

Strengthening Religious Moderation Among Generation Z through Islamic Religious Education in the Digital Era

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze how Islamic Religious Education can strengthen religious moderation (moderasi beragama) among Generation Z learners who live in an intensive digital environment filled with hate speech, hoax content, and exposure to extremist narratives. The study is grounded in the reality that Indonesian students increasingly encounter provocative religious content on social media, which has the potential to erode tolerance, foster exclusivist attitudes, and, in extreme cases, contribute to radicalization. In this context, Islamic Religious Education should not merely transmit normative religious knowledge, but must also cultivate wasatiyyah (moderation), tasamuh (tolerance), tawazun (balance), and ta'adl (justice) as lived dispositions. This research employs a qualitative approach using library research. Data were obtained from national and international journal articles, conference proceedings, and institutional reports relevant to religious moderation, Generation Z, digital literacy, and Islamic Religious Education. The data were analyzed using content analysis by identifying, classifying, comparing, and synthesizing ideas from various sources of literature. The findings indicate that religious moderation can be strengthened through curriculum integration, teacher exemplarity, digital literacy training, interfaith dialogue, and habituation of moderate religious practice. This approach has the potential to help learners critically navigate online religious content, resist exclusionary narratives, and internalize tolerance as part of their religious identity. Thus, Islamic Religious Education based on religious moderation can be positioned as a preventive, reflective, and contextual strategy for safeguarding social harmony among the digital generation.

Keywords: *Religious moderation; Generation Z; digital era; Islamic Religious Education; tolerance*

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Introduction

Generation Z has grown up in an educational environment that is inseparable from digital connectivity, where social media functions not only as a source of entertainment but also as a primary channel through which religious and ideological narratives circulate. Empirical evidence shows that exposure to hate speech and hoax content on social media significantly increases prejudice and religious intolerance among Indonesian teenagers, particularly those with low levels of media literacy (Riyawi & Febriansyah, 2023). This condition indicates that the digital space has become a contested arena in which tolerance and exclusivism compete for the attention of young learners, making the role of religious education more urgent than ever.

The risk of digital exposure to intolerant narratives is not merely hypothetical. A mapping study of youth radicalism and socio-religious intolerance on social media found that although Indonesian youth are generally tolerant toward various social groups, discriminatory attitudes and susceptibility to exclusionary narratives persist and are amplified through online platforms (Burhanuddin et al., 2020). More recent phenomenological research on Indonesian university students further reveals that extremist attitudes often develop gradually through everyday communicative practices jokes, selective association, algorithmic echo chambers, and emotionally charged content long before they appear as organized radical movements (Nugroho et al., 2026). These findings suggest that the formation of intolerance in the digital era is subtle, cumulative, and deeply embedded in ordinary online interaction, which makes it difficult to address through normative religious instruction alone.

Religious moderation (*moderasi beragama*) has therefore emerged as a strategic response within Islamic education. Religious moderation in Indonesia is best understood as a balanced attitude in practicing religion that avoids both excessive liberalism and rigid extremism, while upholding national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and respect for local tradition (Subchi et al., 2022). Framed this way, religious moderation is not a dilution of religious commitment but a disciplined, balanced expression of faith that is fully compatible with core Islamic teachings. Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia have increasingly positioned themselves as agents of this mainstreaming effort, embedding moderation values into curricula, student activities, and institutional culture to counter the spread of transnational radical ideologies (Nasir & Rijal, 2021).

At the level of formal schooling, Islamic Religious Education carries a strategic curricular mandate to cultivate this balance. Systematic reviews of curriculum practice show that religious moderation rooted in the Qur'anic and prophetic concept of *wasatiyyah* is increasingly embedded into secondary-level Islamic Religious Education through learning goals, learning experiences, teaching methods, and evaluation systems, although the depth and consistency of this integration still varies considerably across schools (Muis, 2025). Classroom-level studies confirm this curricular potential: implementing an Islamic Religious Education curriculum grounded in religious moderation has been shown to shape balanced, tolerant student character and to serve as a counterweight to the currents of radicalism that continue to threaten social cohesion (Riyawi & Febriansyah, 2023).

