

The Integration of Islamic Moderation in Religious Education of Indonesia

Khairan Muhammad Arif¹, Zahwa Mumtazah², Khaulah Khairan³, Ainal Mardhiah⁴

¹State Islamic University of Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, Indonesia, Khairan.arif@uinjkt.ac.id

²Sakarya University, Turkey, Zahwamumtazah19@gmail.com

³State Islamic University of Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, Indonesia, khaulah.khairan23@mhs.uinjkt.ac.id

⁴State Islamic University of Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh, Indonesia, ainal.abdurrahman@ar.raniry.ac.id

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ABSTRACT:

This study examines the integration of Islamic moderation (wasatiyyah) within Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in Indonesia as a strategic response to the challenges of exclusivism, radicalism, and intolerance among students. Employing a qualitative approach through literature review and field analysis in several public and Islamic schools, this research explores how values of moderation, such as tolerance, balance, justice, and respect for diversity are implemented within the curriculum, pedagogy, and teacher competencies. The findings reveal that although the national curriculum formally incorporates the principles of moderation, its implementation varies across institutions due to differences in teacher capacity, local culture, and institutional policies. This study highlights the critical role of teachers as change agents who can translate the abstract concept of moderation into concrete learning experiences through dialogical methods, contextual teaching, and inclusive classroom practices. The research contributes to the discourse on religious education reform by emphasizing that Islamic moderation in PAI is not merely a theological imperative but also a sociological necessity for fostering peaceful coexistence in Indonesia's plural society. Recommendations include strengthening teacher professional development, providing moderation-based teaching resources, and enhancing collaboration among government bodies, religious organizations, and civil society to ensure the sustainability of moderation values in Islamic education.

Keywords: Islamic Moderation, Islamic Religious Education, Tolerance, Curriculum Integration..

1. Introduction

Islamic moderation (wasatiyyah Islam) is one of the essential characteristics of Islam as prescribed by Allah in the Qur'an. Likewise, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) instructed and exemplified for Muslims to understand and

practice a moderate approach to Islam in all dimensions of life, including education (K. M. Arif, 2020). Islamic moderation, which has become a stream of modern Islamic thought, is capable of bringing a sense of balance and generating a positive response from the global community toward Islam (Al-Qaradhawi, 1997).

Islamic moderation, with its principles of justice, benevolence, wisdom, and balance across all dimensions of life, must be grounded in a robust epistemology and theoretical framework that can be identified through its principles (Al-Qaradhwawi, 2003). This also includes exploring the relationship between the principles of Islamic moderation and educational concepts, as well as the teaching–learning process. The concept of moderation in Islamic creed (‘aqīdah), law (sharī‘ah), social relations (mu‘āmalah), and ethics (akhlāq) reflects the teachings of Islam as practiced by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and his companions, and continued by successive generations, which has shaped Islamic civilization to this day (Imarah, 1998).

The impact of radical and extremist Islamic ideologies has given rise to fundamentalism and violence in the social life of several countries (Omotosho, 2015). Such extremist thought often originates from educational curricula that take an extreme approach to teaching values and knowledge, including religious studies (Al, 2023), resulting in equally extreme outputs. Conversely, excessive liberalism arises from liberal learning approaches that rely solely on unrestricted free thinking, often disregarding morality and religion (Sumper Mulia Harahap, 2023). The intellectual framework of Islamic moderation is a highly effective approach to countering radical and extremist interpretations of Islam, which tend to approach Islamic teachings in a rigid and intolerant manner (K. M. Arif, 2020). Data from Indonesia’s National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT) indicate that the national radicalism rate in 2020 reached 12% and declined to 10% in 2022

(BNPT, 2022). These data demonstrate that radicalism or extremist tendencies toward Islam remain relatively high despite the decline in 2022, thereby necessitating a deradicalization process through education, particularly Islamic education from a moderation perspective.

Religious education is the oldest form of education in Indonesia, particularly Islamic education, which emerged during the Dutch colonial period through institutions in the form of pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) (Miftahuddin et al., 2022). Institutional religious education has experienced significant development, particularly in 2024. The Directorate of Islamic Education at the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs reported that in 2024, the number of madrasahs in Indonesia reached 87,517, consisting of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI), Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs), and Madrasah Aliyah (MA) (<https://madrasah.kemenag.go.id/gis/>).

Similarly, the Directorate of Higher Education reported that the number of higher education institutions offering religious studies in Indonesia in 2020 reached 1,240 out of 3,044 private higher education institutions nationwide, meaning that 27% of Indonesia’s private higher education institutions are religious higher education institutions (Education, 2020). However, the allocation of religious education as a subject within the national curriculum has seen a significant decline in the 2022 national curriculum structure. This is evident from the considerably limited instructional hours for religious education compared to general subjects, as shown in the following table:

Table 01. Number of Instructional Hours for Junior High Schools (SMP/M.Ts) and Senior High Schools (SMA/MA) in 2022

Subject Category	SMP/M.Ts	SMA/MA
Religious Subjects (Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism)	96 hours/year (11.1%)	108 hours/year (9.6%)
General Subjects (Civics [Pancasila], Mathematics, English, Indonesian Language, and Science)	864 hours/year (89.9%)	1,116 hours/year (91.4%)

Source: Decree of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia No. 56/M/2022 on Guidelines for Curriculum Implementation in the Context of Learning Recovery.

