



## Rethinking Islamic Education: Incorporating Values of Religious Moderation in the Modern Era

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### ABSTRACT

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This study aims to describe the insertion of religious moderation values in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) learning and to examine how these values are integrated, internalized, and practiced within the educational process. Employing a qualitative approach with a single-case study design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews, moderate participant observation, and document analysis involving IRE teachers, students, school leaders, guidance and counseling teachers, and homeroom teachers selected purposively. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis through transcription, coding, categorization, and theme development. The findings reveal four main patterns of religious moderation insertion: the integration of moderation values into IRE lesson planning, the implementation of dialogic, reflective, and contextual learning strategies, the internalization of moderation values through school culture, and students' experiences in interpreting and practicing religious moderation in their daily lives. These findings indicate that religious moderation is not merely presented as normative content but functions as a socio-pedagogical practice shaped by the interaction of curriculum, teachers, school culture, and students' lived experiences. The study implies the need to strengthen instructional planning, attitude assessment, and collaborative school programs to foster an inclusive, tolerant, non-violent, and contextually responsive Islamic education ecosystem.

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## INTRODUCTION

Religious moderation has become a critical issue in contemporary education because schools are not merely institutions for knowledge transmission but also spaces where students develop perspectives toward diversity and social coexistence (Hasan & Juhannis, 2024; Wardi et al., 2026). In multicultural societies, religious education plays a strategic role in cultivating tolerance, inclusivity, mutual respect, and peaceful interaction among

individuals from different backgrounds (Fenezia & Armiati, 2025). This issue is particularly important in Indonesia, where students grow up within a highly pluralistic environment characterized by religious, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity. The ability of educational institutions to promote balanced religious understanding contributes significantly to social harmony and national cohesion. Religious moderation in Islamic education should be understood through theological, sociological, anthropological, and intercultural communication perspectives so that it can function as a social practice rather than merely a normative discourse (Rahmadi & Hamdan, 2023). Furthermore, religious education is essential for preventing exclusivism, prejudice, and symbolic violence in diverse communities (Ardhy & Fauziah, 2025). Therefore, integrating religious moderation into educational practices is increasingly important for fostering responsible citizenship and peaceful social relations in contemporary multicultural societies.

Despite its strategic importance, the implementation of religious moderation in educational settings continues to face substantial challenges. The increasing prevalence of identity polarization, exclusivist religious interpretations, and intolerance among young people has raised concerns regarding the effectiveness of current educational approaches. In many cases, students encounter differing religious beliefs and cultural practices without adequate guidance to develop constructive attitudes toward diversity. Consequently, misconceptions, stereotypes, and discriminatory behaviors may emerge within school communities. Verbal bullying and social exclusion based on religious differences still occur in educational environments, even in institutions that actively promote harmony and moderation (Aprilianto, 2025). Some students also remain reluctant to accept certain forms of interreligious social interaction, such as exchanging greetings during religious celebrations (Aprilianto, 2025). These findings indicate that intolerance does not always manifest through overt conflict but often appears in everyday interactions, language use, social boundaries, and prejudicial attitudes. Such conditions highlight the urgent need for educational interventions that systematically cultivate moderate religious attitudes among students.

Field observations indicate that efforts to promote religious moderation have already been initiated through Islamic Religious Education learning activities. Teachers have attempted to connect religious content with values of mutual respect, social harmony, and peaceful coexistence through classroom instruction. Classroom discussions, contextual examples, and daily habituation practices are frequently used to encourage students to appreciate differences and avoid excessive fanaticism. Teachers also promote respectful communication and collaborative interaction among students from diverse social backgrounds. These

practices demonstrate that religious moderation can be integrated into routine educational activities and become part of students' learning experiences. However, the implementation of these efforts often remains informal and insufficiently documented. Limited attention has been given to understanding how moderation values are systematically planned, implemented, and evaluated within classroom instruction. As a result, there is still inadequate knowledge regarding the pedagogical mechanisms through which religious moderation is inserted into Islamic Religious Education learning.

