MITIGATING RADICALISM AMONG HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS THROUGH VIRTUE CHARACTER EDUCATION AND SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING INSTRUCTION

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Abstract

This research aims to determine the role of teaching virtuous character on the attitudes towards radicalism among Indonesian high school students and to measure student's spiritual well-being as a moderator factor in those connected variables. Quantitative methods were used to measure teaching the character of virtue, spiritual well-being, and attitudes towards radicalism, through survey question. Purposive sampling technique was used to select participants, which was 434 students aged 14 - 19 years from 13 high schools in West Java (Depok and Bekasi). A total of 148 teachers were also completed the teaching virtue character questionnaire. Interviews were also conducted with several students, to obtain an overview of students' attitudes towards radicalism. Data analysis using regression analysis IBM SPSS for Windows 25. The findings showed that teaching virtue character influences high school students' attitudes towards radicalism; high school students' attitudes towards radicalism influenced by teaching virtuous character with spiritual wellbeing as a moderator variable; and spiritual wellbeing as a moderator in strengthening the negative relationship between teaching virtuous character and students' attitudes towards radicalism. It can be concluded that high school students' attitudes toward radicalism can be reduced by teaching virtues and spiritual well-being. As a manifestation, the teaching of virtuous character in Indonesian high schools needs to be enriched by spiritual well-being content to achieve the goal of reducing the spread of radicalism among students.

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to determine the role of teaching virtuous character on the attitudes towards radicalism among Indonesian high school students and to measure student's spiritual well-being as a moderator factor in those connected variables. Quantitative methods were used to measure teaching the character of virtue, spiritual well-being, and attitudes towards radicalism, through survey question. Purposive sampling technique was used to select participants, which was 434 students aged 14 - 19 years from 13 high schools in West Java (Depok and Bekasi). A total of 148 teachers were also completed the teaching virtue character questionnaire. Interviews were also conducted with several students, to obtain an overview of students' attitudes towards radicalism. Data analysis using regression analysis IBM SPSS for Windows 25. The findings showed that teaching virtue character influences high school students' attitudes towards radicalism; high school students' attitudes towards radicalism influenced by teaching virtuous character with spiritual wellbeing as a moderator variable; and spiritual wellbeing as a moderator in strengthening the negative relationship between teaching virtuous character and students' attitudes towards radicalism. It can be concluded that high school students' attitudes toward radicalism can be reduced by teaching virtues and spiritual well-being. As a manifestation, the teaching of virtuous character in Indonesian high schools needs to be enriched by spiritual well-being content to achieve the goal of reducing the spread of radicalism among students.

Keywords: Teaching virtue character, spiritual well-being, radicalism, high school student

1.   PREFACE

Radicalism is an ideology formed by a group of movements seeking drastic social or political change through the use of violent means to achieve alterations in social and political conditions (Cross & Snow, 2012). Attitude towards radicalism can be described as an individual's feelings toward radical ideologies, where in this context, an individual's feelings may be supportive or sympathetic, or conversely, unsupportive or unsympathetic to radical ideologies advocated by a group of people who adhere to the desire for drastic social or political change, including the use of violent methods to bring about changes in social and political conditions (Berkowitz in Azwar, 2021). The term radicalization identifies a process in which individuals adopt extreme belief systems that can "justify the use of violence to influence social change" (Maskaliunaite, 2015). Characteristics of radical thinking include intolerance or a lack of tolerance towards groups with different beliefs outside their own, as well as a tendency towards fanaticism, exclusivity, and a willingness to use anarchic methods. There is no age limit to the possibility of exposure to radical ideologies. Research by Yamin et al. (2021), Yani et al., and Metta et al. (2020) indicates that radical ideologies can also be adopted by individuals who are still young or adolescents.

Young people or adolescents have a stronger tendency and a higher likelihood of engaging in radical social movements compared to adults due to the transitional phase in their developmental

growth, which makes them vulnerable to identity crises. This crisis can lead to cognitive openness, enabling them to embrace radical ideas (Widyaningsih et al., 2017). Empirical evidence shows that young people can be exposed to radical ideologies and exhibit varying degrees of intolerance. Data from the National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT) indicates that the largest group of terrorists has a general high school education, accounting for 63.3%, followed by university graduates at 16.4%. In terms of age, the majority of terrorists are aged 21-30, constituting 47.3%, followed by those aged 31-40 at 29.1%. Those under 21 account for 11.8% (Lubis, 2016). Furthermore, a survey conducted by the Setara Institute (2016) revealed that out of 760 respondents from several high schools in Jakarta and the Greater Bandung area, 35.7% were passive/puritan intolerant, 2.4% were active/radical intolerant, and 0.3% (approximately 3-4 individuals) had the potential to become terrorists.

