



## Contextual Learning in Islamic Religious Education as an Effort to Ward Off Radicalism Among Adolescents

Sururul Murtadlo<sup>1\*</sup>, Faizudin<sup>1</sup>, Ahmad Munji<sup>1</sup>, Wasehudin<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>STIT Al-Khairiyah Cilegon, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup>UIN Sultan Maulana Hasanudin Banten, Indonesia

\*email Koresponden Penulis: [sururulumurtadlo@stitalkhairiyah.ac.id](mailto:sururulumurtadlo@stitalkhairiyah.ac.id)

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### ABSTRACT

*One of the problems of radical movements in Islam that threatens national integrity is the radicalization among students, which leads them to systematically attack existing institutions. This phenomenon can be prevented through the application of Contextual Learning. Learning that connects religious teachings with relevant social contexts in students' daily lives tends to produce a more moderate understanding of religion. This study aims to explore how the implementation of Contextual Learning in Islamic education impacts the ideological resilience of youth. The research employed a qualitative method with in-depth interviews of teachers and students, as well as document analysis related to the implementation of learning. The findings indicate that the application of Contextual Learning not only enhances students' understanding of religious moderation but also strengthens their ability to think critically about radical ideologies. Significantly, this approach fosters attitudes of respecting differences, rejecting religiously motivated violence, and building students' ideological resilience in the face of radical penetration. The main contribution of this study to the development of Islamic education is to provide empirical evidence that Contextual Learning is effective as a pedagogical strategy to reinforce religious moderation. Therefore, the development of the Islamic education curriculum needs to integrate this model so that future generations possess moderate attitudes, critical thinking skills, and readiness to face contemporary social and ideological challenges.*

**Keywords:** Contextual Learning, Islamic Religious Education, Radicalization

### ABSTRAK

Salah satu masalah aliran radikal dalam Islam yang mengancam keutuhan bangsa ialah radikalisasi di antara pelajar sehingga mereka menyerang secara sistematis institusi-institusi yang ada. Peristiwa ini dapat dihindari apabila diterapkan pendekatan Contextual Learning. Pembelajaran yang mengaitkan ajaran agama dengan konteks sosial yang relevan dalam kehidupan sehari-hari siswa cenderung menghasilkan pemahaman yang lebih moderat tentang agama. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi bagaimana penerapan Contextual Learning dalam Pendidikan Islam berdampak pada ketahanan ideologis remaja. Metode penelitian menggunakan kualitatif dengan teknik wawancara mendalam terhadap guru dan siswa, serta analisis dokumen yang berkaitan dengan pelaksanaan pembelajaran. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa penerapan Contextual Learning tidak hanya meningkatkan pemahaman siswa tentang Moderasi Agama, tetapi juga memperkuat kemampuan mereka untuk berpikir kritis terhadap ideologi radikal. Secara signifikan, pendekatan ini

menumbuhkan sikap menghargai perbedaan, menolak kekerasan bernuansa agama, serta membangun daya tahan ideologis pelajar di tengah penetrasi paham radikal. Kontribusi utama penelitian ini bagi pengembangan Pendidikan Islam adalah memberikan landasan empiris bahwa Contextual Learning efektif dijadikan strategi pedagogis untuk memperkuat moderasi beragama. Dengan demikian, pengembangan kurikulum PAI perlu mengintegrasikan model ini agar generasi mendatang memiliki sikap moderat, keterampilan berpikir kritis, dan kesiapan menghadapi tantangan sosial-ideologis kontemporer.

