

## Islamic Religious Education as the Main Pillar to Improve Indicators of Religious Moderation

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**Abstract.** *There are cases of intolerance and low levels of religious moderation among students. This is an implication of the diversity of Indonesian society which is plural and diverse. These cases need to be avoided by strengthening the role of Islamic Religious Education to increase indicators of understanding of religious moderation. The research method used is library research. This research aims to i) How can Islamic Religious Education become the main foundation for the development of the four pillars of religious moderation?, (ii) To what extent can the Islamic Religious Education curriculum be implemented as a means to encourage the improvement of religious moderation indicators?, (iii) How is the role of PAI teachers in teaching understanding of religious moderation to students?. The results showed that Islamic Religious Education can improve the indicators of understanding of religious moderation by (i) internalization of Islamic Religious Education values, (ii) active participation of Islamic Religious Education teachers, and (iii) curriculum based on religious moderation.*

**Keywords :** *Islamic Religious Education; Moderation; Religious Moderation.*

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**Abstract.** *Terdapat kasus-kasus intoleransi dan tingkat moderasi beragama yang rendah dikalangan peserta didik. Hal tersebut merupakan implikasi dari keberagaman masyarakat Indonesia yang majemuk dan plural. Kasus-kasus tersebut perlu dihindari dengan menguatkan peran Pendidikan Agama Islam untuk meningkatkan indikator pemahaman moderasi beragama. Metode penelitian yang dilakukan adalah penelitian pustaka. Dari hal tersebut penelitian ini bertujuan untuk i) Bagaimana Pendidikan Agama Islam dapat menjadi fondasi utama untuk pengembangan empat pilar moderasi beragama? (ii) Sejauh mana kurikulum Pendidikan Agama Islam dapat diimplementasikan sebagai sarana untuk mendorong peningkatan indikator moderasi beragama? (iii) Bagaimana peran guru PAI dalam mengajarkan pemahaman moderasi beragama kepada peserta didik?. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan PAI dapat meningkatkan indikator pemahaman moderasi beragama dengan (i) internalisasi nilai-nilai PAI, (ii) partisipasi aktif guru PAI, dan (iii) kurikulum berbasis moderasi beragama.*

**Keywords :** *Pendidikan Agama Islam; Moderasi; Moderasi Beragama.*

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### PRELIMINARY

Indonesia is a country of pluralism that includes ethnic, racial, cultural and religious diversity (Ahmadi & Afifah, 2022). In religious diversity, there are at least 6 official religions recognized by the government, not including the ancestral belief systems found in various tribes. Data from the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs shows that 231,069,932 people follow Islam, 20,246,267 Christians, 8,325,339 Catholics, 4,646,357 Hindus, 2,062,150 Buddhists, 71,999 Confucianists and 112,792 people in the belief system ("Portal Data Kementerian Agama," 2022).

This religious diversity certainly has its challenges. According to SETARA Institute's findings, there were a minimum of 180 incidents and 424 instances of violations against freedom of religion and belief in the year 2020. Furthermore, non-state actors committed 62 acts of intolerance (Sigit &

Hasani, 2021). Correspondingly, as per a report by the Pancasila Ideology Development Agency (BPIP), incidents of intolerance in Indonesia are consistently on the rise ("BPIP: Kasus Intoleransi di Indonesia Selalu meningkat," 2020). These cases increased with the fall of the New Order/Orde Baru regime (Ma'rifah, 2012).

Furthermore, in educational institutions, there are examples of cases such as what happened in SMK 2 Padang and a school in DKI Jakarta. The case began with a teacher sending a short message through the WhatsApp platform to vote for a student council chairman with different beliefs (Suyanto, 2021). In July 2017, a non-Muslim student at SMPN 3 Genteng Banyuwangi was required to wear a jilbab and follow religious rituals. In 2019 there was a regulation requiring new students to wear Muslim clothing; protests from student parents against the prohibition of hijabs for students during class time. In 2020 there was a case from SMA Negeri 1 Gemolong Sragen who was terrorized by the students' religious organization (Tagar News, 2017). Furthermore, the results of research from Aisyah et al (2021) intolerance among Nurul Jadid High School students still exists because of different beliefs and appearances (Aisyah et al., 2021).