The formation of adolescents' attitudes towards radicalism can be influenced by significant others (Azwar, 2021). Attitudes can be learned through imitation, as individuals tend to mimic others, especially if those individuals are perceived as strong and influential (Sears, Freedman, & Peplau, 1985, cited in Azwar, 2021), including parents. Parents serve as role models for their children, and from them, children and adolescents learn values and norms that shape their attitudes and behaviors in daily life (Ali, 2000, cited in Ramdhani, 2015). Children often inherit the attitudes of their parents, but adolescents, as they approach adulthood, are more influenced by their peers. During adolescence, peer groups tend to replace the family as the reference group for individuals, meaning the group whose norms are used to evaluate oneself (Calhoun & Acocella, 1990, cited in Azwar, 2021). High school students' attitudes towards radicalism can be defined as an individual's feelings towards radical ideologies, wherein these feelings may be supportive or sympathetic, or conversely, unsupportive or unsympathetic to radical ideologies advocated by a group of people who seek drastic social or political change, including the use of violent means to achieve these changes.

For adolescents as high school students, the role of a teacher is crucial in shaping their attitudes. Metheny et al. (2008) state that teachers can be potential sources of support for students as they spend a significant amount of time in school. Teaching is part of the educational activities in schools conducted by educators or teachers to impart knowledge, skills, guidance, and motivation to their students (Zulqarnain et al., 2021). Lickona (2012) mentions that character education is a deliberate effort to assist individuals in understanding, caring about, and practicing core ethical values. According to Lickona (1997), character education is a deliberate effort to teach virtues. Virtue represents qualities of goodness in humans. Virtues that benefit individuals include those that help individuals fulfill their life goals, while virtues that benefit society at large include the opportunity for people to live together harmoniously and productively. In this context, the concept of virtue is related to the concept of goodness (Park, Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Teaching virtue character education can be defined as a direct approach to moral education that involves basic moral literacy education for students to prevent them from engaging in immoral and harmful behaviors towards themselves or others.

Furthermore, spiritual well-being is defined as a statement about the spiritual state of high school students reflecting positive feelings, behaviors, and an understanding of their relationships with themselves, others, the transcendent, and nature, which in turn displays individuals with identity, wholeness, satisfaction, joy, love, respect, and positive attitudes, and harmony in life (Gomez & Fisher in Tumanggor, 2019). Spiritual well-being is an indicator of an individual's quality of life in the spiritual dimension or an indicator of their spiritual health (Ellison, 1983). Spiritual well-being is divided into two aspects: (a) Religious Well-being, which focuses on how

individuals view the well-being of their spiritual life, as expressed in their relationship with a higher power, namely, experiencing a close relationship with the Creator (God); and (b) Existential Well-being, which refers to the social and psychological state of individuals to adapt to their environment and engage in external relationships in achieving life goals as a view of the future based on satisfaction with life, including both positive and negative experiences (Boivin et al. in Vollman et al., 2006).

This study highlights a variable that is rarely researched but highly important, which is radicalism in adolescents. High school students' attitudes towards radicalism are influenced by the presence of virtue character education provided by teachers and the strength of students' spiritual well-being.

Can teaching virtuous character by teachers in schools and students' spiritual well-being play a role in mitigating attitudes towards radicalism among high school students? Can the spiritual well-being of high school students mediate the relationship between the teaching of virtue character and attitudes towards radicalism?

2.   RESEARCH METHODS

The study involved a total of 507 high school student participants who were willing to complete the questionnaire. These students came from various types of high schools, including Private National High Schools, Public High Schools, Private Islamic High Schools (Madrasah Aliyah Swasta), and Private Religious High Schools (Christian/Catholic, Hindu/Buddhist). However, after data processing, 434 student participants were retained for analysis. The participants' ages ranged from 14 to 19 years, with the highest percentage at ages 16 (39.2%) and 17 (35.5%). The lowest percentages were at ages 19 (1.2%), 14 (2.3%), and 18 (3%). The student participants were distributed across different grade levels: 10th grade (31.1%), 11th grade (36.2%), and 12th grade (32.7%). The participants' school backgrounds varied, including students from Private National High Schools (74.2%), Public High Schools (0.9%), Private Islamic High Schools (10.6%), Private Christian/Catholic High Schools (13.4%), and Private Hindu/Buddhist High Schools (0.9%).