**Kata Kunci:** *Contextual Learning, Pendidikan Agama Islam, Radikalisasi*

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## A. INTRODUCTION

Radicalization among adolescents is one of the serious phenomena that has received widespread attention both at the global and national levels. Various studies and reports show that young age groups are often the main targets of the spread of extremist ideologies due to their psychological and social conditions that are still in the process of finding identity. A United Nations Development Programme report (2017) confirms that the majority of recruitment of radical groups in a number of African and Asian countries occurs in individuals aged 15–24 years. In Indonesia, the National Counter-Terrorism Agency (BNPT) released data that around 39% of students and students have vulnerability to exposure to religion-based radical ideas, especially through digital media (BNPT, 2020). This fact indicates that the radicalization of adolescents is not a marginal issue, but a real threat to the sustainability of social harmony and the ideological resilience of the nation.

Adolescents' vulnerability to radicalism can be explained from several aspects. First, psychologically, adolescence is characterized by an intense process of searching for identity (Erikson, 1994). In this phase, adolescents tend to be easily influenced by ideologies that offer certainty of identity and meaning in life. Second, the low level of moderate religious literacy causes some adolescents to fail to distinguish between authentic religious teachings and politicized religious narratives (Hefner, 2019). Third, the rapid flow of information globalization, especially through social media, facilitates the infiltration of transnational ideologies that are often exclusive and intolerant (Campion, 2019). This condition emphasizes that the world of education has a great responsibility to equip adolescents with a foundation of true, critical, and moderate religious knowledge.

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) has a strategic role in shaping the character of the younger generation. PAI is expected not only to transmit religious knowledge, but also to instill the universal values of Islam that are oriented to rahmatan lil-'alamin, namely compassion, justice, and peace (A. Sukino, 2025). Several studies have shown that PAI taught normatively and textually is often unable to respond to the complexity of contemporary challenges, including the rise of religion-based radicalism (Ali & Daulay, 2021). Therefore, the PAI approach needs to be reviewed to be more relevant to the social reality of today's adolescents.

One of the approaches offered is *Contextual Teaching and Learning* (CTL). This approach emphasizes the relationship between the subject matter and the real life context of students so that learning is more meaningful (Johnson, 2014). CTL is believed to be able to

bridge the gap between religious texts and social realities, as well as encourage the birth of a more inclusive and critical understanding of religion. In the framework of Islamic Education, the application of CTL can help students internalize the values of religious moderation in an applicative way, not just cognitive (S. Sukino, 2023). Research by Naim and Susanto (2020) shows that CTL is effective in increasing tolerance between students through real-life experiential learning at school. However, studies that specifically highlight the implementation of CTL in the context of adolescent deradicalization are still relatively limited.

This research gap is what is the academic urgency for this study. By examining the implementation of CTL in Islamic Religious Education, this study not only makes a practical contribution to the deradicalization strategy, but also a theoretical contribution to the development of a PAI curriculum that is more responsive to contemporary ideological challenges. Through this approach, PAI can be more optimal in equipping adolescents with moderate attitudes, critical thinking skills, and ideological resilience to reject radicalism. Therefore, this research is important to be carried out as a scientific effort in strengthening Islamic education that is relevant to the needs of the times while maintaining the integrity of the nation.

## B. RESEARCH METHODE

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study type of research. This approach was chosen to deeply understand the implementation of the Contextual Learning learning model in Islamic Religious Education and its influence on efforts to ward off radicalism among adolescents. The case study was chosen because it allows researchers to explore the phenomenon in detail in the context of the learner's real life.

The research was carried out at MA Al-Khairiyah Citangkil which has implemented Islamic Religious Education learning based on Contextual Learning. The research subjects consisted of Islamic Religious Education teachers, adolescent students (ages 15–18 years), and school principals. The selection of locations and subjects is carried out purposively, with the criterion that the educational institution is actively implementing a deradicalization program based on religious education.

The data collection technique in this study was carried out through interviews, observations, and documentation studies. Interviews were conducted with three main groups of informants, namely Islamic Religious Education teachers, MA Al-Khairiyah students who are students in PAI learning, and school principals who have authority in education policy in madrasas. Observations were made on the PAI learning process in the classroom to directly observe the application of *Contextual Learning* principles. In addition, the documentation study includes syllabus analysis, lesson plan (RPP), and school documents related to religious education-based deradicalization programs.