However, the successful implementation of a moderation-based curriculum ultimately depends on teachers. Comparative research on Islamic Religious Education teachers in Banten shows that they foster religious moderation through interactive teaching methods, interfaith dialogue, and role-modeling behavior, yet their efforts

are frequently constrained by limited institutional support, resistance from conservative groups, and a lack of structured professional training (Yudin et al., 2025). This challenge becomes even more pressing in the digital era, where a phenomenological study of madrasah teachers in East Java found that pedagogical competence for fostering religious moderation now requires not only curriculum integration and inclusive classroom

management, but also technological pedagogical mastery to facilitate critical discussions of sensitive religious issues circulating online (Qoyyumillah & Aziz, 2026).

Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), long regarded as guardians of religious authenticity, are also adapting their curricula to this challenge. A case study of a wasathiyah-based curriculum for Generation Z santri in an Islamic boarding school in Jember found that integrating moderation values into fiqh, creed, and moral instruction combined with the pesantren's culture of deliberation (musyawarah) significantly strengthened students' critical thinking and inclusive attitudes (Fathurrozi et al., 2025). Complementary strategies at the level of religious education institutions include integrating moderation values into curriculum content, classroom evaluation, and daily practice through habituation and exemplification (Ratnah et al., 2024).

Based on this discussion, research on strengthening religious moderation among Generation Z through Islamic Religious Education in the digital era is highly relevant. This study is directed toward examining how Islamic Religious Education can be designed, implemented, and evaluated as a preventive strategy against digitally mediated intolerance, and how such an approach can help learners internalize moderation not merely as an abstract value but as a lived, reflective, and socially responsible religious disposition. The novelty of this study lies in positioning religious moderation not simply as a government policy slogan, but as a pedagogical framework that must be deliberately woven into the everyday practice of Islamic Religious Education to prepare learners for the ideological complexities of digital life.

Literature Review

2.1. Generation Z and the Digital Landscape of Religious Discourse

Generation Z is generally understood as digital natives whose worldview, including their religious understanding, is substantially shaped by online interaction. Research on hate speech exposure demonstrates that teenagers with low media literacy who are frequently exposed to hoax news and divisive content on social media are significantly more likely to develop prejudiced and intolerant attitudes toward other religious groups (Riyawi & Febriansyah, 2023). This finding positions media literacy as a prerequisite, not a supplement, to religious education in the digital age. Broader mapping research confirms that while young Indonesians remain largely tolerant across most social categories, patterns of discrimination and susceptibility to radical narratives persist online, correlating strongly with real-world attitudes (Burhanuddin et al., 2020). Recent phenomenological evidence deepens this picture by showing that extremism is rarely experienced by students as an overt ideological rupture; rather, it is normalized gradually through humor, algorithmic reinforcement, and emotionally packaged content that frames issues in binary "us versus them" terms (Nugroho et al., 2026). Taken together, this literature indicates that Islamic Religious Education for Generation Z cannot rely solely on transmitting doctrinal content, but must equip learners with the critical and reflective capacities needed to navigate a digital environment saturated with competing religious narratives.

2.2. Religious Moderation as a Curricular and Institutional Priority

Religious moderation occupies a central position in contemporary Islamic education discourse in Indonesia. It is conceptually defined as a balanced way of practicing religion that rejects both excessive liberalism and extremism while embracing tolerance, non-violence, and respect for local culture and national unity (Subchi et al., 2022). Islamic higher education institutions have been identified as key actors in mainstreaming this value, embedding it into

governance, curricula, and campus culture to counter the appeal of transnational radical movements among students (Nasir & Rijal, 2021). At the secondary level, a systematic review of curriculum practice across multiple countries found that religious moderation is increasingly represented in Islamic Religious Education through explicit learning objectives, though its translation into classroom experiences and assessment remains uneven and requires stronger pedagogical scaffolding (Muis, 2025). Complementary case-study evidence shows that when religious moderation values—justice, balance, tolerance, and cultural friendliness—are deliberately integrated into curriculum content, evaluation techniques, and daily school practice, they generate measurable improvements in student tolerance and social harmony (Ratnah et al., 2024). This body of literature suggests that religious moderation functions most effectively not as an isolated topic but as a cross-cutting curricular principle embedded throughout Islamic Religious Education.