Previous studies have demonstrated the significant role of education in strengthening religious moderation. Educational institutions contribute to the development of moderation through teachers, students, educational objectives, learning management, and school environments (Aflahah, 2023). Religious moderation values can also be internalized through curricular activities, religious habituation programs, student organizations, and educational services that accommodate learners from different religious backgrounds (Iya et al., 2026). These findings collectively emphasize that religious moderation extends beyond cognitive understanding and requires continuous value formation through educational experiences. In addition, students' religious tolerance is strongly influenced by social context, educational policies, and institutional characteristics (Mappiasse & Hayadin, 2022). Therefore, schools possess considerable potential to become effective environments for nurturing inclusive and moderate religious attitudes among students.

Although the literature provides valuable insights, several important gaps remain. Most previous studies have concentrated on senior high schools, Islamic boarding schools, universities, or conceptual discussions of religious moderation, leaving the junior secondary school context relatively underexplored (Maulidy et al., 202). Existing studies primarily emphasize value internalization programs and broad educational strategies rather than examining the detailed pedagogical processes occurring within classroom learning activities. Research on religious moderation continues to expand; however, more specific investigations are still needed regarding instructional practices and classroom dynamics (Zamroni, 2025). Furthermore, previous studies have not sufficiently examined how moderation values are integrated into lesson planning, teaching strategies, classroom interactions, and students' learning experiences simultaneously. Consequently, limited empirical evidence is available regarding the practical mechanisms through which Islamic Religious Education teachers construct and transmit moderation values in everyday learning processes.

The novelty of this study lies in its comprehensive examination of the insertion of religious moderation values within Islamic Religious Education learning at the junior secondary school level. Rather than focusing solely on

school programs, value internalization activities, or institutional policies, this study investigates religious moderation from three interconnected dimensions: instructional planning, classroom implementation, and students' lived experiences. This approach enables a deeper understanding of how moderation values are transformed from curriculum objectives into concrete pedagogical practices and meaningful learning experiences. Furthermore, the study explores the interaction among teachers, curriculum, school culture, and students in shaping moderate religious attitudes. By analyzing moderation as a socio-pedagogical process rather than merely a normative concept, this research provides a more holistic perspective on the construction of religious moderation within formal educational settings. Such understanding is important for developing more effective educational strategies that respond to contemporary social diversity and multicultural realities.

Based on these considerations, this study addresses the following research problem: how are religious moderation values inserted into Islamic Religious Education learning, and how do students experience and practice these values within the school environment? This study argues that religious moderation is not merely transmitted through formal religious content but is constructed through the interaction of curriculum design, instructional strategies, school culture, and students' social experiences. Therefore, the effectiveness of moderation education depends not only on what is taught but also on how it is taught and experienced by learners. By investigating these processes, the study contributes to the development of Islamic education scholarship through a more contextual understanding of moderation in classroom practice. In addition, the findings are expected to provide practical recommendations for teachers, school leaders, and educational policymakers in designing inclusive, dialogical, and contextually relevant religious education capable of fostering tolerant, peaceful, and socially responsible citizens in diverse societies.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This study employed a qualitative approach with a single-case study design. The qualitative approach was selected because the research aimed to obtain an in-depth understanding of the process of inserting religious moderation values into Islamic Religious Education (IRE) learning, particularly regarding teachers' instructional strategies and students' experiences in natural educational settings. A single-case study design was considered appropriate because the investigation focused on a specific educational context and sought to explore the phenomenon comprehensively within its real-life environment. This design enabled the researcher to examine the interaction between curriculum implementation, classroom practices, school culture, and students' perspectives

in a holistic manner (Busetto et al., 2020). Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in IRE learning, religious guidance activities, or the school's socio-religious culture. The participants included IRE teachers, students from Grades VII–IX, the principal or vice principal, guidance and counseling teachers, homeroom teachers, and other relevant stakeholders. Limited snowball sampling was also employed when initial participants recommended additional informants who possessed relevant information (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

