Enhancing the Role of Religious Education in Countering Violent Extremism in Indonesia – **CONVEY Indonesia**

Policy Brief Series

Issue 5 | Vol. 1 | 2018

Urgency of *Lajnah Penashih* of Textbooks in Islamic Religious Education

Key Findings

1. School and university students eagerly seek literature of Islamic Religious Education (PAI/*Pendidikan Agama Islam*) to find answers to their restlessness and about their identity. Yet instead of using the formal textbooks, students are more easily attracted to popular literature.
2. The popular textbooks that are easy-to-read and, with the help of technology, come with attractive packaging and are illustrated with appealing images, apparently contain ideas of intolerance.
3. Islamic literature is produced by various publishers that are affiliated with different Islamic movements and organizations that are growing in many cities in Indonesia.
4. Although there are parts in the PAI textbooks that specifically teach about tolerance, there are also texts in other parts that tend to teach intolerance of difference.

Background

Islamic literature plays a very significant role in propagating Islamic ideology among students. The Ministry has set the standards on textbooks contents, yet contents on radicalism and intolerance continue to be found in textbooks used in Islamic Religious Education (PAI/*Pendidikan Agama Islam*) that should have promoted the teaching of peace. At the same time, popular literature is on the rise, appealing to students through the use of new means and methods as presented in attractive packaging. With the help of technology, the easy-to-read popular books are equipped with appealing illustrations, yet they contain the idea of intolerance. The beautifully packaged books containing ideologies on radicalism and intolerance are ready to be disseminated to millennials.

Looking at the current condition, Islamic Religious Education as a school subject should be made as the main source for school and university students in their learning about Islam. Nevertheless, students who are active in extra-curricular religious studies, e.g. Rohis/*Kerohanian Islam* (Islamic club) in schools and LDK/*Lembaga Dakwah Kampus* (Intra-campus Islamic Proselytization) in universities, consider that the religious education taught in schools and universities does not meet their needs. In terms of quality, the lessons taught in Islamic Religious Education subject are very plain and shallow.

## Intolerance in Text Books

Kurikulum 2013

The Islamic Religious Education (PAI) and Character Education is a subject taught in school for the duration of 3 lesson-hour per face-to-face class teaching. The 2013 curriculum acknowledge student-centered approach so that students are expected to be more active, including in this subject. Discussion is often used as the teaching method. Nevertheless, in general the contents of the textbooks (from primary to senior secondary level) include ambiguous and contradictory messages. For example, instead of conveying the message of tolerance and respect to other people's faith, the lessons only provide one viewpoint or in this case the Islamic perspective. Some texts even include message to regard other faith as heretical.

In PAI textbook for senior secondary school students, sensitive wordings e.g. *kafir* (non-believers, heathen), *musyrik* (idolatry, polytheism), and *khilafah* (Caliphate) were found without any meaningful counterbalancing context. For example, text about intolerance against non-moslems was found in Students' Worksheet (LKS/*Lembar Kerja Siswa*) in PAI subject for Grade XI students in Jombang, Depok, and Jakarta. The said LKS maintains the message that *"the one that can and must be worshipped is Allah SWT only, and those who worship other than Allah are the musyrik and thus may be killed"*. In addition, contents on hostility towards people of other faiths was found in the PAI guidebook published by Ministry of Education and Culture (MOEC) for Grade XII students (PPIM UIN, 2016).
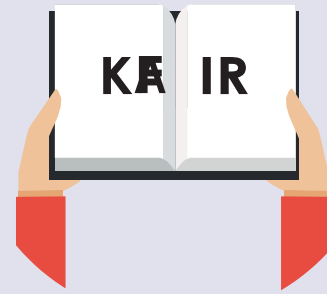
PAI teachings should emphasize more on compassion and tolerance in religion, yet this is not found in the PAI textbooks that are currently in circulation. The books' contents tend to give more emphasis on morality and character education on the basis of a single school of thought. For example, the concept that moslem women's *awrah* (intimate parts) must be covered not only during prayers but also in public sphere (PPIM UIN, 2016).

The book titled *Pendidikan Agama Islam Bagi Mahasiswa* (Islamic Religious Education for University Students) published by Ministry of Research and Technology and Higher Education (2016) was recommended to be used as textbook based on Circular Letter of Director General of Teaching and Learning and Students Affairs of the Ministry, yet the book is not actually used as key reference in teaching PAI in universities. Instead, the university lecturers encourage students to read the literature authored by the lecturers themselves or other reading materials compiled by the lecturers from other sources, such as modules, handouts, and presentation slides (Pascasarjana UIN Yogyakarta, 2018).
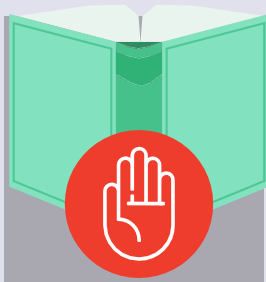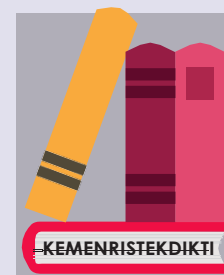
The topic on *khilafah* (Caliphate) in PAI textbooks was presented without clear context and tends to put more emphasis on only one perspective. For example, in PAI textbook for Grade X, p.181 contains text about *khilafah* as part of upholding Islamic law or *sharia* (PPIM UIN, 2016). This has a strong tendency to obscure the students' understanding about the true meaning of *khilafah*.

