Integrating Values of Religious Moderation into Islamic Religious Education for Generation Z

M. Bayu Sandhya, Mhd. Habibu Rahman, Hadi Saputra Panggabean

Abstract

Generation Z has grown up amid a rapid flow of digital information, greater openness to cross-cultural and interfaith interaction, and frequent exposure to online content that often carries intolerant or radical narratives. These conditions require Islamic Religious Education (PAI) to move beyond merely emphasizing the cognitive aspects of religious knowledge and to instill the values of religious moderation (wasathiyah) as a foundation for tolerant, inclusive, and just religious attitudes. This study aims to examine the urgency, strategies, and challenges of integrating religious moderation values including tawasuth (moderation), tawazun (balance), i'tidal (uprightness and firmness), tasamuh (tolerance), musawah (equality), syura (deliberation), and love for one's homeland into the PAI learning process for Generation Z students. The study employs a qualitative approach using the library research method, analyzing literature, educational policies, and prior studies related to religious moderation and the characteristics of Generation Z. The findings indicate that integration can be achieved through the renewal of teaching materials, contextual and project-based learning approaches, the use of digital media familiar to Generation Z's learning style, and teachers' exemplary conduct in daily religious practice. The main challenges include gaps in teachers' digital literacy, the scarcity of contextual teaching materials, and the influence of social media algorithms that tend to reinforce polarization. This study recommends strengthening the competence of PAI teachers and developing a religious moderation learning model that is adaptive to the digital-native character of Generation Z.

***Keywords**: religious moderation, Islamic religious education, Generation Z, wasathiyah, Islamic education*

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Introduction

Indonesia is known for its high level of religious, ethnic, and cultural diversity; consequently, religious moderation has become a fundamental necessity for maintaining social harmony amidst this diversity. Multicultural-based Islamic education emphasizes the acceptance of diversity regarding culture, ethnicity, religion, and worldviews through inclusive learning materials and interactive, reflective teaching methods. This approach also instills values of tolerance, justice, and peace within Islamic Religious Education (PAI) (Oktarini & Panggabean, 2025). The concept of moderation or the "middle path" in Islam holds significant implications for multicultural education, as it fosters a balanced approach that avoids extremes in religious thought (Rahman, 2021). The paradigm of religious moderation is also viewed as a means to revitalize the function of Islamic education, enabling it to address the challenges of a multicultural context more effectively (Nasri & Tabibuddin, 2023). Furthermore, the internalization of moderation values through Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curricula is believed to cultivate a more tolerant and inclusive worldview in students from an early age (Farihatun & Auliya, 2022). These perspectives underscore that religious moderation is not merely a normative concept but a strategic necessity that must be systematically integrated into formal education specifically within PAI subjects in both general schools and madrasahs.

Generation Z, having grown up amidst the rapid flow of digital information, faces unique challenges in understanding and internalizing the values of religious moderation. The open nature of the digital landscape presents both opportunities and challenges for reinforcing religious moderation, as young people are vulnerable to exposure without adequate filtering to religious content that is extremist or biased (Ramadhan, Basid, & Faizin, 2023). This phenomenon is exacerbated by the threat of radicalization targeting students across various social media platforms, making the role of religious education increasingly crucial in preventing its spread (Subairi, 2024). Meanwhile, the Society 5.0 era demands adaptive educational strategies to ensure young people remain capable of critically and wisely filtering the religious information they encounter (Fricticarani et al., 2023). Given that Generation Z are digital natives, conventional approaches to Islamic Religious Education (PAI) are deemed insufficient unless they are adapted to align with the generation's information consumption patterns.