The study was conducted at a public junior secondary school in East Java, Indonesia. The site was selected because it represents a multicultural educational environment where students interact within diverse social, cultural, and religious backgrounds, making it a relevant context for examining the implementation of religious moderation values in educational practice. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, moderate participant observation, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore instructional planning, teaching strategies, attitude assessment, and students' experiences in understanding and practicing the values of *tawassuth*, *tasamuh*, *i'tidal*, *musawah*, *shura*, non-violence, and respect for local culture. This interview format allowed the researcher to follow a structured guideline while providing participants with opportunities to explain their experiences in greater depth (Fasyiransyah et al., 2025). Observations focused on classroom learning processes, teacher–student interactions, classroom discussions, religious habituation activities, and school culture. Documentary data included lesson plans, teaching materials, assessment instruments, school regulations, religious programs, and records of school activities. The use of multiple data collection techniques strengthened methodological triangulation and enhanced the credibility of the findings (Schlunegger et al., 2024).

Data trustworthiness was ensured through source triangulation, method triangulation, member checking, and an audit trail. Source triangulation involved comparing information obtained from teachers, students, school leaders, supporting teachers, and institutional documents, whereas method triangulation was conducted by cross-checking findings from interviews, observations, and documentation. Member checking was performed by confirming preliminary interpretations and summaries of findings with key participants to ensure accuracy and consistency (Qomariyah et al., 2025). An audit trail was maintained through systematic documentation of interview guides, field notes, transcripts, collected documents, analytical memos, and coding decisions (Carcary, 2020). Data were analyzed using an interactive qualitative analysis model consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. During data condensation, the researcher selected, focused, simplified, and organized

relevant information from the collected data. The condensed data were subsequently presented through thematic displays to facilitate interpretation and pattern identification. Finally, conclusions were drawn and continuously verified throughout the research process to ensure the validity and consistency of the emerging themes. This analytical procedure enabled the identification of meaningful patterns related to the insertion of religious moderation values in IRE learning (Christou, 2022).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Results**

The findings indicate that the insertion of religious moderation values in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) learning is a multidimensional and integrated educational process. The process extends beyond formal classroom instruction and involves interactions among curriculum implementation, pedagogical practices, school culture, and students' social experiences. Thematic analysis identified four interrelated themes: (1) the integration of religious moderation values into IRE lesson planning, (2) the implementation of dialogic, reflective, and contextual learning strategies, (3) the internalization of moderation values through school culture, and (4) students' experiences in understanding and practicing religious moderation in their daily lives.

### **Integration of Religious Moderation Values in IRE Learning Planning**

The findings show that religious moderation values, including *tawassuth*, *tasamuh*, *i'tidal*, *musawah*, *shura*, and non-violence, have been integrated into the planning and implementation of IRE learning. This integration appears in two forms. First, it is explicitly reflected in learning objectives, learning activities, and attitude assessment. Second, it is implicitly embedded through the hidden curriculum, including teachers' role modeling, respectful communication practices, and a school culture that encourages tolerance and appreciation of diversity. As a result, religious moderation is not only presented as a normative concept but is also practiced through learning activities and social interactions within the school environment.

Document analysis revealed that tolerance and respect for diversity were incorporated into group discussions, attitude reflection activities, and behavioral assessments conducted during the learning process. Teachers adapted religious content to students' social realities by transforming normative religious values into learning experiences that were relevant to everyday life. Consequently, learning functioned not only as knowledge transmission but also as a process of value transformation.

“I usually connect lessons about tolerance with examples that are close to students’ daily lives so that they understand that tolerance is not merely a theory but something that must be practiced in everyday interactions.” (GP-1, Interview, 2026)

The findings further indicate a shift from teacher-centered instruction toward value-oriented learning, where teachers act not only as knowledge transmitters but also as facilitators of value internalization. Learning plans therefore function as strategic instruments for fostering students’ awareness of moderation through gradual and continuous processes.