This condition is exacerbated by the fact that PAI textbooks use formal language that is hard to understand by students, thus the popular books containing ideas of radicalism are more convenient for students. A Students' Worksheet for primary school level was found to contain an example about *jihad* and war. Intergroup stigma is also widely spread in children books, such as discriminating against person A who has different faith and to associate that with negative attributes (Pascasarjana UIN Yogyakarta, 2018).
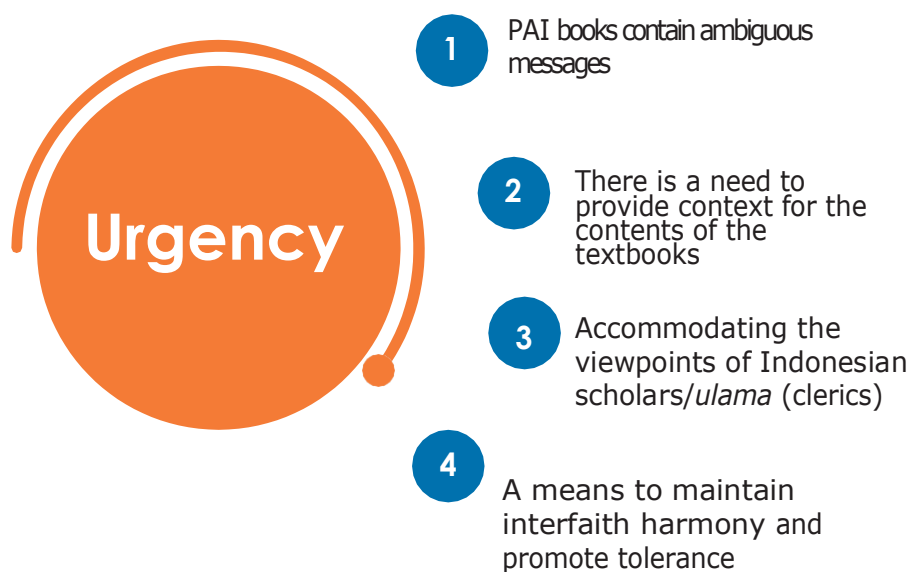
Government must play more active role in addressing the spread of radical and intolerant contents. This can be done by regularly monitoring PAI books, and, to the extent necessary, recalling books that contain ideas of intolerance.

> PAI as a school subject should include teachings about respect to other religions, both in the lessons and in the textbooks

Urgency of Establishing *Lajnah Penashih* of Textbooks

Having a diversity of contents and prevalence of local aspects in PAI textbooks in schools is paramount. The goal is to foster tolerance from early age. Nevertheless, this would not happen if PAI textbooks continue to be distributed without any supervision. The government's vision on PAI in Indonesia is very clear but the widely-circulated literature is not strongly putting forward the value of tolerance. To achieve that goal, it is necessary to establish a national committee on book validation (*penashih*) that has the authority to oversee the writing and publication process of PAI textbooks.

Urgency

1. PAI books contain ambiguous messages

2. There is a need to provide context for the contents of the textbooks

3. Accommodating the viewpoints of Indonesian scholars/*ulama* (clerics)

4. A means to maintain interfaith harmony and promote tolerance

The value of diversity and the representation of local aspects must be included in the sub-chapters of PAI textbooks for use in schools. This is important to cultivate the value of tolerance from early age. A national committee on book validation (*penashih*) that has the authority to oversee the writing and publication process of PAI textbooks would be required to achieve the goal.

Further, the packaging and the methods used to deliver PAI contents must be improved, including the two aspects as follows:

1. The use of plain language and easy-to-understand illustration in PAI textbooks.
2. The use of various more-interactive teaching methods in teaching PAI and in accordance with students' characteristics, such as audiovisual, infographics, and social media.

Recommendations

To address various issues pertaining to PAI textbooks, the government must undertake the following measures:

1. To establish national book assurance committee (*lajnah penashih*) that is authorized to oversee the process of PAI textbooks development and publication.

   The recommendation on workflow of the *Lajnah Penashih* is as follows:

   Review function

   Lajnah Penashih

   Control Function

   Recommendation / Revision Function
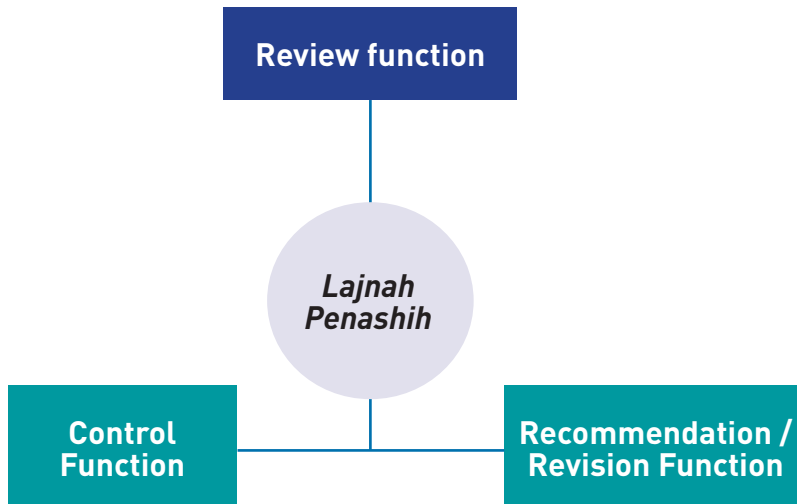
2. To create an inventory of publishers and authors who are qualified to prevent the spread of radical and intolerant ideas in PAI textbooks.

3. To set up a consortium consisting of experts and academics whose function is to advocate the workflow scheme of the *Lajnah Penashih* of Islamic textbooks.