The data analysis technique is carried out by selecting and focusing data that is relevant to the research objectives, organizing them into thematic categories such as learning strategies, implementation challenges, and impacts on adolescents' religious attitudes. Furthermore, the data was interpreted to answer the research questions and tested with relevant theories (Ridlo, 2023).

## C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Implementation of Contextual Learning in Islamic Religious Education

The implementation of the Contextual Learning approach in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) aims to bring together religious concepts with the social realities faced by students in their daily lives. This approach departs from the assumption that learning will be more meaningful if students can relate new knowledge to their actual experiences. CTL emphasizes connecting academic subjects to students' daily lives, increasing relevance and understanding (Ajeng Eka Prastuti, Sarmini, 2020). Contextual teaching materials lead to better academic performance, as students can relate concepts to their own experiences (Mansur & Amrin, 2023). The application of Contextual Teaching and Learning in science education, improves student learning outcomes and motivation, but does not specifically address its application in PAI classrooms or the preparation of teaching materials for adolescents (Siswa et al., 2020). In the PAI class, Contextual Learning is applied through the preparation of teaching materials that are not only conceptual, but also applicable to social situations that are relevant to the lives of today's adolescents.

Teachers design learning scenarios that relate Islamic teachings such as tolerance, justice, and compassion with contemporary social phenomena, such as cultural diversity, social conflicts, and the use of digital media. Teachers redesign courses to connect Islamic teachings such as tolerance, justice, and compassion with contemporary social issues, using authentic learning approaches that engage students in real-life contexts, fostering understanding and application of these values in diverse situations (Aderibigbe et al., 2023). Encouraging open discussion about religious tolerance can help students navigate social issues while adhering to Islamic principles (Zulham & Lubis, 2022). For example, in discussing verses about peace and *ukhuwah Islamiyah*, the teacher related it to the issue of intolerance on social media and the importance of maintaining brotherhood in a multicultural society. Thus, students are invited to see the relevance of religious teachings in facing real-world challenges, not just as abstract concepts.

The teaching techniques used include group discussions, real-life case studies, and reflection on personal experiences. Group discussions encourage collaborative learning, allow students to share diverse perspectives and deepen their understanding of complex topics (Lee et al., 2022). Incorporating personal reflection into learning encourages critical thinking and self-assessment, important for adult learners (Lewis & Bryan, 2021). In the discussion, students are given a case study of a religion-based conflict that has occurred in Indonesia or the world, then they are asked to analyze it based on the principles of Islamic teachings on peace. Through this method, students learn to think critically, consider various perspectives, and apply Islamic values in their assessment of concrete situations.

Teachers also invite students to reflect on real experiences by writing essays or sharing stories about their experiences of dealing with differences, resolving minor conflicts in their neighborhoods, or dealing with extremist narratives on social media. Reflective practice, including writing and sharing experiences, empowers students to confront and challenge these narratives effectively (Kosmidou & Sfyroera, 2023). This reflection aims to build self-awareness, strengthen the value of religious moderation, and internalize Islamic teachings personally and contextually.

Active student involvement is central to this strategy. Instead of being passive recipients of information, students are encouraged to become learning subjects who actively build meaning from religious materials through interaction with the real world.

Active learning strategies, such as group discussions and problem-solving activities, significantly increase student participation and interest in the subject matter (Dogani, 2023). Blended learning optimizes Islamic Religious Education (PAI) by increasing student engagement, allowing them to actively participate and build meaning from religious material through a variety of media, thereby developing their character and overcoming the shortcomings of previous learning (Eduscience et al., 2023). This process also enriches their social skills, such as empathy, collaboration, and effective communication, competencies that are essential to form a young generation capable of rejecting radical ideologies independently and responsibly.

