

The Role of Islamic Religious Education in Shaping Moderate Character in Schools: A Theoretical Study

Sultan Ardiansyah Putra, Nanda Rahayu Agustia, Abdi Syahril Harahap

Abstract

This study aims to analyze the role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in shaping the moderate character of students in the school environment. The study was carried out through a theoretical approach and literature study on various academic sources related to religious moderation, character education, and PAI learning strategies. The results of the analysis show that PAI has a central role in internalizing the values of moderation, such as tolerance, justice, balance, and respect for differences. PAI teachers function as agents of moderation value transformation through curriculum approaches, contextual learning methods, and moral examples. Thus, Islamic education in schools is not only a means of religious knowledge transfer, but also a vehicle for the formation of religious personalities that are open and tolerant of diversity.

Keywords: Islamic Religious Education, Moderate Character, Religious Moderation, Schools, Character Education

Sultan Ardiansyah Putra¹

¹Islamic Religious Education Study Program, Universitas Pembangunan Panca Budi, Indonesia
e-mail: sultanking952@gmail.com¹

Nanda Rahayu Agustia², Abdi Syahril Harahap³

^{2,3}Islamic Religious Education Departement, Universitas Pembangunan Panca Budi, Indonesia
e-mail: nandarahayu@dosen.pancabudi.ac.id², abdisyahril@dosen.pancabudi.ac.id³

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Introduction

Education Education is essentially a humanization process that aims to form human beings who are knowledgeable, moral, and have a balanced personality. In the Indonesian context, education has a very important mission to strengthen the identity of a religious, civilized, and tolerant nation in the midst of a plurality of religions, ethnicities, and cultures. This is where the role of **Islamic Religious Education (PAI)** becomes very significant, not only as a subject that transmits religious knowledge, but also as a means of building moderate social character and morality (Azra, 2017).

Social reality shows that the world of education is inseparable from the challenges of extremism, radicalism, and intolerance that have begun to permeate some of the younger generation. Various studies show indications of an increase in exclusivity and fanaticism in understanding religious teachings among students and students (Hefner, 2013; Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia, 2019). This phenomenon certainly threatens the diversity and social cohesion of the Indonesian nation which is based on the principle of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*. Therefore, Islamic education in schools must be transformed into a force that encourages the birth of a generation that is religious as well as moderate, tolerant, and open to differences (Amin, 2019).

Historically, Islam itself taught a balance between faith and reason, between spiritual and social life. The value of moderation or *wasathiyah* has become the main principle in Islamic teachings. Allah SWT says in Q.S. Al-Baqarah verse 143, "And thus We have made you a people who are *wasathan* (middle), so that you may be witnesses of the (deeds) of mankind..." This principle emphasizes that Muslims are required to be fair, balanced, and not extreme in religion. In the context of education, the spirit of *wasathiyah* is the foundation for the development of curriculum, methods, and learning practices that respect diversity and encourage peace (Rahman, 2019).

According to Azyumardi Azra (2012), religious moderation in Islamic education is the result of a dialectic between Islamic values and a multicultural Indonesian context. He emphasized that Islamic education must be a forum that integrates three main dimensions: Islam, Indonesianness, and modernity. These three need to be harmonized so that students not only understand Islamic teachings dogmatically, but also contextually and applicatively in pluralistic social life. Thus, moderate Islamic education does not mean weakening religious identity, but rather strengthens it in the framework of nationality and humanity (Azra, 2014).

Furthermore, moderate Islamic education emphasizes a balance between **theological, moral, and social aspects**. This is in line with the view of Muhaimin (2012) who stated that PAI functions as a means of developing a whole personality (*insan kamil*) through learning that touches on cognitive (knowledge), affective (attitude), and psychomotor (behavioral) aspects. In this context, moderate character is not the result of memorizing religious texts, but is the result of internalizing universal Islamic values such as justice (*'adl*), tolerance (*tasamuh*), balance (*tawazun*), and deliberation (*shura*).

