Awaken the Spirit of Peace through Moderate Islamic Religious Education

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ABSTRACT

This article emphasizes the importance of integrating Islamic Religious Education (IRE)with the principles of religious moderation (*wasathiyyah*) within Indonesia's diverse educational landscape. Moderate Islamic education plays a crucial and strategic role in developing a generation that is tolerant, peaceful, and culturally aware. The study uses a library research approach, analyzing primary and secondary sources related to Islamic education, peace, and multicultural values. The findings show that traditional models of religious education often focus only on doctrinal and ritual aspects, neglecting to cultivate values of empathy, coexistence, and mutual respect. Therefore, incorporating moderation into IRE is essential to counter the rise of radical ideologies among students and to foster balanced faith and social harmony. Achieving this requires educators to thoroughly understand and demonstrate moderation in their teaching, and for curricula to consistently include inclusive and compassionate religious principles. Strong policy commitment from the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, universities, and other stakeholders is vital for creating programs that prioritize moderate Islamic education throughout the country. Ultimately, these efforts will promote lasting peace and harmony among Indonesia's diverse religious communities.

Keywords—Islamic Religious Education, Religious Moderation, Peace, Multiculturalism, Indonesia

INTRODUCTION

In Surah Al-Hujurat (49:13), Allah Ta'ala clearly states that humans were created with inherent differences. However, these differences hold deep beauty and purpose. Just as a painting made of various colors creates a masterpiece of great value, diversity among humans is a divine blessing. Life would lose its richness if people were all the same, like factory products shaped in uniform patterns (Mario, 2025).God created humankind into nations and tribes so that they can know each other, fostering relationships through communication and social interaction. These interactions, whether two-way or multidirectional, inevitably involve both understanding and misunderstanding (Ummy Syaidah, 2022). Despite cultural and religious diversity, most nations acknowledge a higher power beyond themselves; however, the ways they worship and express reverence vary. When such differences are not managed wisely, feelings of superiority can develop, leading to social tension and even serious conflicts. As a result, distinctions like "eastern customs" and "westernized customs" have become signs of division.

Rohman (2021) notes that Indonesia, long admired for its friendliness, tolerance, and exemplary Eastern values, now appears to be losing these virtues. Incidents of violence and chaos in the name of religion are becoming more frequent in this multi-religious country. Ironically, perpetrators often call upon God's name while committing immoral acts, which fundamentally contradicts the core of any faith. Regardless of the motive, violence, especially random killings, cannot be justified. Theological disagreements should be addressed through dialogue and mutual respect, not hostility.The growing trend of SARA-based (ethnic, religious, racial, and inter-group) violence in Indonesia shows a decline in the country's appreciation for diversity. In fact, difference is a *sunnatullah*, a divine law, that has always existed throughout human history. However, the values of pluralism and multiculturalism are not always well understood or fully embraced by society. Baidhawy (2005) highlights three key indicators of this lack of multicultural awareness: limited

understanding of other religions and ethnicities, low interest in learning about different cultures, and inadequate respect or tolerance for diverse beliefs.

Ultimately, the increase in violence and conflict across the archipelago comes from social prejudice. As Truna and Zakaria (2021) explain, prejudice stems from a lack of awareness and acceptance of different social groups. When understanding of multiculturalism is weak, communities tend to fall into primordialism and one-sided truth claims—believing their group alone is correct while viewing others as wrong or even threatening. Such stereotypes and exclusivist attitudes inevitably lead to SARA-related conflicts, jeopardizing Indonesia's unity and harmony.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The high rate of SARA-related violence and conflict in several parts of Indonesia may reflect flaws in religious, particularly Islamic, education in fostering tolerance and multicultural awareness among students. Several concerns have been raised about the implementation of religious education. Historically, during the New Order regime, Islamic education often served as a tool of indoctrination to uphold political stability and the rulers' status quo (Baidhawy, 2005). Even today, religious education in many institutions remains mostly exclusive, emphasizing claims of truth and salvation while reducing respect for other faiths (Dute, 2021).