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in schools plays a strategic role in instilling values of religious moderation; however, its practical implementation faces various challenges. PAI teachers are expected to play an active role in shaping students' attitudes toward moderation by fostering harmonious social interactions among learners from diverse religious backgrounds (La Hadisi, Tetambe, & Assingkily, 2024). Efforts to internalize these values have also been directed through the Freedom to Learn (Freedom to Learn) curriculum for PAI subjects, although implementation remains uneven across educational institutions (Hilmin, Noviani, & Yanuarti, 2023). Strengthening the role of PAI in promoting religious moderation depends on the quality of teaching materials and methods, as well as teachers' pedagogical competence in presenting these values within a relevant context (Huda, Kusumastuti, Firdaus, & Endahas, 2024). These conditions indicate that integrating religious moderation values into PAI instruction for Generation Z requires further in-depth study, particularly regarding effective strategies, methods, and evaluation approaches.

The rise of social media presents unique challenges for instilling values of religious moderation in students. Rambe and Rahman (2025) found that, although student responses to religious moderation instruction tend to be positive, some students still exhibit exclusive attitudes linked to the influence of social media. Consequently, strengthening digital literacy has become a crucial aspect of developing Islamic Religious Education (PAI) that can instill values of tolerance, openness, and the rejection of violence in a generation living in a digital environment. Another issue underscoring the urgency of this research concerns the evaluation and assessment of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) instruction based on religious moderation, which lacks comprehensive standardization. Evaluating religious moderation-based instruction

within contemporary Islamic education still faces challenges in objectively measuring students' affective and psychomotor aspects (Halim, 2023). Value-based assessment in PAI instruction requires specific strategies to effectively foster and measure tolerant and inclusive character in students (Herlina, 2023). Furthermore, assessment strategies for moderation values in Islamic education vary across schools, preventing the results from serving as a standardized benchmark (Mulyani, 2023). Based on this background, the research problems can be formulated as follows: (1) what forms of integration of religious moderation values are applied in PAI instruction for Generation Z; (2) what factors support or hinder this integration process; and (3) how effective are religious moderation-based PAI instructional strategies in shaping the moderate character of Generation Z.

Based on the stated problem, this study aims to describe and deeply analyze the process of integrating values of religious moderation into Islamic Religious Education (PAI) for Generation Z. Islamic education plays a crucial role in fostering the spirit of (mercy to all creation) among Muslim Generation Z through instructional approaches relevant to the characteristics of the times (Nurhayati Ali, 2026). The study also seeks to identify effective strategies for religious moderation education to cultivate a tolerant younger generation amidst the challenges of the digital age (Sari, Syukriyah, & Husna, 2024). Furthermore, it aims to examine the opportunities and challenges associated with strengthening religious moderation within the PAI curriculum in the digital era, serving as a basis for educational policy recommendations (Afida, Wahidah, & Permatasari, 2025). Overall, the findings are expected to offer both theoretical and practical contributions to the development of PAI instructional strategies capable of fostering moderate, tolerant, and inclusive attitudes among Generation Z as the nation's future leaders.

Literature Review

2.1. The Concept and Urgency of Religious Moderation in Islam

Religious moderation represents a religious perspective, attitude, and behavior that occupies a middle ground avoiding extremes on the right (excessiveness) and on the left (disregarding the essence of religion). Rahman (2021) explains that the concept of moderation in Islam embodies a principle of balance between religious texts (nash) and social context, allowing religious teachings to be applied adaptively without losing their essence. Nasri and Tabibuddin (2023) add the perspective of al-Ghazali, noting that religious moderation revitalizes the role of Islamic education within a multicultural society by emphasizing the balance between reason and revelation, as well as a tolerant attitude toward differences.

Four commonly cited indicators of religious moderation national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and accommodation of local culture serve as a framework widely adopted by researchers in Islamic education to measure the extent to which these values have been internalized by students. Halim (2023) emphasizes that religious moderation is not merely a normative concept; rather, it requires operational evaluation within contemporary Islamic education practices to ensure it does not remain solely at the cognitive level.

2.2. Generation Z: Characteristics and Religious Challenges in the Digital Era

Generation Z born between the mid-1990s and around 2010 is known as a cohort of digital natives who grew up alongside the internet and social media from an early age (Iwantoro, 2023). This characteristic results in learning patterns, methods of seeking religious information, and ways of expressing religious identity that differ significantly from those of previous generations. Ayub and Fuadi (2024) highlight that Gen Z interacts more with technology than with textbooks or traditional authoritative sources, making them vulnerable to exposure without critical filtering to religious information that is biased, superficial, or even prone to extremism.