With this approach, Contextual Learning in Islamic Religious Education not only teaches the truth of religious texts, but also equips students with critical thinking skills, social understanding, and contextual moral skills — making religion a positive force in building a peaceful and inclusive society.

## **2. Contextual Learning in Islamic Religious Education**

Contextual Learning is a learning approach that emphasizes the importance of connecting teaching materials with students' real-life contexts. Contextual learning promotes a better understanding of complex concepts, such as natural selection, by connecting them to real-world scenarios (Aptyka et al., 2022). By incorporating real-life contexts, such as sustainability issues in agriculture and botany, students are more likely to be actively involved in their learning (McGregor et al., 2023). This approach focuses on how students relate the knowledge learned in the classroom to the experiences and situations they encounter in their daily lives. In the context of Islamic Religious Education (PAI), Contextual Learning invites students to interpret religious teachings directly within their social and cultural framework. The integration of sociocultural elements is essential to adapt religious teachings to modern contexts, ensuring relevance and resonance with students (Gunada et al., 2023). A more holistic understanding of religious texts, as it considers the historical and cultural circumstances surrounding their revelation (Yuli Edi Z et al., 2023). The goal is for students not only to understand religious concepts in theoretical form, but also to be able to apply them in practical life.

The basic principles of Contextual Learning include several important things, including: Linkage to Student Experience: More effective learning occurs when students are able to relate teaching materials to their personal experiences. When students see the relevance of what they learn, they become more engaged and motivated, which enhances their learning experience (Ajeng Eka Prastuti, Sarmini, 2020). Social and Cultural Context: Learning should reflect the social and cultural situation of students so that it is easier to understand and accept. Learning is strongly influenced by the social and cultural context of students, which can improve the understanding and acceptance of educational content. The sociocultural perspective emphasizes that learning is not only about acquiring canonical knowledge but is also shaped by interactions within specific environments and communities (Castanelli, 2023). The fit between learning and transmission contexts affects cultural transmission, suggesting that learners are more likely to transmit variants learned in congruent social contexts, thus reflecting their social and cultural situations for better understanding and acceptance (Tamariz et al., 2023). Student Active Engagement: Students are not only passive listeners, but actively involved in the learning process, either through discussion, research, or reflection on the material provided. Application of



**Knowledge in Real Life:** Students are encouraged to apply knowledge learned in real-life situations.

In Islamic Religious Education, this approach can be applied by associating Islamic teachings such as the values of virtue, tolerance, and peace with social phenomena relevant to adolescent life, such as the use of social media, interreligious interactions, and other social issues. Adolescents often rely on virtue ethics to navigate online moral dilemmas, such as cyberbullying, suggesting that character-based education can effectively guide their behavior (Harrison & Polizzi, 2022). Social media serves as a double-edged sword; While it can create "bubbles" that limit interfaith interactions, social media also offers opportunities for diverse exchanges among youth from different backgrounds (Novak et al., 2022). Engaging with peers of different faiths online can increase understanding and tolerance, in line with Islam's teachings on interfaith respect. Encouraging transgressive behaviors, such as asking questions and engaging in dialogue, can increase the readiness of young people to engage in interfaith discussions, fostering a culture of peace and understanding (Rydz & Stawarz, 2022). This readiness can be developed through educational programs that highlight the importance of dialogue in overcoming social and religious boundaries. While the integration of Islamic teachings with social phenomena brings many benefits, it is important to recognize the potential for negative online experiences, such as discrimination and unrealistic expectations, that can impact adolescents' well-being (Douglass et al., 2022). Thus, Islamic teachings are not only understood in the framework of religious teachings, but also in the social context that exists around them.

Islamic religious education has an important role in shaping the character and understanding of adolescents' religion, which is not only theoretical, but also practical. Contextual Learning provides an opportunity for students to explore the meaning of Islamic teachings more deeply by relating them to their social context. In this case, the context-based learning approach reinforces religious values in everyday life, as students can understand that Islam is not only limited to ritual worship, but also encompasses how to live a just, tolerant, and harmonious life in society.