Furthermore, current practices in religious education tend to emphasize ritual performance over the internalization of religious and ethical values (Sman & Lebong, 2024). Lessons are often focused on laws, rules, and prohibitions, neglecting the deeper spiritual aspects of faith, hope, and compassion. This approach encourages having a relationship with a religion rather than *being* religious. Such a model benefits individuals only on a superficial level and does not promote communal harmony. Muhyidin (2024) similarly notes that religious learning often emphasizes obedience to doctrine without considering social realities. Ideally, religious education should help students embody religious principles in daily life, not just memorize religious content.
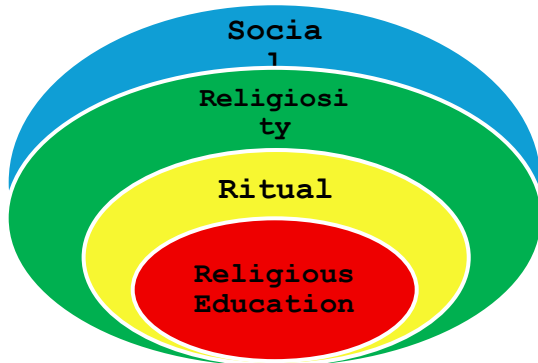

Fig. 1 Religious Education Practices

Dute (2021) states that the current educational approach mainly focuses on cognitive achievement and stays limited within ethnic boundaries. In *Strategy for Strengthening Islamic Religious Education in Schools*, Arifin and Nurhakim (2025) point out several weaknesses in how Islamic education is implemented. First, it emphasizes memorization over internalization. Students may perform well on exams, but their knowledge often does not lead to moral behavior. Religious education should aim to foster moral values, positive attitudes, and lived experiences that improve students' quality of life. Second, Islamic education often emphasizes doctrinal transmission. Teachers serve as the main authority figures, while students passively receive information. This "banking system" of education, as described by Paulo Freire, limits students' critical thinking and reflection on their faith. Third, many programs focus too much on religion, its rituals and dogma, and neglect the broader educational goal of fostering understanding, empathy, and ethical behavior. Fourth, the learning process still relies heavily on memorization assessments, with success mainly measured through final exams that test rote memorization rather than comprehension or application.

Fifth, religious education in Indonesia often lacks a connection to universal human values such as social, emotional, spiritual, and communal aspects. Sixth, the internalization of religious teachings is hindered by

weak support systems and unfavorable environments, whether in schools, peer groups, or the broader community. Zubairi (2023) emphasizes that religious education should not stop at simply imparting knowledge; it must also touch the soul, inspiring students toward personal transformation. Successful religious education, therefore, should balance three aspects: intellectual (cognitive), behavioral (affective), and practical (psychomotor). Unfortunately, Indonesia's current system tends to focus only on cognitive and psychomotor skills, neglecting moral and spiritual development. As a result, it produces intelligent individuals who may lack ethical grounding or social responsibility.
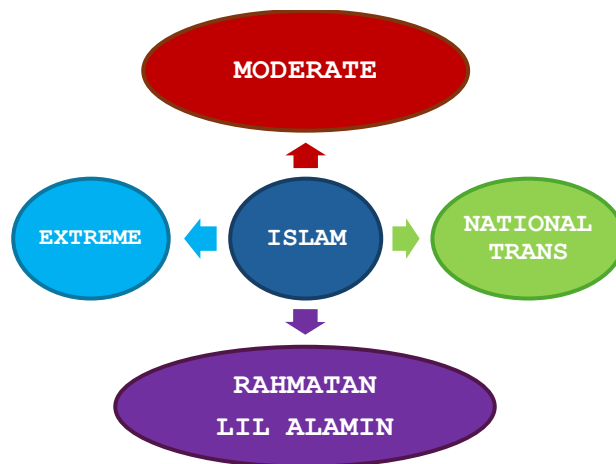

Fig. 2The Position of Moderate Islam (Wasathiyah) as Rahmatan Lil 'Alamin

To address these challenges, it is essential to promote and implement religious education based on moderation (*wasathiyyah*). In Indonesia's diverse context, Azra and Thaha (2020) argue that the future of Islam in Indonesia depends on a *balanced Islam*—a moderate form that embodies *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (a mercy to all creation). Moderate Islam benefits not only Muslims but also extends compassion and peace to people of all faiths and all beings. They further assert that Islam will not thrive under extreme, rigid, or literalist interpretations. Indeed, Indonesia's long tradition of moderate Islam is a strength that must be safeguarded.

However, the current rise of transnational Islamic movements that promote rigid and literalist ideologies poses serious challenges. These groups have increasingly infiltrated various sectors of Indonesian society, including previously moderate communities. Therefore, as Zuhri (2022) emphasizes, strengthening Islamic moderation in Indonesia requires ongoing revitalization and recontextualization, ensuring that *Islam wasathiyyah* remains the main character of Indonesian Islam.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a library research method, which mainly depends on written sources to gather data and insights. As defined by Rohayu Fadilla (2021), library research involves direct engagement with texts, documents, and numerical data rather than field observations or eyewitness accounts.The researcher employed this method to explore and analyze a range of relevant references, both primary and secondary, in order to gain a deeper understanding of how the spirit of peace can be promoted through moderate Islamic religious education. The study looks at books, scholarly articles, and academic journals that discuss concepts related to *wasathiyyah* (moderation), tolerance, and multicultural understanding within the context of Islamic education.Through qualitative analysis of these texts, the researcher aimed to synthesize ideas from multiple authors and develop a conceptual framework that explains how balanced Islamic education can promote peace and mutual respect in Indonesia's diverse society.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The weaknesses of current religious education systems in fostering respect for diversity reveal the urgent need for a pluralistic and moderate approach to teaching Islam. In a multi-religious country like Indonesia, religious education that emphasizes moderation is essential for maintaining social harmony (Rozak et al., 2023). Indonesia's various beliefs and traditions can easily become sources of conflict if not handled with mutual