The data above indicate that the instructional hours (JP) for religious education at the junior high school level (SMP/MTs) account for only 11.1% per year, and at the senior high school level (SMA/MA), only 9.6% per year, compared to the total hours allocated for general subjects. The first principle of Pancasila is Belief in One Supreme God, which implies that religious education should be a priority in the national education system. The values and mandate contained in the first principle of Pancasila cannot be realized if religious education does not receive serious attention. Considering the high rate of radicalism and the significant disparity between the hours allocated to religious education and general subjects, research and studies on efforts to integrate the concept of Islamic moderation into education particularly religious education become urgent and essential. The religious moderation program promoted by the government across all national educational institutions will not be effective if it is not synergized with the concept of Islamic moderation within religious education. This is crucial, given that the majority of Indonesia's population is Muslim.

This study aims to explain the concept of Islamic moderation in education and to integrate it into the system of Islamic religious education in Indonesia by proposing conceptual and practical frameworks for implementation within Islamic educational institutions. The ultimate goal is to produce students who possess a moderate, just, balanced, and proportional understanding and practice of Islam. Furthermore, this study continues the previous research conducted by Imam Mujahid, which examined the orthodox pesantren's approach to creating moderate students. The moderate Islamic understanding taught and practiced at the traditional pesantren As-Salam, as found in that study, successfully

shaped students with moderate character (Imam Mujahid, 2021).

Another study, entitled "Mainstreaming Moderation in Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism in Islamic Boarding Schools in Central Java" conducted by Muhammad Wildan, found that several conservative pesantren, as relatively inactive entities, must be approached appropriately through soft measures, since hard measures are unable to effectively address or resolve the roots of radicalism. The indirect and soft approach initiated by CISForm can reorient these pesantren towards moderate Islam (wasathiyah) (Wildan & Muttaqin, 2022).

Similarly, research conducted by Zolkefley from Universiti Malaysia Al-Sultan Abdullah Pahang, Malaysia, entitled "Work-Life Balance in Managing Stress, Job Satisfaction, and Performance: The Concept of Wasatiyyah and a Neuroscience Perspective" demonstrated that the application of the wasatiyyah concept modulates neural networks and hormonal organization within the brain, which in turn influences work performance and daily activities. This ethical component of Islam is integrated into the daily life of a Muslim and provides comprehensive benefits, ranging from stress management and job satisfaction to overall work performance (Zolkefley, 2023).

Another study conducted by Muhammad Nasir and Rijal, entitled "Maintaining the Middle Path: Mainstreaming Religious Moderation through Islamic Higher Education Institutions in Indonesia," revealed that religious moderation can instill values of national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and accommodation of local culture (Nasir & Rijal, 2021). The study addressed several key questions: first, what are the concept and role of Islamic moderation in education? Second, how can the understanding of Islamic moderation be integrated into religious education in Indonesia? Third, what are the responses to and impacts of integrating Islamic moderation into religious education on students?

The integration of the concept of moderate Islam into religious education in Indonesian

educational institutions is capable of providing comprehensive and holistic knowledge of Islam, as well as cultivating a moderate attitude toward the practice of Islamic teachings. This is reflected in attitudes of justice, balance, wisdom, and proportionality in relation to Islamic teachings. This fact can be observed for several reasons: first, the growing awareness within religious educational institutions regarding the importance of teaching students about moderate Islam; second, the emergence of educators and teachers who possess a holistic and profound understanding of moderate Islamic teachings in accordance with the Qur'an and Sunnah; and third, the increasing public awareness of the importance of Islamic moderation and religious moderation in the life of the nation and the state.

2. Literature Review

1. Religious Education in Islam

Education, according to Plato, is "the activity of imparting beauty and perfection to the human body and soul" (Plato, 1988). Ibn Sina defined education as "a habit, meaning the continuous practice of something until it becomes a character" (Ali, 1978). Abu Hamid al-Ghazali stated that "education is like a farmer planting seeds, where weeds grow among the plants, and the farmer works to repair and perfect the crops" (Hirasi Lailiy & Mani Basmah, 2016). Ibn Khaldun defined education as "a process of nurturing and perfecting human character to make it more complete" (Khaldun, 2004). John Dewey described education as "a collection of activities through which members of society transform their powers, aims of existence, and their continuous development" (Salam, 1981).