Through Contextual Learning, students can learn about Islamic teachings in a more relevant way to the reality they face. For example, in teaching about the principle of justice in Islam, teachers can relate it to hot social issues, such as economic inequality or social discrimination. In this way, students not only understand the values of Islamic teachings textually, but they also understand how those values can be applied in their daily lives.

In addition, Contextual Learning also encourages students to think critically about the various social situations they face, so that they can see the role of Islam in creating solutions to these social challenges. This further strengthens students' understanding of religious teachings that are more contextual, relevant, and applicative.

### **3. The Role of Islamic Education in Countering Radicalization**

Radicalization among adolescents is one of the serious challenges facing the global community today. The spread of radical ideologies in the name of religion, especially among teenagers, often occurs due to a narrow and extreme understanding of religion. In Indonesia, radical interpretations of Islam among students were found to be more influential than social tolerance, suggesting that a narrow understanding of religious principles can lead to radicalization (Nafi'a et al., 2022). Therefore, religious education

plays a very important role in shaping a moderate, inclusive, and tolerant understanding of religion.

Contextual Learning in Islamic Religious Education can be a solution to counteract radicalization by teaching students to understand Islamic teachings more broadly and comprehensively, as well as relate these teachings to their social lives. Students who engage deeply with the Qur'an and its contextual meaning develop a broader interpretation of Islamic teachings. This process encourages critical thinking and personal reflection, which is essential in combating radical narratives (Hanafi et al., 2022). Increased religious literacy equips students with the tools to distinguish between moderate and extremist interpretations, promoting a more nuanced understanding of their faith. The role of Islamic education goes beyond religious teaching; This education also addresses social issues that contribute to radicalization, such as identity struggles among youth in a multicultural environment (Sözeri et al., 2022). By encouraging discussions around identity and belonging, educational frameworks can help students navigate their cultural contexts, reducing feelings of alienation that can lead to radicalization. Instead, some argue that traditional methods of Islamic education can inadvertently reinforce rigid interpretations of the faith, potentially leading to radicalization if not modernized. Thus, a balance between traditional teachings and contemporary social contexts is essential for effective education.

Context-based learning provides a space for students to explore various dimensions of Islamic teachings, including values that support peace, tolerance, and harmony between religious communities. The Charter of Medina exemplifies how the Prophet Muhammad established a framework for coexistence, protecting both Muslims and non-Muslims, thereby promoting peace and mutual respect (Amrullah & Jailani, 2022).

Contextual Learning can teach students to think critically about religious narratives that lead to radicalization (Aryanti Dwiyanı & Eva Sofia Sari, 2021). Schools can create an environment where controversial issues are discussed openly, allowing students to express and challenge extremist views without fear of retaliation. Teaching students to analyze and question the narratives they encounter, especially in the media, can empower them to fight radicalization (D'Olimpio & Hand, 2023). By introducing religious concepts in real social situations, students can more easily understand that extremism is contrary to the basic values of Islam that emphasize the well-being of humanity and global peace. In this case, context-based Islamic Religious Education not only provides religious knowledge, but also shapes students' attitudes and mindsets that can be a strong fortress against radicalization.

Through the Contextual Learning approach, students are taught to appreciate differences, build empathy, and apply moderate Islamic values in their social interactions, both in the real world and in cyberspace. This is an important step in preventing the spread of radical ideology among the younger generation.

#### **4. The Impact of the Application of Contextual Learning on Adolescent Ideological Resilience**

Application Based on the results of the research, the application of Contextual Learning (CTL) in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) has a significant impact on the ideological resilience of adolescents in the face of exposure to radical ideas. The impact can be explained in the following sub-findings:

**a. Increased Moderate and Inclusive Attitudes**

The application of CTL encourages students to understand Islam not only as a normative dogma, but as a teaching that emphasizes moderation, tolerance, and respect for cultural and religious diversity. This is in line with the findings of Al-shami (2020) which shows that context-based learning approaches help students be more open to differences. Research by Arifiana et al. (2022) also confirms the positive correlation between moderate religiosity and adolescents' resilience to extremist narratives. In the context of this study, an inclusive attitude can be seen from the way students appreciate peers of different ethnicities, cultures, and religious views.