### **Dialogic, Reflective, and Contextual Learning Strategies**

The second finding demonstrates that the implementation of religious moderation values is strongly influenced by the pedagogical strategies employed by teachers. Teachers predominantly use dialogic, reflective, and contextual approaches through structured group discussions, interactive question-and-answer sessions, case studies based on social realities, and reflective activities related to students’ experiences.

These approaches create democratic learning spaces in which students actively participate in constructing knowledge and values. Differences of opinion are treated as opportunities for learning rather than as sources of conflict. Students are encouraged to express their views, listen to others, and engage in respectful dialogue.

“When we have discussions in class, I realize that my friends can have different opinions. From that experience, I learn not to impose my own views and to respect others more.” (PD-1, Interview, 2026)

The findings suggest that students internalize moderation values more effectively when these values are connected to real-life experiences, social interaction, and critical reflection. Such learning experiences support the simultaneous development of cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions.

### **Internalization of Moderation Values through School Culture**

The third finding reveals that religious moderation is reinforced through school culture, which functions as an educational social space shaping students’ habits, attitudes, and patterns of interaction. School culture encompasses daily interactions among school members, school regulations, respectful communication practices, religious activities, and efforts to strengthen values of togetherness.

Observations indicate that moderation values are consistently reinforced through everyday social interactions. Students are encouraged to respect differences, avoid discriminatory behavior, and maintain harmonious

relationships with peers. These practices contribute to the development of equality, tolerance, and non-violence as shared values within the school community.

“We always remind students not to mock their friends because of differences in habits, opinions, or backgrounds. Even small acts of ridicule can affect students’ comfort and the overall school climate.” (GBK-1, Interview, 2026)

The findings demonstrate that an inclusive school culture plays an important role in strengthening students’ understanding and practice of moderation values through continuous social habituation.

### **Students’ Experiences in Interpreting Religious Moderation**

The fourth finding shows that students generally interpret religious moderation as an attitude characterized by balance, respect for differences, non-extremism, and the rejection of verbal and social violence. These understandings are formed through classroom learning, social interactions, and personal reflection on everyday experiences.

The internalization process occurs gradually through repeated experiences, reflection, and social habituation. Students reported that learning activities helped them better understand the importance of respecting others and maintaining harmonious relationships despite differences.

“After studying Islamic Religious Education, I understand better that mocking friends is wrong. We should respect our friends even when there are differences.” (PD-2, Interview, 2026)

However, the findings also indicate that some students remain at a normative level of understanding, suggesting that moderation values have not yet fully developed into deeper reflective awareness. In addition, assessment of religious moderation values is still primarily conducted through teacher observation and has not been fully supported by structured assessment instruments.

### **Discussion**

The findings demonstrate that the insertion of religious moderation values in Islamic Religious Education is a multidimensional process involving curricular, pedagogical, and cultural dimensions simultaneously. The integration of moderation values into learning objectives, learning activities, and attitude assessments indicates that religious moderation is not merely presented as religious content but is embedded within the broader educational process. This finding supports previous studies emphasizing that educational institutions play a strategic role in strengthening religious moderation through curriculum,

learning management, and school environments (Aflahah et al., 2023). It also confirms that moderation education is most effective when values are integrated holistically rather than delivered as isolated topics.

The study further reveals that dialogic, reflective, and contextual learning strategies serve as important mechanisms for internalizing moderation values among students. Through classroom discussions, case studies, and reflective activities, students actively construct understanding rather than passively receive information. This finding is consistent with the argument that moderation-oriented education should promote critical literacy, dialogue among perspectives, and a balance between religious texts and social realities (Chadidjah et al., 2021). At the same time, the present study extends previous findings by showing how these pedagogical approaches operate in everyday classroom practices at the junior secondary school level, thereby providing a more detailed understanding of the instructional processes underlying moderation education.