Additionally, 148 teachers participated in the study. The majority of the teachers fell into the category of Young Adults (21 to 30 years old) (35.14%). Most of them held a Bachelor's degree (87.84%), practiced the Islamic faith (80.41%), and were married (70.27%). In terms of religious activities, a significant portion of the teachers actively engaged in religious rituals (89.19%), while 62.16% were not active in religious organizations.

To assess high school students' attitudes toward radicalism, a questionnaire was used, adapted from the Violent Extremism Dispositions Scales (VEDS) by Davydov and Khlomov (2017a). The overall reliability (consistency) of the questionnaire, as measured by Cronbach's alpha, was 0.81 (Davydov & Khlomov, 2017b). The adaptation of the Violent Extremism Dispositions Scales (VEDS) by Davydov was validated through expert judgment, as there was no direct adaptation of the questionnaire available in Indonesian. The questionnaire on attitudes toward radicalism consisted of 11 dimensions and 67 statements, with item details per dimension as follows: (a) Cult of Power Dimension: 8 statements; (b) Admissibility of Aggression Dimension: 6 statements; (c) Intolerance Dimension: 6 statements; (d) Conventionalism Dimension: 4 statements; (e) Social Pessimism Dimension: 6 statements; (f) Mysticism Dimension: 6 statements; (g) Destructiveness and Cynicism Dimension: 6 statements; (h) Passion for a Movement Dimension: 6 statements; (i) Normative Nihilism Dimension: 6 statements; (j)

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Anti-Introspection Dimension: 6 statements; and (k) Conformity Dimension: 7 statements. The attitude toward radicalism scale used a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

The teaching of virtue character was measured using a questionnaire adapted from the six Character Strengths developed by Park, Peterson, and Seligman (2004). The Values in Action Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS) scale demonstrated satisfactory Cronbach's alpha (> 0.70) (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The questionnaire on the teaching of virtue character comprised 24 statements, categorized into the following dimensions: (a) Wisdom and Knowledge Dimension: 5 statements; (b) Courage Dimension: 4 statements; (c) Humanity Dimension: 3 statements; (d) Justice Dimension: 3 statements; (e) Temperance Dimension: 4 statements; and (f) Transcendence Dimension: 5 statements. Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from never (1) to very often (5).

Spiritual well-being was measured using the Spiritual Well-being Scale developed by Moberg (in Darvyri et al., 2014), consisting of two subscales: a) Religious Well-being and b) Existential Well-being. Alpha Cronbach for RWBS ranged from 0.82 to 0.99, and for EWBS, it ranged from 0.73 to 0.98 (Darvyri et al., 2014). The spiritual well-being questionnaire comprised 20 statements, divided into two dimensions: (a) Religious Well-being with 10 statements; and (b) Existential Well-being with 10 statements. The spiritual well-being scale used a 6-point Likert scale (1=strongly agree, 6=strongly disagree).

3.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Hypothesis testing in this study was conducted using Moderated Regression Analysis (MRA) models. The first model analyzed the partial effect of virtue character education (VC) on attitudes towards radicalism (AR), testing Hypothesis 1. The second model examined the role of spiritual well-being (SW) as a moderating variable in the relationship between virtue character education (VC) and attitudes towards radicalism (AR), testing Hypothesis 2. The third model assessed spiritual well-being as a moderator strengthening the negative relationship between virtue character education and students' attitudes towards radicalism (weakening attitudes towards radicalism), testing Hypothesis 3.