In Indonesia, the concept of education as defined in the National Education System Law of 2003 is "a conscious and planned effort to create an atmosphere of learning and an educational process so that learners actively develop their potential to possess spiritual strength, self-control, personality, intelligence, noble character, and the skills needed by themselves, society, the nation, and the state" (RI, 2003). Based on these definitions, education can be concluded as a

serious endeavor undertaken by individuals or institutions to develop and cultivate the potential of learners in an integral and gradual manner, forming them into knowledgeable, faithful, and pious individuals.

Western scholars such as Max Muller define religion as "a mental state or condition of the mind that transcends reason and deliberation, enabling humans to comprehend the Infinite through various names and manifestations" (Allan Manzies, 1895). In Islam, religion is "a set of divine rules that guide humankind to the truth in creed and ideology, as well as in behavior and morality" (Muhammad Ad-Zuhailiy, 2019). Although there are differing perceptions of religion between the West and Islam, both views agree that religion is a guide through which humanity comes to know God and worship Him.

In Islam, religious education is considered the primary goal of education, because through education, humans come to know Allah and the teachings of Islam and are able to practice them in their daily lives. Therefore, Islam obliges the pursuit of knowledge for both men and women. The Prophet Muhammad said: "Seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim, male and female" (Narrated by Ibn Majah, Abdul Bar, and Al-Bazzar). The Qur'an states that people of knowledge and faith are better and more honorable than those without knowledge (Qur'an, Surah Al-Mujadilah: 11). Al-Ghazali positioned religious sciences as obligatory knowledge (fard 'ain) that every Muslim must study (Al-Ghazali, 2006).

Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah explained that education functions as a means of purification and refinement of the soul in three aspects: first, purification and refinement of the soul in servitude to God by removing bad habits and worldly desires; second, purification and refinement of the soul from ignorance to knowledge; and third, purification and refinement of the soul's intentions and goals so that one does not fall into laziness or despair (Al-Jawziyyah, 2007).

From the Qur'anic verses, the Sunnah, and the views of scholars mentioned above, it can be concluded that education in Islam holds a central position as the foundation of human dignity and happiness in this world and the hereafter. Therefore, every Muslim is obligated to pursue education throughout their life.

2. The Concept of Islamic Moderation

The term moderate or wasathiyah linguistically carries the meaning of justice and excellence, as reflected in the Qur'anic verse:

“And thus We have made you (the Muslim community) a just and chosen nation, that you may be witnesses over mankind and that the Messenger may be a witness over you” (Qur'an, Surah Al-Baqarah: 143).

Allah also commanded the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) to call followers of other religions to practice their faith in a moderate and non-extremist manner (Qur'an, Surah An-Nisa: 171; Al-Maidah: 77). These verses form the theological basis of the religious moderation (moderasi beragama) initiative that is actively promoted by the Indonesian government today. The Prophet Muhammad further clarified the meaning of wasathiyah in his hadith, stating: “Wasathiyah is justice” (Narrated by al-Bukhari).

Classical scholars have elaborated on this concept. Al-Ashfahani explained that wasathiyah refers to the central point of a thing, where both sides are equal (Al-Ashfahani, 2013). Importantly, wasathiyah is not fully identical with the modern term moderate. While moderate generally means avoiding extremism and choosing a middle path (Depdiknas RI, 2008), wasathiyah carries a broader meaning representing fairness, balance, proportionality, and wisdom in understanding and practicing Islamic teachings (K. M. Arif, 2020).

From a terminological perspective, scholars have defined wasathiyah or Islamic moderation as follows: Ali bin Abi Talib stated, “You must adhere to the middle way, for those who are excessive will return to it, and those who are negligent will catch up with it” (Al-Ghazali,

2006). Al-Qurtubi, interpreting Surah Al-Baqarah: 143, explained that the Muslim ummah is a moderate, just, and intelligent community that must maintain a position of balance, avoiding extremism and excess (Al-Qurtubi, 2006). Ibn Ashur defined wasathiyah as the attitude situated between two extremes: the far right, characterized by undue restriction (tafrith), and the far left, characterized by excess (ifrath), both of which must be avoided in favor of a perfect middle path (Ashur, 2020).

Similarly, Yusuf al-Qaradawi defined Islamic moderation as “a balance, middle position, and justice between two opposing poles, wherein neither pole dominates the other, thereby preventing one from violating the rights of the other.” He provided examples of such opposing poles, including spirituality and materialism, individualism and collectivism, idealism and pragmatism, and rigidity and flexibility (Al-Qaradawi, 2009). Ali Muhammad al-Shalabi described wasathiyah as “Islamic teachings that prioritize justice, goodness, uprightness, and proportionality (shirath al-mustaqim), avoiding excess or extremism (al-ghuluw wa al-ifrath) as well as negligence or deficiency (al-jafa wa al-tafrith)” (Ali Muhammad al-Shalabi, 2007).

Taken together, wasathiyah and moderation share a generally similar meaning, although wasathiyah encompasses a broader scope. To facilitate understanding, the term moderation can be used interchangeably with wasathiyah. Thus, Islamic moderation can be defined as “a worldview and attitude characterized by justice, balance, proportionality, and wisdom, avoiding both far-right and far-left extremes in understanding, interpreting, and practicing Islamic teachings as derived from the Qur'an and Sunnah.”