This situation presents a distinct set of challenges. In their study on the implementation of religious moderation in the digital sphere, Ramadhan, Basid, and Faizin (2023) found that Generation Z faces a flood of intolerant content and religious polarization on social media; these factors risk eroding moderate attitudes unless counterbalanced by digital literacy and the early

reinforcement of values. Similarly, Mahmud (2024) links the identity crisis phenomenon among Gen Z to the overwhelming flow of information on social media, noting its impact on their psychological well-being and religious outlook. Hasanah and Sukri (2023) also emphasize the need for digital literacy grounded in Islamic values rather than mere restrictions on technology access as a solution to these challenges.

2.3. Islamic Religious Education as a Space for Integrating Religious Moderation Values

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) holds a strategic position as a vehicle for instilling values, rather than merely serving as a medium for transferring cognitive knowledge. Farihatun and Auliya (2022) demonstrate that the internalization of religious moderation values can be achieved through PAI content that explicitly incorporates principles of tolerance, balance, and respect for diversity. Hilmin, Noviani, and Yanuarti (2023) link this to the (Independent Curriculum), noting that the curriculum's flexibility allows PAI teachers to design contextual learning experiences relevant to the students' current socio-religious realities.

The role of the teacher is pivotal in this process. La Hadisi, Tetambe, and Assingkily (2024) found that the implementation of the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher's role in shaping students' attitudes of moderation is heavily determined by leading by example, employing a dialogic approach, and facilitating interaction across differences within the classroom. In a similar vein, Huda et al. (2024) assert that PAI strengthens religious moderation when instruction is designed not merely to transmit scriptural texts but also to cultivate students' critical and reflective thinking regarding contemporary religious issues. Herlina (2023) highlights the importance of value-based assessment rather than purely cognitive evaluation as a strategy for fostering tolerant and inclusive character through PAI instruction, while Hidayat (2024) emphasizes the need for PAI learning evaluations grounded in religious moderation to ensure that the success of value internalization can be objectively measured.

2.4. Strategies for Integrating Religious Moderation Values into Islamic Religious Education (PAI) for Generation Z

Given that Generation Z is well-versed in the digital world, strategies for integrating values of religious moderation into Islamic Religious Education (PAI) need to be aligned with their learning patterns. Masluhah (2021) demonstrates that digitizing PAI materials such as through instructional videos and interactive media effectively boosts the interest and understanding of "digital generation" students regarding Islamic values, including the value of moderation. Through a literature review, Ifa Afida, Wahidah, and Permatasari (2025) emphasize that while reinforcing religious moderation within the PAI curriculum in the digital era faces challenges specifically the influx of unverified information it simultaneously offers opportunities to utilize digital platforms as a means of promoting moderate religious outreach that better reaches the younger generation.

Several strategies emerging from recent studies include: (1) contextual and reflective learning approaches that encourage students to link the values of (moderation) with real-world social experiences; (2) the use of digital media (videos, interactive content, educational social media) to convey moderation values in ways that align with Gen Z preferences; (3) the role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in modeling behavior and facilitating dialogue across diverse perspectives; and (4) the strengthening of Islamic-value-based digital literacy to enable students to critically evaluate religious information. Ramdani et al. (2023) emphasize that successfully instilling an attitude of moderation depends heavily on the appropriateness of the learning models employed by teachers and their alignment with student characteristics a principle particularly relevant to Generation Z, given their distinct digital-native traits.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach in the form of library research a method that utilizes library materials such as books, journals, and other scholarly documents as the primary data source rather than field data. This approach was selected because the study focuses on examining, analyzing, and synthesizing concepts regarding the integration of religious moderation values into Islamic Religious Education (PAI) for Generation Z, drawing upon theories and findings from prior research; this aligns with the characteristics of descriptive qualitative research, which, according to Creswell (2018), aims to understand the meaning of a phenomenon based on perspectives emerging from the literature and the specific context under study.