2.3. Teacher Agency and Pedagogical Competence in Fostering Moderation

Teachers remain the central agents through whom religious moderation is translated into lived classroom practice. Comparative fieldwork among Islamic Religious Education teachers in Banten found that moderation is fostered primarily through interactive teaching methods, interfaith dialogue, and everyday role-modeling, but that these efforts are frequently undermined by inadequate institutional backing and insufficient teacher training (Yudin et al., 2025). This challenge intensifies in the digital era. A phenomenological study of madrasah teachers in East Java identified three integrated dimensions of pedagogical competence necessary for fostering moderation online: embedding moderation values into curriculum materials, mastering digital tools to facilitate critical discussion of sensitive religious content, and managing inclusive learning environments that welcome dialogue and character assessment across difference (Qoyyumillah & Aziz, 2026). These findings collectively imply that teacher professional development programs must move beyond general digital literacy training toward specialized competence in curating moderation-based digital content and mediating sensitive online-offline religious discourse.

2.4. Pesantren and Institutional Innovation in Moderation-Based Curricula

Islamic boarding schools have also become important sites of curricular innovation in response to digital-era challenges. A case study of a wasathiyah-based curriculum implemented at an Islamic boarding school in Jember found that integrating moderation values into fiqh, creed (aqidah), and moral education (akhlak), combined with the pesantren's culture of collective deliberation, effectively strengthened santri's critical thinking, religious moderation understanding, and inclusive attitudes (Fathurrozi et al., 2025). This finding is theoretically significant because it demonstrates that religious moderation need not be treated as an externally imposed, secular value; rather, it can be developed organically from within established Islamic educational traditions, using existing pedagogical structures such as fiqh instruction and pesantren deliberative culture as vehicles for moderation.

Research Methodology

This study uses a qualitative approach with library research. Library research was selected because this study focuses on a conceptual analysis of literature discussing Generation Z, digital religious discourse, religious moderation, and Islamic Religious Education. The research data consist of secondary data obtained from national and international peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, and institutional studies

relevant to the topic. Data collection was carried out through literature searching and selection based on thematic relevance, source credibility, publication recency, and suitability to the research focus. The selected literature was classified into four main themes: the digital characteristics of Generation Z, the concept and policy framework of religious moderation, the pedagogical role of Islamic Religious Education teachers, and institutional innovation in moderation-based curricula, including pesantren practice. The data were analyzed using content analysis by reading, identifying, grouping, comparing, and synthesizing ideas from various sources of literature. Data validity was maintained through literature triangulation, comparing multiple scholarly sources to ensure that the resulting synthesis had a strong academic foundation. In this study, religious moderation is understood as a balanced, tolerant, and non-extremist expression of Islamic faith that respects diversity and rejects violence, while Islamic Religious Education is understood as a curricular space responsible for cultivating this balance among digitally immersed learners. The findings are directed toward formulating a conceptual framework for strengthening religious moderation among Generation Z through Islamic Religious Education in the digital era.

Results

The Based on a literature review of Generation Z, religious moderation, teacher pedagogy, and pesantren curriculum innovation, four main findings were identified. These findings are not the result of field observation, but rather a conceptual synthesis of academic literature.

3.1 Generation Z Requires Digitally Literate Religious Education

The literature review shows that Generation Z's exposure to hate speech, hoax content, and emotionally charged religious narratives on social media significantly increases the risk of prejudice and intolerance, particularly among learners with weak media literacy (Riyawi & Febriansyah, 2023). Broader mapping studies confirm that although young Indonesians remain generally tolerant, discriminatory patterns and vulnerability to online radical narratives persist and correlate with real-world attitudes (Burhanuddin et al., 2020). This finding is important for Islamic Religious Education because it indicates that moderation cannot be taught as an abstract value disconnected from learners' actual digital experience. Instead, the subject must equip students with the capacity to critically evaluate online religious content, recognize manipulative framing, and resist algorithmically reinforced echo chambers, positioning Islamic Religious Education as a form of applied digital-religious literacy education.