According to Yusuf al-Qaradawi, Islamic moderation is built upon several core principles and values: justice, consistency, goodness, security, strength, and unity (Al-Qaradawi, 2009). Al-Shalabi similarly emphasized the principles of goodness, justice, ease, wisdom, consistency, and balance (Ali Muhammad al-Shalabi, 2007).

Justice (al-'adalah) is the most fundamental and primary standard of Islamic moderation, both in interpretation and application. A person's thought cannot be considered moderate if their understanding and *ijtihad* rely solely on reason to the point of departing from the Qur'an and Sunnah. Conversely, an interpretation cannot be considered moderate if it applies the Qur'an and Sunnah purely textually without using reason and sound judgment to grasp their essence, intent, and context such an approach inevitably deviates from justice and balance (M. K. Arif, 2020).

The principle of goodness (al-khairiyyah) is grounded in the Qur'anic verse: "You are the best nation ever brought forth for mankind" (Qur'an, Surah Ali Imran: 110).

Ibn Kathir interpreted this verse to mean that Muslims are the best community on earth (Ibn Kathir, 1994). According to Muhammad al-Shalabi, the superiority (khairiyyah) of this community lies in five aspects: (1) its faith in Allah; (2) its continuous call to what is good and beneficial; (3) its provision of benefit to humankind; (4) its responsiveness to the messages of the Prophets and Messengers; and (5) its divine guarantee of never collectively agreeing upon misguidance (Ali Muhammad al-Shalabi, 2007).

The principle of consistency (al-istiqamah) emphasizes the ability of a moderate Muslim community to remain steadfast in the middle path, resisting radical or liberal currents. Wasathiyah is, in essence, the consistent commitment to remain on the straight path (M. K. Arif, 2021). The principle of balance (al-tawazun), as described by al-Qaradawi, refers to a state of equilibrium between two opposing poles, ensuring that neither dominates the other. This balance prevents materialism from negating spirituality, individualism from undermining collectivism, or realism from excluding idealism (Al-Qaradawi, 2003).

Finally, the principle of wisdom (al-hikmah) highlights the importance of discerning judgment and prudence in all matters. Wisdom is considered superior to mere knowledge, as a

person of knowledge is not necessarily wise. Indeed, Islamic law (shari'ah) is built upon wisdom. Ibn Qayyim stated: "The foundation of the shari'ah is built upon wisdom and the welfare of servants in both worldly life and the Hereafter. Shari'ah is entirely justice, entirely mercy, entirely benefit, and entirely wisdom. Any matter that departs from justice to injustice, from mercy to harshness, from benefit to harm, or from wisdom to futility is not part of the shari'ah, even if one tries to interpret it as such" (Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, 2006).

3. Integration of Islamic Moderation in Education

Islamic moderation encompasses all dimensions of Islam: creed (aqidah), law (shariah, including worship, transactions, and legal matters), and ethics (akhlaq). It also permeates every aspect of human life, both in religious and social contexts. The principles and values of Islamic moderation can thus be applied across multiple spheres of life, including politics, education, economics, communication, and beyond (MUI, 2019).

In the educational sphere, these principles can be integrated into all components of education: objectives, teachers, students, curriculum, facilities, and teaching methodologies. The values of moderation can further be incorporated into lesson plans, learning materials, teaching approaches, instructional methods, and assessment strategies.

The objectives of education in the framework of Islamic moderation are holistic, covering both worldly and spiritual aims, the material and the immaterial, the physical and the spiritual, knowledge and skills, as well as individual and communal development. Ibn Sahnun recognized as one of the pioneers of Islamic education outlined the goals of Islamic education in his seminal work *Adab al-Mu'allimin*, first published in Tunisia in 929 CE. He asserted that the primary purpose of Islamic education is "to know Allah and understand the Qur'an and the Sunnah" (Mursi, 1992). Similarly, al-Qabisi, a student of Sahnun, argued in his book *Ahwal al-Muta'allimin wa Ahkam al-Mu'allimin wa al-*

Muta'allimin that the general aim of Islamic education is "to know Islam." Muhammad Qutb later elaborated that the specific objective of Islamic education is "the formation of a righteous human being," encompassing the nurturing of the soul, intellect, and body (Qutb, 2001).

Therefore, it can be concluded that the general aim of Islamic education within the wasathiyah (moderation) paradigm is to foster knowledge of Allah and Islam, while its specific aim is the holistic development of a righteous human being whose spirit, intellect, and body are nurtured in an integrated and comprehensive manner.