The data sources for this study comprise both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources consist of books, national and international scholarly journal articles, and findings from previous research (conducted within the last five years) that directly address religious moderation, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) instruction, and the characteristics of Generation Z meanwhile, secondary sources include supporting documents such as curriculum policies, supplementary articles, and other relevant references used to enrich the discussion. Data collection was carried out through a documentation study specifically, the searching, gathering, and recording of data from written sources relevant to the research focus consistent with Sugiyono's (2019) definition of the documentation study as a data collection technique aimed at locating and acquiring data via written documents, images, or significant works that support and complement the research data.

This study employs content analysis a technique used to derive valid and replicable conclusions from data based on their context. According to Krippendorff (2018), content analysis is a research technique for making valid and replicable inferences from texts or other data regarding their context of use, involving the steps of data reduction, categorization, and interpretation. In this study, data gathered from various literature sources were reduced to select relevant sections and categorized according to the study's sub-themes (the concept of religious moderation, characteristics of Generation Z, Islamic Religious Education PAI instruction, and value integration strategies). Subsequently, the data were analyzed using a descriptive-critical approach to produce a theoretical synthesis addressing the research problem, aligning with the qualitative data analysis model proposed by Miles and Huberman (2014), which encompasses the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing.

Results

3.1. Forms of Religious Moderation Values Relevant for Integration into Islamic Religious Education (PAI) Instruction

A review of the literature indicates that the values of religious moderation most relevant for integration into Islamic Religious Education (PAI) instruction comprise four key indicators: commitment to the nation, tolerance, non-violence, and accommodation of local culture. Nasri and Tabibuddin (2023) found that these four values when examined through the lens of al-Ghazali's thought align with the principle of balancing reason and revelation, which lies at the core of Islamic education. These findings reinforce Rahman's (2021) view that (moderation) is not merely a normative concept but an operational value that can be translated into concrete teaching materials, such as respecting differences between schools of thought, honoring adherents of other faiths, and rejecting religious extremism.

An analysis of various applied studies reveals that values of tolerance and non-violence are the most frequently highlighted elements in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) materials at the primary and secondary education levels. Farihatun and Auliya (2022) note that the internalization of moderation values is most effective when PAI materials explicitly feature exemplary stories of the Prophet and his companions that reflect a moderate stance, rather than relying merely on normative doctrines presented in a purely textual manner. This underscores that the integration of these values does not occur in isolation; instead, it is woven into the

existing curriculum particularly within the domains of (creed and character) and the history of Islamic civilization.

Furthermore, the study reveals that the religious moderation values being integrated need to be aligned with the digital lives of Generation Z such as maintaining a critical stance toward religious hoaxes and the ability to filter out intolerant content on social media. Hilmin, Noviani, and Yanuarti (2023) emphasize that within the (Independent Curriculum) framework, moderation values are no longer viewed as supplementary material; instead, they are integrated into the learning outcomes of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) itself, thereby granting teachers the flexibility to formulate values that are contextual to the students' current socio-digital realities.

3.2. Strategies for Integrating Religious Moderation Values into Islamic Religious Education (PAI) for Generation Z

A review of the literature indicates that the most widely implemented integration strategy is the contextual and reflective learning approach a strategy that encourages students to connect the value of (moderation) with real-world social experiences in their immediate environment. Ramdani et al. (2023) found this strategy effective because it goes beyond merely conveying values at a cognitive level; it also trains students to reflect on moderate attitudes in their daily social interactions, particularly within school environments characterized by religious and cultural diversity. These findings are reinforced by La Hadisi, Tetambe, and Assingkily (2024), who highlight that teachers setting a good example and facilitating dialogue across diverse perspectives are crucial elements of this contextual strategy.