respect and understanding. In this context, moderate Islamic education (*Pendidikan Agama Islam wasathiyyah*) plays a vital role in developing a generation that values peace and coexistence. Arifudin (2022) argues that the limitations of current Islamic education models, particularly their failure to produce tolerant and multicultural-minded students, demand structural reform and innovation. This reform involves integrating values of tolerance and peace into the core curriculum of Islamic education, rooted in the concept of *wasathiyyah*. Islamic education guided by moderation not only encourages mutual respect but also promotes persuasive and compassionate communication strategies that help internalize the values of coexistence amid religious diversity (Yunaidi, 2011). When grounded in equality, justice, and empathy, such education can nurture students' sense of moral responsibility toward followers of different faiths.

The urgency of implementing *wasathiyyah*-based Islamic education is growing, especially as radical ideas have started to infiltrate schools and youth organizations. Jami'ah (2021) revealed that extremist groups often target high school students, taking advantage of their limited religious understanding and emotional instability to influence their beliefs. These groups sometimes aim to control student organizations like *Rohis* (Islamic student associations), promoting strict and exclusionary interpretations of Islam. This situation demands serious attention from schools, governments, and parents alike. Susanto (2022) emphasizes the importance of early prevention of violent behavior, both physical and verbal, by strengthening students' faith through balanced and reflective religious instruction. Without these efforts, the seeds of radicalism and intolerance can easily take root in educational settings. Faozan (2022) warns that when educational institutions are affected by violence or intolerance, the goal of creating a generation that values diversity becomes impossible. Instead, schools may produce individuals who lack respect for differences, endangering Indonesia's social harmony and national unity.

The Qur'an itself provides clear guidance on the importance of tolerance and peaceful coexistence. Surah Al-Kāfirūn (109:1–6) explicitly rejects compulsion in belief:

Say (O Muhammad), "O you disbelievers!

I do not worship what you worship,

nor do you worship what I worship.

I shall never worship what you worship,

nor will you ever worship what I worship.

For you is your religion, and for me is my religion."

Similarly, Surah Al-Ḥujurāt (49:13) reminds humanity of divine intent behind diversity:

"O mankind! We have created you from a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another. Surely, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous."

These verses affirm that respecting differences and avoiding coercion are fundamental Islamic values. The Qur'an's message encourages peace, understanding, and cooperation among all people, principles essential to building *baldatun ṭayyibatun wa rabbun ghafūr* (a good and God-favored nation) (Darmadi, 2022).Therefore, peace and tolerance are not just social ideals but religious duties. They must be achieved through intentional educational efforts that teach students to see every human being as a creation of God, deserving of dignity and equal opportunity. Violence, hatred, and prejudice only occur when understanding and compassion are lacking. When individuals genuinely recognize the importance of harmony and consistently practice it in daily life, society will thrive in mutual happiness and beauty.

CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that the implementation of Islamic Religious Education (known as PAI) must prioritize *mutual respect* as a fundamental value in Indonesia's religious and national

life. An Islamic education model grounded in respect and moderation serves as an effective medium for cultivating tolerance and appreciation for religious diversity among students. Such education not only strengthens interfaith harmony but also counters the influence of extremist ideologies that continue to spread among youth.

The success of Islamic Religious Education in promoting respect and moderation largely depends on the role of teacherswho truly understand and embody the concept of *wasathiyyah* (religious moderation). Likewise, the curriculum contentshould explicitly incorporate balanced perspectives, emphasizing compassion, justice, and cooperation in religious life.

Achieving this requires strong political and institutional commitment. The government, especially the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Religious Affairs, along with universities and other educational stakeholders, must work together to develop and implement policies that foster moderate Islamic education at all levels.

When the principles of *wasathiyyah* are consistently applied across institutions and levels of education**,** a culture of togetherness, peace, and harmony among Indonesia's diverse religious communities can truly thrive. In this way, Islamic Religious Education becomes not only a subject of study but also a transformative force that nurtures citizens who live in mutual respect, unity, and peace within the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia.

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