Moderate character education has also become relevant to the direction of national policy. The Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia (2019) in the document *Religious Moderation* emphasized that moderation is not only a theological issue, but also an issue of education and nationality. Religious moderation in schools is expected to produce students who have three main competencies: thinking critically about religious issues, behaving inclusively towards differences, and being committed to the integrity of the Republic of Indonesia. Thus, PAI is not just a normative lesson, but a strategic instrument in the development of the nation's character.

In practice, the implementation of moderation values in PAI can be carried out through three main domains: (1) **curriculum**, by incorporating the values of tolerance and humanity in the learning materials; (2) **learning methods**, with a dialogical and contextual approach; and (3) **teacher examples**, as moral figures who display moderate behavior in daily life (Nugroho, 2021).

These three domains complement each other and form an educational ecosystem that is peaceful, open, and respects diversity.

However, the reality on the ground shows that the implementation of religious moderation values in schools still faces various challenges. Some PAI teachers still tend to teach religion textually and dogmatically, without associating it with the social context of society (Hidayat, 2020). In addition, there is still a gap between the idealism of moderation policies and learning practices in schools, especially related to pedagogical competence and multicultural insight of teachers. This condition emphasizes the importance of strengthening the capacity of PAI teachers as moderation agents who are able to integrate wasathiyah values into the entire educational process.

Based on this background, this article seeks to examine theoretically the role of **Islamic Religious Education in shaping a moderate character in schools**. This study departs from the assumption that PAI has great potential as a medium for the formation of an inclusive, rational, and civilized religious identity. Through a literature study approach, this article seeks to explore the concepts, strategies, and challenges in implementing moderate Islamic education in schools as a solution to the phenomenon of intolerance and social polarization among students.

Literature Review

The Concept of Religious Moderation

Religious moderation or wasathiyah is a central concept in Islamic teachings that emphasizes balance, justice, and tolerance. The term wasathiyah comes from the word wasath, which means "middle", "fair", or "balanced" (Amin, 2019). This concept has a theological basis in the Qur'an, as explained in Q.S. Al-Baqarah verse 143: "And thus We have made you a wasathan (middle) people, so that you may be witnesses of human (deeds)..." This verse affirms that Islam rejects all forms of extremism and teaches a balance between the spiritual and social dimensions of human life.

According to the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia (2019), religious moderation is a way of view, attitude, and religious practice that takes a middle way, avoiding excessive attitudes (ghuluw) and underestimating (tafrith) in religion. The goal is to maintain a balance between personal and social interests, as well as between doctrinal texts and the contextual realities of life. In the context of education, religious moderation means instilling the values of togetherness, empathy, and respect for differences within the framework of faith.

Azra (2017) explained that religious moderation in Islam is not only related to theology, but also a cultural and social expression that presents Islam as a religion that is peaceful, inclusive, and adaptive to the changing times. In his view, Indonesian Muslims have a long tradition in developing Islam that is tolerant and friendly to the local culture, which came to be known as Islam Nusantara. This tradition is an important model in realizing religious moderation through education.

Religious moderation also has an epistemological dimension. According to Rahman (2019), moderation does not mean relativism that negates the truth, but a rational approach to the truth that opens up space for dialogue and respect for differences of views. Thus, religious moderation is the practice of balancing a belief in religious truth and an attitude of openness to social plurality.

Islamic Religious Education and Character Building

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) has a mandate that is not only cognitive but also affective and psychomotor. Its main purpose is to form a man of faith and noble character, which is reflected in the balance between the relationship with Allah (hablun minallah) and the relationship with fellow human beings (hablun minannas). Muhaimin (2012) stated that Islamic education must be directed at the development of a whole personality (insan kamil), namely individuals who have spiritual, moral, intellectual, and social intelligence.