A second strategy identified in the study is the use of digital media to convey values of moderation, given that Generation Z are digital natives. Masluhah (2021) demonstrates that digitizing Islamic Religious Education (PAI) materials through instructional videos and interactive media effectively boosts students' interest in and understanding of Islamic values compared to conventional lecture-based methods. Ifa Afida, Wahidah, and Permatasari (2025) complement these findings by emphasizing that digital platforms, when properly managed by PAI teachers, can serve as a medium for moderate (religious outreach) that reaches the younger generation more effectively than face-to-face approaches alone.

A third strategy emerging from the study is the strengthening of digital literacy grounded in Islamic values, serving as a critical tool for students to filter religious information in the digital sphere. Hasanah and Sukri (2023) found that digital literacy integrated with Islamic values equips students with the ability to distinguish moderate content from provocative or extremist material. This finding aligns with the study by Huda et al. (2024), which emphasizes that the success of this integration strategy relies heavily on the teacher's ability to design instruction that fosters students' critical-reflective thinking, rather than merely facilitating a one-way transfer of information.

3.3. Factors Supporting and Hindering the Integration of Religious Moderation Values among Generation Z

A literature review has identified several factors supporting the successful integration of religious moderation values, including the competence and exemplary conduct of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers, supportive curriculum policies, and the alignment of teaching methods with students' characteristics. Hasan and Nikmawati (2020) emphasize that teachers need to employ appropriate learning models tailored to student characteristics so that values of moderation are deeply understood rather than merely memorized. Another identified supporting factor is the flexibility of the (Independent Curriculum) as noted by Hilmin, Noviani, and Yanuarti (2023) which allows teachers the scope to innovate and design contextual, non-rigid lessons on moderation.

On the other hand, study findings also reveal several inhibiting factors, particularly those related to the characteristics of Generation Z as digital natives. Ramadhan, Basid, and Faizin (2023) found that the influx of intolerant content and religious polarization on social media poses a major challenge capable of eroding students' moderate attitudes, unless counterbalanced

by the early reinforcement of values and digital literacy. Mahmud (2024) further confirms that the identity crisis experienced by some members of Generation Z stemming from excessive exposure to information on social media impacts the stability of their religious attitudes, thereby increasing their vulnerability to non-moderate ideologies.

Another inhibiting factor identified in the study is the limitation of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) assessment methods, which remain oriented toward cognitive aspects, making it difficult to objectively measure the success of instilling moderation values. Hidayat (2024) and Herlina (2023) both found that a lack of value-based (affective) assessment instruments poses a specific challenge in evaluating the extent to which moderate attitudes have truly been internalized by students, rather than merely understood theoretically. This situation highlights the need to develop a more comprehensive evaluation model so that the success of integrating religious moderation values into PAI instruction for Generation Z can be measured more accurately.

Conclusion

Based on the literature review conducted, it can be concluded that integrating values of religious moderation into Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is essential, given the characteristics of Generation Z digital natives who are vulnerable to exposure to unverified and potentially extremist religious information. Moderation values such as tolerance, commitment to the nation, non-violence, and accommodation of local culture must be instilled not merely as cognitive content, but through instructional models that are contextual, reflective, and adaptive to the learning styles of the digital generation. The role of the PAI teacher is pivotal in this process, acting as a role model, a facilitator of cross-perspective dialogue, and a guide for digital literacy who helps students critically evaluate religious information.

Based on these findings, the author offers several recommendations. First, educational institutions and Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers need to continue developing digital-based learning models and media that explicitly incorporate values of religious moderation, making them more accessible and understandable to Generation Z students. Second, there is a need to strengthen training for PAI teachers focusing on both digital literacy and the pedagogical skills required to facilitate dialogue and critical discussion regarding contemporary religious issues in the classroom. Third, given that this study is based on a literature review, the author suggests that future research employ an empirical approach such as observations, interviews, or case studies at specific educational institutions to gain a more concrete understanding of the actual effectiveness of integrating religious moderation values into PAI instruction for Generation Z.

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