The curriculum of Islamic education consists of five key components: objectives, content (a collection of subjects), learning resources, teaching methods, and assessment (Musa, 2002). Educational objectives are commonly divided into two categories: general objectives, which seek to guide students toward recognizing, worshipping, and affirming the oneness of Allah (Ma & A. Wahab Hasbullah, 2023), and specific objectives, which focus on the integral development of students' potential. Modern Islamic education scholars agree that the purpose of the curriculum should go beyond developing students' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. Instead, it should be holistic, encompassing aspects of faith, morality, physical health, intellect, psyche, spirituality, social behavior, and aesthetics (Nashih, 1997; Al-Qadhi, 2004).

The content of the Islamic education curriculum from a wasathiyah perspective includes all forms of knowledge imparted to learners, derived from divine revelation, human reason, and lived experience. Al-Ghazali categorized curriculum content into two main groups.

1) Religious Sciences ('Ulum al-Shar'iyah), which include:

- a. Usul (foundational sciences): Qur'an, Hadith, consensus (ijma'), and the sayings of the Companions;
- b. Furu' (derivative sciences): jurisprudence (fiqh) and ethics;

- c. Preparatory sciences (al-Muqaddimat): language and grammar;

- d. Complementary sciences (al-Mutamimmat): disciplines related to the Qur'an such as exegesis (tafsir).

2) Non-Religious Sciences, which he further classified into:

- a. Praiseworthy sciences, such as mathematics and medicine;

- b. Permissible sciences, such as psychology and history;

- c. Blameworthy sciences, such as sorcery and other harmful knowledge (Dakhlallah, 1996; Wahyudin, 2018).

Al-Ghazali's classification can be seen as a highly moderate curriculum model, balancing religious and worldly sciences, logical and applied sciences, in a comprehensive and integrative way. Teachers play a central role in the implementation of education. A teacher is defined as "a person who leads, guides, and nurtures others in the educational process" (M. K. Arif, 2005). According to Ali Abdul Halim Mahmud, an Islamic teacher must possess several key competencies: honesty, trustworthiness, the ability to effectively communicate messages, and intellectual competence (Ali Abdul Halim Mahmud, 2004). These teacher competencies are derived from the qualities of the Prophets and Messengers and are comprehensive in nature, covering moral, pedagogical, intellectual, and professional dimensions.

This perspective aligns with Indonesian Government Regulation No. 19 of 2017, which amended Government Regulation No. 74 of 2008 concerning teachers, and stipulates that teachers must possess four core competencies: pedagogical competence, personal competence, social competence, and professional competence.

4. The Role of Islamic Moderation in Religious Education

The principles of Islamic moderation, which emphasize justice and balance in both understanding and practicing religious and social

activities, play a crucial role in shaping a moderate concept of religious education. The objectives of Islamic religious education which focus on the introduction of *aqidah* (creed), *ibadah* (worship), *muamalat* (social transactions), and *akhlak* (ethics) are significantly influenced by the religious orientation of stakeholders involved in the development of religious education curricula. Likewise, the content of the curriculum, which consists of clusters of religious sciences and subjects taught to students, is inevitably shaped by those who design it.

The competence and paradigm of religious education teachers who embrace the principles of Islamic moderation have a significant impact on moderating students' understanding and attitudes, enabling them to internalize and practice these principles in daily life. A study conducted by Zoelkefly in Malaysia demonstrates that the concept of Islamic moderation plays a critical role in shaping students' intellectual development and understanding of Islam in a more peaceful and tolerant manner (Zoelkefly, 2023). Similarly, research conducted by Hendra Harmi on senior high schools and vocational schools in Rejang Lebong Regency found that Islamic Religious Education (IRE) subjects substantially contribute to shaping students' moderate Islamic character. Educational institutions can also function as testing grounds for the implementation of religious moderation in diverse community settings (Harmi, 2022).

Other studies further reveal that the inclusion of moderate theological education within school curricula fosters a more balanced understanding of religious thought and practice among students. Research conducted by Arhanudin Salim on interfaith schools in Yogyakarta shows that "theological and philosophical approaches are necessary to bring about profound changes in interreligious knowledge in Indonesia, including encouraging more moderate attitudes" (Salim, 2022). Based on these field research findings, it can be concluded that the integration of Islamic moderation within educational curricula plays a highly significant role in cultivating moderate perspectives and attitudes in religious education.

3. Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design, which views social reality as holistic, complex, dynamic, meaningful, and characterized by interactive relationships among phenomena (Sugiyono, 2009). The research applied the Participatory Action Research (PAR) method, which is defined as "a process of planning change, taking action, observing both the process and its consequences, reflecting on the process, then replanning, taking further action, and continuing this cycle iteratively" (Gaffney, 2008). To enhance the awareness of research participants, the researchers collected primary data through interviews, observations, field notes, process documentation, and qualitative reports. Interviews and qualitative reporting were conducted directly by the researchers. The validation of research findings within the cyclical PAR process aimed to establish a clear relationship between theory, practice, and social transformation.

Primary informants were selected and identified using purposive sampling (Karim, 2022), allowing the researchers to collect field data that were directly relevant to the research objectives. Informant criteria were as follows: (1) geographically distributed across several regions in Indonesia, including Jakarta, West Java, Central Java, and Sulawesi; (2) professionally engaged as school principals, teachers, or lecturers; and (3) knowledgeable about Islamic moderation and religious education.