The results of moderated regression analysis are presented in Tables 1 and 2. Table 1 displays descriptive statistics for the three variables as well as the moderator variable. Table 2 presents the results of moderated regression analysis for Models 1, 2, and 3.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics of Variables in Regression Analysis

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	N
Virtue Character Education (SR)	145,18	19,86	434
Attitudes towards Radicalism (PV)	95,39	12,10	434
Spiritual well-being (SW)	85,61	13,23	434
Moderator Variable (PVxSW)	8231,69	1916,60	434

Table 2

Regression Analysis Results

Model	Variable	Unstandardized B	R-square	Sig.
1	Teaching Character Virtue (PV) on Attitude towards radicalism (SR))	-0,310	0,036	0,000
2	Teaching Character Virtue (PV) on Attitude towards radicalism (SR) with moderator Spiritual well-being (SW)	-0,099	0,114	0,000
3	Moderating effect of Spiritual Well-being (SW) on the relationship of Teaching Character Virtue (PV) and Attitude toward radicalism (SR)	-0,018	0,138	0,001

Table 2 presents the results of the regression analysis in model 1, the significance value (0.000) is smaller than 0.05, indicating a significant effect of the Virtue Character Education variable (PV) on Attitudes towards Radicalism (SR) without the moderating variable. The Unstandardized B value (-0.310) in Model 1 indicates a negative direction of influence from Virtue Character Education (PV) to Attitudes towards Radicalism (SR). In other words, as Virtue Character Education increases, Attitudes towards Radicalism decrease. The R-square value (Model 1) for the relationship between Virtue Character Education (PV) and Attitudes towards Radicalism (SR) is 0.036, suggesting that the direct and partial influence of Virtue Character Education (PV) on Attitudes towards Radicalism (SR) is very small, accounting for only 3.6% of the variance. The remaining variance is influenced by other factors (96.4%). These results suggest that Virtue Character Education (PV) has a negative influence on Attitudes towards Radicalism (SR) without the moderating variable, albeit with a small effect size.

The significance value (SW to SR = 0.000) in Model 2 indicates the influence of the spiritual well-being (SW) variable as a moderator on the relationship between the virtue character education variable (PV) and attitudes towards radicalism (SR). The spiritual well-being variable (SW) has been confirmed as a moderator in the relationship between virtue character education (PV) and attitudes towards radicalism (SR). The Unstandardized B value (-0.099) in Model 2 shows a negative direction of influence from virtue character education (PV) to attitudes towards radicalism (SR), with the moderation of spiritual well-being. Therefore, it can be concluded that the higher the virtue character education, the lower the attitudes towards radicalism, moderated by spiritual well-being. The R-square value (Model 2) for the relationship between virtue character education (PV) and attitudes towards radicalism (SR), with the moderation of spiritual well-being (SW), is 0.114. This means that the influence of the virtue character education variable (PV) with the moderation of spiritual well-being (SW) on attitudes towards radicalism (SR) is 11.4%, while the remaining variance is influenced by other factors (88.6%). Although the effect size is relatively small, it represents an increase of 7.8% compared to Model 1, which did not include the moderation of spiritual well-being (SW).

These findings suggest that spiritual well-being plays a moderating role in strengthening the negative relationship between virtue character education and attitudes of high school students towards radicalism.

The significance value (0.001) in Model 3 indicates the moderating effect of spiritual well-being (SW) on the relationship between virtue character education (PV) and attitudes towards radicalism (SR). This signifies the presence of a moderation effect of spiritual well-being (SW) on the relationship between virtue character education (PV) and attitudes towards radicalism

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(SR). Therefore, spiritual well-being has been proven to act as a moderator, strengthening the negative relationship between virtue character education and high school students' attitudes towards radicalism, essentially weakening their inclination towards radicalism. The Unstandardized B value (-0.018) in Model 3 demonstrates a negative direction of influence from virtue character education (PV) to attitudes towards radicalism (SR), moderated by spiritual well-being. In summary, the higher the virtue character education, the lower the attitudes towards radicalism, with spiritual well-being as a moderator. This corroborates the findings from Model 2. The R-square value (Model 3) for the relationship between virtue character education (PV) and attitudes towards radicalism (SR), with the moderation of spiritual well-being (SW), is 0.138. This means that the combined influence of the virtue character education variable (PV) and spiritual well-being (SW) on attitudes towards radicalism (SR) accounts for 13.8% of the variance, while the remaining variance is influenced by other factors (86.2%). Although the effect size is relatively small, it represents a 10.2% increase compared to Model 1 and a 2.4% increase compared to Model 2. The moderation effect is negative (unstandardized B = -0.018), indicating that the stronger the virtue character education provided by teachers, the weaker the attitudes towards radicalism, and vice versa.