As quoted by Husna and Thohir, Henri Saputro argues that in psychoanalytic theory, students' school years, especially high school years, are a period of self-discovery, including on the topic of religious life (Husna & Thohir, 2020). The younger generation still shows unpredictable personality development at a certain age. For this age range, identity and character development are very important (Widuseno & Sudarsih, 2019). The younger generation needs to be given direction in religious life. Students at the developmental stage can absorb knowledge faster than parents. Religious moderation from an early age can cause the internalization of values under religious teachings to be stronger. This will continue to be carried by certain individuals as they grow older and interact in a global community environment (Hanan & Rahmat, 2023).

From this, moderate and inclusive Islamic education can organize society so that there is no clash between parties and sentiments of radicalism (Fahri & Zainuri, 2019). This can be done through the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia to realize moderate and inclusive Islamic education (Mukhibat, Istiqomah, & Hidayah, 2023). Furthermore, Islamic Religious Education has become one of the important media in transferring the message of religious moderation (Makruf, Muttaqin, & Febiyana, 2021). Islamic educational philosophy offers a strong theoretical and methodological framework for creating an advanced Islamic education that encourages religious moderation. (Hasanah & Abbas, 2023). The implementation of religious moderation-based learning in Islamic education is seen as a crucial step in addressing religiously labelled conflicts and producing a moderate generation (Aida, 2022; Nasihin, Ainol, & Khumaidi, 2023).

Religious moderation is the perspective, behaviour, or attitude of someone who always takes the middle way and does not lean to the extreme in religion (Kementerian Agama RI, 2019a). In English, moderation means average, core, standard, and impartial (Kementerian Agama RI, 2019b). According to the Oxford Dictionary, moderation is the quality of being reasonable and not extreme (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, n.d.). In Arabic, moderation is known as *wasathiyah* which is equivalent to *tawasuth*, *i'tidal*, and *tawazun*. The term *wasathiyyah* is derived from the Qur'an and carries the profound meaning of a combination of justice and moderation and between excess and deficiency. The Big Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI) mentions two definitions of moderation: *first*, the reduction of violence; *second*, the avoidance of extremes. If someone says, "that person is moderate", it means that the sentence states that the person is reasonable, mediocre, and not extreme (Depdikbud, 2018).

People who practice moderate religion must avoid feeling alone and excluded. Discrimination occurs when individuals or groups are cornered or treated unequally because of differences in religion, belief, race, ethnicity, or social class (Khadafi & Mardiasih, 2021). The values of religious moderation include choosing the middle way, being balanced, tolerant, honest, and bringing goodness and preventing disobedience (Malik, Hs, & Hindi, 2021). In fact, according to the interpretation of Ahmad Syafi'i Ma'arif, humanity must also coexist peacefully with atheists (Ma'arif, 2015).

In connection with this, there are signs regarding religious moderation in the Qur'an. As quoted by Wahyuninto and Muslim, the results of research from Syamsul Hidayat show that the dominant view is Islam and other religions are only a claim of truth. The prohibition of coercion in entering a religion actually strengthens Islam. Even though it is like that, Islam still respects other religions (Wahyuninto & Muslim, 2010).

Indicators of religious moderation consist of four indicators, namely: 1) national commitment; 2) tolerance; 3) non-violence; and 4) accommodating to local culture. *First*, the indicator of national commitment is included in the indicator of moderate understanding because a person can be assessed for the level of religious moderation from the perspective of loyalty to the basic national consensus. *Second*, tolerance refers to an attitude that is open, broad, voluntary, and friendly in accepting diversity. *Third*, religious moderation involves the formation of a balanced and moderate character. Non-violence is an integral part of a character that reflects a moderate and middle-of-the-road attitude. *Fourth*, individuals who have a moderate attitude tend to be more open and friendly to local traditions and cultures in their religious practices, as long as they do not conflict with the core principles of religious teachings. Religious moderation in general can be applied in the context of education including in this context is Islamic Religious Education which can create conditions for moderate students (Husna & Thohir, 2020).

Previous research, from the aspect of learning material content, Rohmat Mulyana (2023) suggested the concept of religious moderation values in textbooks (Mulyana, 2023). Muhaemin et al (2023), argue that the content of the material in the textbooks has not covered all indicators of religious moderation (Muhaemin, Rusdiansyah, Pabbajah, & Hasbi, 2023). Research from Hakim (2022), suggests the practice of implementing PAI values at SMA Negeri 1 Tasikmalaya in the frame of religious moderation (Hakim, 2022). Other related research on religious moderation is research from Burhanuddin and Khairuddin (2022) and Suhendi et al. (2020) which discusses preventing radicalism in the setting of higher education institutions (Burhanuddin & Khairuddin, 2022; Suhendi, Sawahel, & Abdillah, 2020).