In the context of character, PAI functions as a means of forming universal Islamic values such as honesty, responsibility, justice, empathy, and respect for differences (Zuhdi, 2018). This

process of character formation cannot be achieved only through lectures or memorization of texts, but through the internalization of these values in contextual and applicative learning activities. Therefore, the approach to character education in PAI must be integrative, that is, combining the spiritual dimension with social practice.

Moderate character education in Islam is also related to the goals of Indonesia's national education as stipulated in Law No. 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, namely "developing the potential of students to become human beings who believe and fear God Almighty, have noble character, are healthy, knowledgeable, capable, creative, independent, and become democratic and responsible citizens." This goal emphasizes that education, including PAI, must produce human beings who have a balance between religious values and human values.

Azyumardi Azra (2012) stated that Islamic education must be a means to build open, dialogical, and humanitarian-oriented religious awareness. He rejects an educational approach that is exclusive and textual only, because it can give birth to a narrow and intolerant mindset. According to him, Islamic education needs to develop democratic and multicultural values as part of the mission of Islamic da'wah which is rahmatan lil 'alamin (mercy for the universe).

Moderate Islamic Education in Schools

Schools as social institutions have a strategic role in instilling the values of religious moderation in the younger generation. Through Islamic Religious Education, schools can build a religious culture that is open, peaceful, and respectful of diversity. Azra (2014) refers to schools as "public spaces of Islamic education", where Islamic values are interpreted and practiced socially in a national and humanitarian context.

In practice, moderate Islamic education in schools is realized through three main aspects: **curriculum, learning, and example**. First, the PAI curriculum must contain themes that encourage tolerance, fairness, and peace-loving attitudes. For example, material on "Islam as a religion of peace" or "the role of Muslims in a multicultural society" can strengthen students' understanding of the values of moderation (Rahman, 2019). Second, PAI learning needs to use participatory and reflective methods that encourage students to think critically about socio-religious issues. Third, PAI teachers act as role models who display moderate behavior in daily interactions (Hidayat, 2020).

Hefner (2013) explained that moderate Islamic education is not only the result of the curriculum structure, but also of the social dynamics in the school environment. A school culture that emphasizes togetherness, fairness, and mutual respect is an important factor in shaping the moderate character of students. Thus, all components of schools—teachers, principals, students, and the community—must collaborate in building a peaceful and inclusive education ecosystem.

However, the implementation of moderate Islamic education in schools still faces a number of challenges. Several studies show that there is still a tendency for some educators to teach religion rigidly, less contextually, and not responsive to the issue of pluralism (Nugroho, 2021). In addition, the PAI curriculum still needs to be adjusted to changing social dynamics in order to instill moderation values effectively. Therefore, it is necessary to train PAI teachers and strengthen the capacity of school institutions in internalizing wasathiyah values in every aspect of educational activities.

Overall, this literature review shows that the role of Islamic Religious Education in shaping a moderate character is very important and strategic. PAI has great potential to build a balanced religious awareness between faith and humanity, between obedience to God and social responsibility. Through an inclusive curriculum, reflective learning methods, and teacher examples, PAI can be an effective means of building a tolerant, democratic, and peace-loving generation of Muslims.

Research Methods

Research This research uses a **qualitative approach** with the type of **library research**. This approach was chosen because the focus of the study lies in the conceptual and theoretical analysis of the role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in shaping the moderate character in schools. The qualitative approach allows researchers to understand the ideas, concepts, and values contained in various literature sources in depth and contextually. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative research provides a space for researchers to explore the meaning of social and cultural phenomena through interpretation of relevant texts and contexts.

This research does not use direct field data, but relies on **secondary data** sourced from scientific books, national and international journal articles, proceedings, and research reports that discuss Islamic religious education, character education, and the concept of religious moderation. Data was obtained through searching various academic databases such as Google Scholar, Garuda, and Scopus, taking into account the credibility and relevance of the source to the research focus. According to Zed (2014), literature study is an effective method to find the theoretical and conceptual basis of an issue being researched, especially in the fields of education and religion.