The hypothesis testing results indicate that spiritual well-being serves as a moderator in the role of teaching virtue character in shaping high school students' attitudes towards radicalism. Spiritual well-being acts as a moderator, strengthening the negative relationship between teaching virtue character and high school students' attitudes towards radicalism. This can be interpreted to mean that the attitudes of high school students towards radicalism can weaken in the influence of teaching virtue character by teachers in high school, with the presence of spiritual well-being as a moderator.

The descriptive statistical analysis of responses to the radicalism attitude questionnaire reveals that the majority of high school students (67.1%) hold attitudes towards radicalism in the "Moderate" category (291 individuals). Upon closer examination, students falling into the "Moderate" category primarily come from the regions of Bekasi (57.39%) and Depok (34.22%). Meanwhile, there are 57 students (13.1%) categorized as having "Low" attitudes towards radicalism, and 19.8% are categorized as having "High" attitudes towards radicalism. This means that there are 86 students who endorse, support, or sympathize with radical ideologies. These findings should draw the attention of stakeholders involved in secondary education, parents, and academics concerned with education and radicalism. The results of high school student participants' responses to the questionnaire also yield an interesting finding regarding the approval attitudes of high school students (in Depok and Bekasi) towards radicalism. Out of a total of 434 high school student participants, the majority (86.9%) express disagreement with radicalism. However, it is noteworthy that a significant portion, 13.1% (57 students), actually endorse radical ideologies. Responses from participating teachers to the questionnaire similarly indicate that a total of 8 teachers (5.41%) express agreement with radicalism.

The results of the descriptive statistical analysis of responses to the character virtue teaching questionnaire reveal that the majority of high school students (55.8%) fall into the "High" category (242 individuals). However, there are 46 participants (10.6%) who perceive character virtue teaching as being in the "Low" category. This means that 46 students have not received direct instruction involving the teaching of character virtues from their teachers to prevent them from engaging in immoral behaviors that could harm themselves or others.

The descriptive statistical analysis of responses to the spiritual well-being questionnaire reveals that the majority of high school students (55.5%) fall into the "High" category (241 individuals). This indicates a profound understanding of spiritual values among high school students. However, there are 9 students (2.1%) who fall into the "Low" category in terms of spiritual well-being. This suggests that these students may not fully endorse the idea that something reflects positive feelings, behaviors, and an understanding of the relationship with oneself, others, the transcendent, and nature, which in turn reflects an individual's identity, wholeness, satisfaction, joy, love, respect, and positive attitudes, as well as harmony in life.

The results of participants' responses to the questionnaire also show that the majority of high school students (34.8%) believe that the most correct values are related to Religion, Pancasila (the philosophical foundation of Indonesia), and Nationalism. Parents are the most prioritized figures in instilling these values, according to the high school students (69.81%), while teachers at school occupy the third position with a percentage of 9.44%. Most of the student participants live with their parents (94.7%), and therefore, they consider parents and family members to be the most influential figures in instilling life values for the student participants.

4.   CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From this study, it can be concluded that the attitudes of high school students toward radicalism are directly influenced by the teaching of virtue character. The influence is negative, meaning that the stronger the understanding of virtue character teaching by high school students, the weaker their attitudes toward radicalism. When this relationship is moderated by spiritual well-being, the negative relationship between virtue character teaching and attitudes toward radicalism in high school students becomes stronger. Thus, the presence of spiritual well-being and the teaching of virtue character can weaken attitudes toward radicalism among high school students in the Depok and Bekasi regions.

However, it is important to note the limitations of this study, particularly the imbalance in the sample proportion based on the type of school. The majority of the samples came from private national high schools (74.2%), while the samples from public high schools were limited (0.9%). For future researchers, it is recommended to address this imbalance and consider a more representative sample to enhance the generalizability of the findings.

Based on the research findings, it is recommended that schools evaluate their character education programs and teaching methods, integrating them with the concept of spiritual well-being to effectively counter radical attitudes among students. Collaboration between parents and schools is crucial in instilling values of truth consistently and preventing the emergence of radical attitudes. High school students should actively explore their potential for spiritual well-being, and schools can support this through various programs and workshops. Future research in this area should consider factors like age, gender, and social status to provide a more comprehensive understanding of attitudes toward radicalism. These recommendations collectively aim to develop and implement strategies that address and prevent radical attitudes while fostering students' spiritual well-being and character development.

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