The position of this research has significant differences from previous studies, especially in the context of studying Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in school institutions that are contextualized with indicators of religious moderation. From this, this study produces several research questions (i) How can Islamic Religious Education become the main foundation for the development of the four pillars of religious moderation? (ii) To what extent can the Islamic Religious Education curriculum be implemented as a means to encourage the improvement of religious moderation indicators? (iii) How is the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers in teaching understanding of religious moderation to students?

## RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses the literature study method. Literature study or library research is research that uses library sources to obtain data in this case discussing the practice of religious moderation in the educational environment (Zed, 2008). Primary data sources are taken from several books and journal articles related to religious moderation and education. Secondary data sources include supporting documents, news, and reports of findings. The data analysis technique uses the content analysis method which is used to determine the presence of certain words, themes, or concepts in certain data fragments (Wilson, 2011).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Internalization of Islamic Education Values

The internalization of values from Islamic religious education significantly contributes to enhancing students' comprehension of the concept of religious moderation (Ahmadi & Afifah, 2022; Alfurqan & Hidayat, 2023; Badi' Rohmawati & Izza, 2022). Islam is rich with a multitude of values that guide the lives of its followers. Values such as compassion, justice, humility, and generosity are deeply embedded in Islamic teachings. Ibnu Miskawaih articulated that the primary aim of education

is to shape good character. As a renowned ethical philosopher of his time, he emphasized the significance of character education for students. According to him, developing a strong character is essential, not only focusing on academic knowledge. Good character stands out as the most crucial attribute that students should possess (Faizin, Sholeilluna, Rohmah, & Maftuhah, 2023). The application of religious moderation is essential to be implemented early on in the school environment. Often, we find that students' morality can conflict with the principles of religious values (Hanan & Rahmat, 2023). These values not only contribute to the individual's spiritual growth but also play a significant role in fostering a harmonious and just society. Islam's values provide a moral compass for navigating life with integrity and contributing positively to the community.

In other words, the main focus of Islamic Religious Education is to guide students' character, not only to improve their understanding of Islam. Religious moderation can be implemented through religious guidance that involves the planning, implementation, and evaluation of learning Islamic Religious Education (PAI). With this approach, it is expected to form an attitude of religious moderation in students (Gunawan, Ihsan, & Jaya, 2021). In line with this, research from Hani Rosyada (2022) shows that the internalization of religious moderation values can be developed through Islamic Religious Education learning. Furthermore, these values can be applied through religious guidance, which involves planning, implementing, and evaluating learning (Rosyada, 2022). In Islam, Islamic values and national commitments are closely linked, allowing people to recognize each other (Kharisma et al., 2021). Another value inherent to religious moderation indicator is the idea of tolerance in Islam has been the subject of several research. Both Hasnaini (2022) and Junaidi (2021) stress the significance of fostering collaboration, tolerance, and respect in Islamic education, especially in light of Indonesia's varied community (Hasnaini, Hurmaini, Trimadona, & Mukhlis, 2022; Junaidi & Ninoersy, 2021). In the context of Islamic beliefs that support religious moderation, the ideas that oppose violence are regularly incorporated into Islamic Religious Education materials (Pradana, 2020). In addition, Islamic Religious Education also respects local culture (Tofiqurrohman, 2019).

The values of religious moderation can be integrated into character education in schools through indirect learning. Every student learning is designed to be familiar with excellent character and moderate and noble character (Gunawan et al., 2021). This process involves an effort to harmonize the religious values taught in PAI subjects so that they become an integral part of students' characters and attitudes. By internalizing the rich values of Islamic Religious Education, which encompass the four indicators of religious moderation, students are expected not only to understand conceptual of religious moderation but also to be able to apply it in their daily behavior. Therefore, PAI learning is not only a means to improve religious knowledge, but also a place to shape students' characters to reflect a moderate and tolerant attitude in living a religious life.