Data analysis followed an interactive and continuous analytical model to produce a comprehensive depiction of the data. Post-collection qualitative analysis involved data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification, as proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994). Data validity was ensured through the principle of information triangulation, thereby increasing the credibility of the findings.

4. Research Findings

Based on the conceptual framework and field research regarding the integration of Islamic

moderation into religious education, the findings of this study can be described as follows:

1. The Concept of Islamic Moderation in Religious Education in Indonesia

The concept of Islamic moderation began to gain recognition and became a mainstream discourse within Indonesian Islamic thought in 2001. Its mainstreaming accelerated following the events of September 11, 2001, and the subsequent collapse of the World Trade Center in the United States. The discourse on Islamic moderation, originally introduced by Yusuf al-Qaradawi in 1969 (Al-Qaradawi, 2007), became a major topic of discussion and dissemination across the Muslim world after September 11, 2001 including in Indonesia primarily as a means to counter radical and intolerant interpretations of Islam (MUI, 2019).

The Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) redefined the concept of Islamic moderation during the National Islamic Congress held in Yogyakarta from February 8–11, 2015, as “an Islamic way of life that embraces the middle path (*tawassuth*), balance (*tawazun*), uprightness and firmness (*i’tidal*), tolerance (*tasamuh*), egalitarianism (*musawah*), prioritization of deliberation (*shura*), reform-mindedness (*islah*), prioritization of essentials (*aulawiyat*), dynamism and innovation (*tathawwur wa ibtikar*), and civility (*tahadhur*)” (MUI, 2019).

The concept of Islamic moderation is also widely understood by teachers of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in Indonesia not only by teachers in madrasah (Islamic schools) but also by those teaching in public schools. In interviews conducted by the researchers with several Islamic education teachers, participants explained that Islamic moderation is “a Muslim’s understanding and attitude toward Islamic teachings that is fair, balanced, and centered whether in worship,

transactions, ethics, or social relations” (Interview with Mr. Dhamir, teacher at SMP Islam Al-Irsyad and Muhammadiyah Pekalongan, June 20, 2024). Similarly, remote interviews conducted with several junior and senior high school teachers in Bogor and Jakarta revealed nearly identical understandings of Islamic moderation. In response to the question, “How do you teach the concept of Islamic *wasathiyah* in PAI at your school?” most respondents answered, “Wasathiyah is the middle path, tolerance, and balance between material and spiritual dimensions, avoiding both right-wing and left-wing extremes” (Interview with five religious education teachers in Jakarta, Bogor, and Bekasi, June 25, 2024).

In public schools, where religious education is allocated fewer instructional hours compared to science and other general subjects, students generally have limited mastery of religious teachings, resulting in a relatively low level of understanding of Islamic moderation. Previous research by Karno (2023) on the weak implementation of religious moderation at SMAN 11 Bengkulu Utara reported that students’ inability to practice religious moderation was caused by a national curriculum that insufficiently addresses religion in a holistic manner and fails to provide in-depth understanding of religious moderation. Likewise, weak comprehension and implementation of Islamic moderation in public schools (SMPN and SMAN) across Indonesia are linked to the limited number of religious education hours within the national curriculum and teachers’ lack of understanding of the concept of Islamic moderation.

The following section presents data from Islamic education teachers across Indonesia regarding their understanding of Islamic moderation, particularly in response to the question: “Do you understand the concept of Islamic moderation?”

Table 2. Level of Understanding of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) Teachers Regarding the Concept of Islamic Moderation

Teacher/School Type	Limited Understanding	Understanding	Deep Understanding
Public Junior High School (SMPN)	70%	20%	10%
Public Senior High School (SMAN)	60%	30%	10%

Source: Interviews with several public junior and senior high school teachers, June 23, 2025.

In contrast, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in both public and private Islamic madrasahs demonstrate a relatively higher level of understanding of Islamic moderation compared to their counterparts in public schools. This can be attributed, in part, to the more substantial proportion of religious studies in the curriculum regulated by the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kemenag). Subjects such as *aqidah* (Islamic creed), *akhlaq* (ethics), *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), Islamic history, Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsir*), *hadith* studies, and other religious sciences provide students and teachers alike with more comprehensive exposure to the principles of moderation.

During an interview with the principal of Madrasah Tsanawiyah Pesantren Al-Hassan in Bekasi, he was asked whether the religious subjects taught at his school contained values of Islamic moderation and whether they were integrated with the principles of *wasathiyah*. He stated: "I believe that Islamic moderation has been successfully integrated into religious education at our school, both at the curricular level and in the pedagogical approach. This integration is made possible by the balanced proportion of religious and general subjects within the curriculum. When the distribution of religious and general studies is balanced, it naturally allows for the implementation of teaching methods grounded in the principles and values of moderation." (Interview with Imam Thoriqor, Principal of M.Ts Al-Hassan Bekasi, June 23, 2024)

This insight corroborates the argument that curricular balance plays a crucial role in shaping both teacher practices and student attitudes toward moderation. Where religious education is

given adequate time and structured content, teachers are better equipped to contextualize moderation principles and foster a classroom culture of tolerance, justice, and harmony.