3.2 Religious Moderation Functions as a Cross-Cutting Curricular Principle

The literature review indicates that religious moderation cannot be treated as a single, isolated topic within Islamic Religious Education. Conceptually, religious moderation is a balanced way of practicing Islam that avoids both excessive liberalism and rigid extremism while embracing tolerance and national commitment (Subchi et al., 2022), and its mainstreaming has become a strategic priority across Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia (Nasir & Rijal, 2021). At the secondary school level, systematic curriculum analysis shows that moderation values are increasingly embedded into learning goals and materials, although consistent translation into teaching methods and evaluation remains a work in progress (Muis, 2025). Case-study evidence further shows that deliberate integration of moderation values into curriculum, evaluation, and daily practice produces measurable gains in tolerance and social harmony (Ratnah et al., 2024). Taken together, these findings suggest that religious moderation functions most powerfully when embedded across fiqh, creed, ethics, and history instruction simultaneously, rather than confined to a single unit or lesson.

3.3 Teacher Competence Is the Decisive Variable in Digital-Era Moderation Education

The literature review shows that the success of moderation-based Islamic Religious Education depends heavily on teacher competence and agency. Fieldwork among Banten teachers reveals that moderation is cultivated through interactive teaching, interfaith dialogue, and exemplary conduct, but is often constrained by weak institutional support and inadequate training (Yudin et al., 2025). In the digital era, this competence must expand to include technological pedagogical mastery, enabling teachers to facilitate critical discussion of sensitive religious content circulating online while managing inclusive, dialogic classroom environments (Qoyyumillah & Aziz, 2026). This indicates that teacher professional development programs for Islamic Religious Education must be redesigned to explicitly cultivate digital-moderation pedagogy, rather than treating digital literacy and religious moderation as separate training tracks.

3.4 Pesantren Demonstrate that Moderation Can Be Cultivated from Within Islamic Tradition

The synthesis shows that pesantren-based curriculum innovation offers a compelling model for moderation education. The wasathiyah curriculum implemented in an Islamic boarding school in Jember demonstrates that integrating moderation values into fiqh, creed, and moral instruction supported by the pesantren's culture of musyawarah can strengthen santri's critical thinking, understanding of religious moderation, and inclusive attitudes toward difference (Fathurrozi et al., 2025). This finding carries significant theoretical weight: it shows that religious moderation need not be perceived by learners or educators as an externally imposed secular concept in tension with Islamic tradition. Instead, it can be cultivated authentically through existing Islamic pedagogical structures, reinforcing the legitimacy and sustainability of moderation education within both formal madrasah settings and traditional pesantren environments.

Islamic Religious Education is often still understood primarily as a means of transmitting religious knowledge and memorizing scriptural evidence. This model, while necessary, is insufficient for preparing Generation Z to navigate the ideological complexities of the digital era. Its weakness lies in the gap between doctrinal knowledge and learners' actual online experience: students may know the concept of tolerance yet lack the critical tools to resist provocative digital content that frames religious difference in exclusionary terms. Strengthening religious moderation through Islamic Religious Education offers a correction to this weakness by shifting the subject from merely "knowing about tolerance" toward "practicing critical, reflective, and dialogic engagement with religious difference," both online and offline.

Conclusion

Religious moderation is a relevant and urgent framework for Islamic Religious Education in preparing Generation Z to navigate an intensively digital religious landscape. Generation Z grows up amid social media environments where hate speech, hoax content, and emotionally charged narratives can gradually normalize intolerance and exclusivism. Therefore, Islamic Religious Education should not only convey normative religious content, but should also be developed as a space for cultivating critical digital literacy, tolerance, balance, and non-violent religious identity. Strengthening religious moderation can be achieved through curricular integration across fiqh, creed, and ethics instruction; enhanced

teacher pedagogical competence, including digital-moderation pedagogy; institutional innovation within both madrasah and pesantren settings; and habituation of interfaith dialogue and inclusive practice. Through this approach, learners are guided not only to understand Islamic teachings on tolerance cognitively, but also to apply moderation as a lived disposition when navigating provocative digital content and diverse social encounters.

However, because this study uses library research, its findings remain conceptual and do not yet empirically test the effectiveness of specific moderation-based interventions in real classrooms. Further research is needed through field studies, classroom action research, or controlled interventions to test the implementation of digital-moderation pedagogy directly in Islamic Religious Education settings. In addition, further research should examine how moderation education can be adapted across different regional and institutional contexts in Indonesia, given the varying levels of digital access and religious plurality across communities. In general, this study affirms that Islamic Religious Education grounded in religious moderation has strong potential to become a preventive, reflective, and contextual strategy for safeguarding social harmony among Generation Z in the digital era.

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