### **Active Participation of IRE Teachers**

The role of IRE teachers in understanding religious moderation is very important because PAI teachers become role models for students in religious behaviour (Muhaemin et al., 2023). The role of teachers or kyais in the context of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) plays a crucial role in shaping students' religious character and understanding. They not only function as spiritual mentors, helping students understand the teachings of Islam and providing guidance on worship practices, but also as role models of behaviour that can influence students' mindsets and attitudes.

The role of IRE teachers has a very important significance in motivating students to build religious moderation (Irwan, 2023). Moreover, teachers play a role in shaping students' character by developing social skills, tolerance and respect for diversity (Ahmadi & Afifah, 2022). IRE teachers are not only conveyors of religious information but also inspirers who can stimulate students' interest and motivation towards religious moderation values. By presenting a dynamic and inspiring learning approach, IRE teachers can open space for discussion and deep reflection on the relevance of religious values in everyday life. In addition, PAI teachers act as facilitators to guide students in applying religious teachings practically, motivating them to live life with a moderate and tolerant

attitude. Thus, the role of PAI teachers not only includes the transfer of knowledge but also creating a learning environment that arouses students' enthusiasm and involvement in understanding and internalizing religious moderation as an integral part of their personality.

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers play a pivotal role in shaping well-rounded individuals with a strong sense of national commitment and love for their homeland (Haq, Janah, & Rhendica, 2023). Their dedication extends to instilling values that vehemently oppose violence, fostering an environment of peace and harmony (Atqia & Abdullah, 2021). Moreover, these educators actively promote tolerance among adherents of various religious beliefs, emphasizing the importance of mutual understanding and respect (Aidnay, 2018). Additionally, they contribute to social cohesion by adapting their teachings to align with and appreciate local cultures, ensuring a seamless integration of Islamic principles with the diverse tapestry of local traditions (Nada, 2019). In essence, IRE teachers emerge as ambassadors of unity, promoting not only religious values but also a broader ethos of national pride, non-violence, interfaith tolerance, and cultural adaptation.

With continuity of teaching from primary to higher levels of education, teachers help students bring the values of religious moderation into their adult lives. Overall, the role of teachers or kyai is not only limited to the delivery of religious teaching materials but is also key in shaping students' attitudes and views towards religious moderation, ultimately contributing to the creation of social harmony and tolerance in society.

### **Religious Moderation-Based Curriculum**

Islamic Religious Education which carries the value of religious moderation, has a strategic role in implementing the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum. IRE, with a focus on religious moderation, can be an important pillar in creating a learning environment that is inclusive, and democratic, and encourages students' independence (Putri & Nural, 2022). The approach to implementing religious moderation in schools through the curriculum can be done in several ways as described by Zahroh (2022). First, the subject approach involves careful identification of the topics to be covered, which are then broken down into learning materials that must be mastered by students. This approach ensures that the values of religious moderation are specifically integrated into the curriculum based on specific topics and materials.

Furthermore, the targeted approach in the implementation of teaching and learning emphasizes strategies that are tailored to the needs of students. Teachers can design learning methods that suit students' characteristics to ensure understanding and internalization of religious moderation values.

The material organization model approach, as the third option, organizes several discussion topics that are interrelated and reinforcing. This allows students to see the connections between materials and understand the implications of religious moderation in a broader context. The reconstructionist approach, the fourth option, focuses on important issues in people's daily lives. This allows students to respond to social reality with a deeper understanding of religious moderation as a solution to the challenges and problems faced.

The humanistic approach, as the fifth option, prioritizes the affective development, mental resilience and emotional intelligence of students as an integral part of learning. It emphasizes aspects of religiousness that include not only conceptual understanding but also the development of attitudes and values of religious moderation.

Finally, the principle of responsibility involves setting specific standards and objectives in the learning process, as well as regulating its effectiveness based on the degree to which students achieve those standards. This principle ensures that religious moderation is not only integrated into the curriculum but also clearly measured and evaluated (Zahroh, 2022).

## CONCLUSION

The conclusion that can be drawn is that Islamic Religious Education in improving religious moderation is by (i) internalizing PAI values, (ii) active participation of PAI teachers, and (iii) religious moderation-based curriculum. From these three things, PAI can be the main pillar in improving religious moderation indicators. The limitation of this study is that it still uses literature study as the primary source. Further researchers, can further examine Islamic Religious Education and its implications for religious moderation holistically.

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