**b. Strengthening Critical Thinking Skills**

Through the strategies of class discussions, case studies, and social reflection, students are accustomed to critically assessing religious information. They are trained to evaluate the validity of the source, weigh the suitability of the teachings with the principle of *rahmatan lil 'alamin*, and its relevance to universal human values. This strengthens students' resistance to provocative narratives, hate speech, and radical invitations. D'Olimpio & Hand (2023) emphasize that student involvement in discussions of controversial issues plays an important role in building ideological resilience. In the findings of this study, students began to show a selective attitude towards religious content on social media and were not easily provoked.

**c. Internalizing the Values of Tolerance and Pluralism**

CTL also contributes to the formation of an empathetic attitude, respect for differences, and rejection of religion-based violence. Teachers play a strategic role by presenting applicable learning methods, such as the use of Islamic historical stories, cross-background group work practices, and dialogue simulations. This is in line with the research of Anwar Nababan et al. (2022) which confirms that CTL is effective in forming the character of tolerant students. Narinasamy & Logeswaran (2023) also point out the importance of methods such as role play and storytelling to foster empathy in multicultural education. In practice in the field, students show real changes, such as rejecting hate speech, supporting interfaith dialogue, and condemning all forms of violence in the name of universal religion.

The results of this study show that the application of Contextual Learning in Islamic Religious Education is able to have a comprehensive positive impact, both on the cognitive, affective, and social aspects of students. Cognitively, CTL improves their ability to think critically and evaluatively about the religious discourse they receive. Affectively, students show a moderate, empathetic, and inclusive attitude in social interactions. Socially, internalized values of tolerance and pluralism have an impact on the formation of cooperative behavior and rejection of religion-based violence. These findings are in line with the concept of transformative education that emphasizes the formation of human beings who are not only intellectually intelligent, but also morally and socially mature. Thus, CTL can be positioned as a relevant pedagogical strategy to strengthen religious moderation and ideological resilience of adolescents amid the challenges of globalization and the rise of extremism in the digital space.



## D. CONCLUSION

The application of Contextual Learning in Islamic Religious Education has proven to have a significant impact in strengthening moderate and tolerant religious understanding among adolescents. Through a learning approach that links Islamic teachings with the context of real social life, students can better understand how religious values apply not only in ritual contexts, but also in their daily social interactions. Contextual Learning provides opportunities for students to apply Islamic principles, such as justice, tolerance, and peace, in the face of contemporary social challenges.

The application of Contextual Learning principles in Islamic Religious Education classes also plays a role in countering radicalization among adolescents. By introducing more inclusive religious teachings and fostering critical thinking skills, students can more easily assess religious teachings that are not in accordance with moderate Islamic principles and form a broader and applicable understanding of religion. This approach helps adolescents to develop attitudes that reject extreme ideologies that can lead to religious-based violence.

Furthermore, context-based religious education not only equips students with deeper religious knowledge, but also shapes their character to become more tolerant, pluralist, and empathetic individuals towards differences. Thus, Contextual Learning is an effective tool in shaping the young generation who are religious in moderation, ethical, and ready to face increasingly complex social challenges.

Therefore, to realize maximum results in the application of Contextual Learning in Islamic Religious Education, it is recommended that this approach be continuously developed, both through the preparation of relevant curriculum, more intensive teacher training, and strengthening collaboration between schools, families, and communities. Further research exploring the application of Contextual Learning in a broader context is also urgently needed to understand its impact more deeply in a global context.

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