2. Integration of Islamic Moderation into Religious Education, Particularly Islamic Religious Education

The concept of *wasathiyah* or moderation in Islam is an inseparable component of the overall Islamic teachings. *Wasathiyah* is among the most fundamental characteristics of Islam, alongside other essential attributes such as tolerance (*at-tasamuh*), comprehensiveness (*as-syumuliyah*), balance (*at-tawazun*), and realism (*al-waqi'iyah*). Consequently, when discussing Islamic religious education, the principles of moderation inherently permeate the objectives and content of Islamic religious education.

Findings from this study indicate that the curriculum and Islamic religious education subjects taught in public schools, such as state senior high schools (SMAN), are fully integrated with the values of Islamic moderation. This integration is evident because the sources of Islamic religious education, namely the Qur'an and *Hadith* are replete with moderation values.

According to Syu'aib Moh. Arif, Principal of SMA Negeri 1 Popayato Barat, Gorontalo Province: "All the values and principles of Islam contained in the Islamic religious education subjects taught at SMA Negeri 1 Popayato reflect moderate Islamic teachings, upholding tolerance, justice, and balance." (Interview with Syu'aib, Principal of SMA Negeri 1 Popayato Barat, Gorontalo, June 23, 2024)

Similarly, interviews conducted at Madrasah Tsanawiyah in Bogor, West Java, revealed that all

Islamic religious subjects at this school have been integrated with moderate Islamic teachings. According to the head of the school foundation:

“The foundation has implemented Islamic religious subjects such as *aqidah*, *fiqh*, *tafsir*, and *fiqh al-‘ibadah* based on the *Ahlu-Sunnah wal-Jama’ah* approach, which is *wasathiyah* in nature, avoiding both extreme right and extreme left or liberal tendencies. Consequently, our students and *santri* (boarding school students) practice a moderate understanding of Islam in their daily lives.” (Interview with Lutfi Khairullah, Head of the Islamic Boarding School Foundation, Bogor, West Java, July 1, 2024)

From the above interviews, it can be concluded that, in general, the values of Islamic moderation have been well integrated into the Islamic religious education curriculum across Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia. Several supporting factors explain this integration:

- a. **Scriptural Foundation:** The Qur’an, Hadith, and Islamic Religious Education (PAI) subjects inherently contain moderation values.
- b. **Doctrinal Orientation:** The Islamic teachings taught in most schools and *madrasahs* in Indonesia follow the *Ahlu-Sunnah wal-Jama’ah* tradition, widely recognized for its moderate stance.
- c. **Socio-Cultural Context:** The social and cultural values of Indonesian Muslim communities emphasizing tolerance, justice, simplicity, and balance significantly shape students’ religious understanding and practices.

3. Impact of the Integration of Islamic Moderation in Religious Education on Students’ Religious Attitudes

The integration of Islamic moderation (*wasathiyah*) into Islamic Religious Education (PAI) has shown a significant impact on students’ religious attitudes in both public schools and *madrasahs*. This impact can be observed in three key areas:

First, students’ understanding and practice of Islamic teachings. The internalization of

moderation principles is reflected in students who demonstrate a strong and consistent faith (*aqidah*), regular participation in prayers, disciplined attendance at the school mosque, respectful behavior toward teachers and peers, and avoidance of rigid or extreme interpretations of religious issues. Based on interviews and observations conducted with several school principals and *madrasah* heads, Imam Thoriqor, Principal of M.Ts Al-Hassan Bekasi, stated:

“Indeed, after our school incorporated the values of *wasathiyah* Islam into the PAI curriculum, the majority of students have become more diligent in performing prayers, more disciplined in attending the school mosque, and have refrained from displaying extreme attitudes toward their peers—for instance, they no longer label others as misguided over *khilafiyah* (differences of opinion among scholars regarding issues of faith and worship), nor do they consider themselves superior to their classmates.” (Interview with Imam Thoriqor, Principal of M.Ts Al-Hassan, Bekasi, June 23, 2024)

Second, students’ social attitudes toward their school environment. The positive impact of Islamic moderation integration is also seen in students’ increased tolerance for differences of opinion, mutual respect, empathy, and social care. Observations at M.Ts and MA Al-Hassan Bekasi revealed that students demonstrated respectful behavior toward teachers and peers, refrained from bullying, engaged in constructive discussions without mutual blame or self-righteousness, played together harmoniously, and showed high compliance with school rules.