Another significant finding concerns the role of school culture as a medium for the internalization of religious moderation. The study shows that values such as equality, tolerance, mutual respect, and non-violence are reinforced through daily interactions, school regulations, and habitual practices. This result aligns with the view that school culture functions as a hidden curriculum that significantly influences students' character formation (Abdurrohman, 2025). The findings also support the argument that students' tolerance is influenced not only by classroom instruction but also by broader social and institutional contexts (Mappiasse & Hayadin, 2022). Therefore, moderation education should be understood as a school-wide process rather than solely a classroom-based intervention.

The findings regarding students' experiences indicate that moderation values are gradually constructed through repeated social experiences, reflection, and interaction. Students generally associate religious moderation with balance, respect for diversity, and rejection of violence. This finding is consistent with the view that value internalization is a complex social process involving continuous interaction between individuals and their environments (Trisnantari et al., 2026). However, the study also found that some students remain at a normative level of understanding, suggesting that deeper reflective awareness requires more systematic reinforcement. This result complements previous concerns regarding the persistence of intolerance and exclusionary attitudes in educational settings (Aprilianto et al., 2025) and highlights the importance of sustained pedagogical efforts.

From a theoretical perspective, this study strengthens the concept of *al-wasathiyah* in Islamic education by demonstrating that moderation is not only a theological principle but also a socio-pedagogical practice embedded in

curriculum implementation, classroom interaction, and school culture (Wijaya & Jannah, 2026). The novelty of this study lies in its comprehensive analysis of religious moderation from the interconnected perspectives of instructional planning, pedagogical implementation, school culture, and students' lived experiences at the junior secondary school level. While previous studies mainly focused on senior high schools, value internalization programs, or conceptual discussions, this study provides a more holistic understanding of how moderation values are inserted and experienced in everyday educational practice (Gomez, 2024).

Practically, the study contributes to the development of more inclusive and contextually relevant religious education. The findings highlight the central role of teachers as agents of value transformation through role modeling, communication, and experience-based learning (Zhang & Cheng, 2022). Furthermore, the identification of limitations in assessment practices suggests the need for more structured and sustainable evaluation systems capable of measuring not only students' cognitive understanding but also their attitudes and behavioral consistency. The study therefore recommends strengthening operational curricula, developing moderation-based assessment instruments, and enhancing collaboration among IRE teachers, guidance and counseling teachers, and school leaders to foster educational ecosystems that are inclusive, tolerant, and free from symbolic or verbal violence. Such efforts are particularly important in multicultural contexts where education plays a crucial role in preventing exclusivism and promoting peaceful coexistence (Prasetyo et al., 2025; Plechatá et al., 2022).

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the insertion of religious moderation values in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) is a multidimensional and continuous process that is shaped through the integration of instructional planning, dialogic-reflective learning strategies, school culture, and students' social experiences. The most important lesson derived from this study is that religious moderation is more effectively developed when it is practiced as a lived educational experience rather than merely taught as normative religious content. Through the integration of values such as *tawassuth*, *tasamuh*, *i'tidal*, *musawah*, *shura*, and non-violence into classroom learning and school life, students are encouraged to develop balanced, inclusive, and contextually relevant religious attitudes. Academically, this study contributes to the development of Islamic education scholarship by extending the understanding of religious moderation as a socio-pedagogical process involving the interaction of curriculum, teachers, school culture, and students' lived experiences, thereby providing a more holistic

perspective on moderation education at the junior secondary school level. However, this study is limited to a single-case setting and relies primarily on qualitative data from one educational context, which may restrict the transferability of the findings. Future research is therefore recommended to develop more structured instruments for assessing religious moderation, conduct comparative studies across schools with different socio-cultural characteristics, and employ longitudinal approaches to examine the long-term development of students' moderate religious attitudes and behaviors.

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