Third, institutional rejection of rigid and extreme interpretations of Islam. Interviews with teachers at Darul Khair Islamic Boarding School (Bogor), Al-Hassan Modern Boarding School (Bekasi), and Al-Khairaat *Madrasah Tsanawiyah* and Aliyah (Central Sulawesi) indicated that these institutions consistently reject both extremist and liberal religious ideologies, reinforcing the principle of moderation within their educational practices. The following data summarize

institutional attitudes toward extremist and liberal Islamic movements:

Table 03. Attitudes of Public and Islamic Schools toward Extremism and Liberalism

School	Attitude	Rationale
Darul Khair Islamic Boarding School, Bogor	Strong Rejection	Considered incompatible with Islam hanif (pure and upright) and the principle of moderation.
Al-Hassan Islamic Boarding School, Bekasi	Rejection	Deemed inconsistent with wasathiyah principles; both extreme and liberal tendencies are rejected.
Al-Khairaat Islamic Boarding School, Palu	Strong Rejection	Viewed as radical, not reflecting the middle and just path prescribed in Islam.

Source: Field Interviews, June 23, 2024

5. Discussion

The concept of Islamic moderation (wasathiyah) has become the dominant understanding of Islam among Indonesian Muslims. Wasathiyah is not merely a theological idea but has evolved into a practical and cultural attitude that shapes religious life, including religious education. The interview data presented earlier reveal that modern Islamic educational institutions such as madrasah tsanawiyah (junior Islamic schools), madrasah aliyah (senior Islamic schools), as well as state junior and senior high schools have integrated the principles of Islamic moderation into their Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum. Furthermore, teachers of Islamic studies have also implemented wasathiyah values in their teaching practices.

The fact that many Islamic education teachers in Indonesia have internalized the concept of wasathiyah is largely influenced by the tolerant character of Indonesian Islam, which has long upheld mutual respect, humility, and moderation—particularly within santri communities (Basri et al., 2023).

The integration of Islamic moderation values in religious education, as observed in both Islamic and public schools included in this study, indicates that the teachings of wasathiyah have been effectively embedded within Islamic studies curricula. This phenomenon can be attributed to several factors:

1. Teachers' Religious Understanding:

Most Islamic studies teachers in Indonesia have received their education at Islamic higher education institutions—such as State Islamic Universities (UIN) and private Islamic colleges (PTIS)—where moderate Islamic teachings are systematically emphasized (Ahmad Mujib, 2022).

2. Indonesian Islamic Culture:

Prior research has demonstrated that the majority of Indonesian Muslims, who are affiliated with mass organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, adhere to a moderate Islamic tradition that strongly influences the incorporation of wasathiyah values into Islamic education (Lorinda, 2022).

3. National Curriculum Policy:

The national Islamic Religious Education curriculum is designed based on the principles of Islamic moderation. Its content includes subjects that encourage balanced, just, and tolerant interpretations of Islam. The Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia has explicitly instructed educators to integrate moderation values into every aspect of learning, from lesson delivery and student interaction to the creation of inclusive and balanced classroom environments (Hilmin, 2024).

The positive impacts of integrating Islamic moderation into PAI can be seen in three dimensions:

1. **Enhanced Understanding and Practice of Islam:**

Students demonstrate a more comprehensive and balanced approach to faith and practice, showing stronger commitment to worship, adherence to Islamic ethics, and avoidance of sectarian exclusivism.

2. Improved Social Attitudes: Students exhibit respect for differences of opinion (*ikhtilāf al-madhāhib*), tolerance toward others, and active participation in fostering a harmonious school environment.

3. Institutional Rejection of Extremism: Schools consistently reject rigid and extremist interpretations of Islam, reinforcing a culture of moderation among students.

These findings underscore the need for sustained efforts to integrate Islamic moderation into religious education at all levels. Prior research has emphasized that Islamic moderation encourages students to coexist peacefully with people of other faiths and to embrace diversity as a national asset (Hidayati, 2023).

6. **Conclusion**

This study affirms that the integration of Islamic moderation (*wasathiyah*) into Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in Indonesia constitutes a

fundamental strategy for building an inclusive and sustainable educational ecosystem. The findings demonstrate that the internalization of *wasathiyah* values can be systematically achieved through curriculum enhancement, pedagogical innovation, and capacity building for educators as agents of value transformation. This approach significantly contributes to shaping learners' character to be tolerant, just, and capable of constructive engagement within a pluralistic society. Moreover, this research highlights the urgency of Islamic moderation as a response to global challenges, including extremism, intolerance, and social fragmentation. Islamic Religious Education is thus expected not only to serve as a medium for transmitting religious knowledge but also as a platform for cultivating critical awareness and social skills that foster social harmony and national cohesion. For future research, it is recommended to conduct more in-depth studies on the effectiveness of Islamic moderation integration models across different levels of education, employing evaluative and longitudinal approaches. Such research is crucial to identifying the long-term impact on students' attitudes and behaviors, thereby enabling the concept of Islamic moderation to take deeper root as a foundation for building a peaceful, inclusive, and progressive civilization.

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