The data collection process is carried out by reading, studying, and selecting literature that is related to the research theme. After the data is collected, the next step is to conduct **content analysis**, which is an analysis method that focuses on revealing the meanings, ideas, and main ideas contained in various academic texts (Krippendorff, 2013). Through this analysis, the researcher seeks to find the pattern of the relationship between Islamic Religious Education and the formation of moderate character in schools, both in terms of values, pedagogical strategies, and supportive educational policies.

Data analysis was carried out inductively by following the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing as described by Miles and Huberman (1994). In the reduction stage, the data that has been obtained is selected and grouped according to the theme of the study, such as the concept of religious moderation, inclusive Islamic values, and the character education approach in PAI. Furthermore, at the data presentation stage, the results of the literature findings are compiled in the form of a conceptual narrative to illustrate the relationship between these concepts. The final stage is the drawing of conclusions, which is carried out by interpreting the data reflectively to find the theoretical contribution of Islamic Religious Education to the formation of the moderate character of students in schools.

To maintain the validity of the data, this study uses **the source triangulation technique**, which is by comparing and verifying information from various literature so that the resulting interpretation is objective and valid. Patton (2015) emphasized that triangulation in qualitative research serves to strengthen the reliability of findings through the comparison of various perspectives and sources. In addition, the researcher also conducts a process of critical reflection on the arguments that emerge to ensure that the results of the analysis are not trapped in subjective biases, but actually reflect scientific thinking that can be accounted for.

Results

Islamic Religious Education as a Pillar of Moderate Character Formation

The results of the literature review show that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in schools has a strategic role in instilling **the values of religious moderation** as part of the formation of students' character. Moderation in Islam reflects the principle of wasathiyah, namely balance, justice, and impartiality in understanding religious teachings (Azra, 2017). In the context of education, these values are internalized through a learning process that emphasizes tolerance, open-mindedness, and respect for differences.

Islamic religious education not only aims to instill religious dogma, but also to form personalities who are able to live harmoniously in the midst of a pluralistic society. In line with the

view of Tilaar (2012), education plays an important role in building multicultural awareness and fostering students' ability to live together in differences. In this case, PAI functions as an instrument for the formation of moderate character, namely characters that reject extremism, respect plurality, and uphold the values of justice and humanity (Hefner, 2013).

The moderation taught in PAI contains spiritual, moral, and social dimensions. The spiritual dimension includes the cultivation of faith and piety that is balanced with reason and knowledge; The moral dimension includes morality towards others; while the social dimension emphasizes fairness, tolerance, and respect for diversity (Nugroho, 2021). These three dimensions are united in the framework of PAI which emphasizes Islam as *rahmatan lil 'alamin*, which is a religion that brings grace to all mankind.

1. Islamic Religious Education Strategy in Instilling Religious Moderation

Literature findings show that the success of PAI in forming moderate character is determined by the learning strategies applied by teachers in schools. PAI teachers have a dual role: as a **transmitter of Islamic values**, as well as an **agent of social transformation** that instills a tolerant and open-minded attitude. As explained by Zuhdi (2018), PAI teachers need to apply a contextual approach that relates Islamic teachings to social reality, so that moderate values can be accepted applicatively by students.

Effective strategies in PAI learning include:

1. **A dialogical approach**, which is to open a space for discussion between students about religious and social issues critically;
2. **A reflective approach**, which invites students to understand the meaning of Islamic teachings from the perspective of universal humanity; and
3. **An exemplary approach**, where teachers become real models in moderate and tolerant behavior (Hidayat, 2020).

In addition, the integration of moderation values also needs to be realized in **the PAI curriculum**, for example by including the themes of religious moderation, pluralism, and diversity in basic competencies and learning materials. The Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia (2021) emphasized that strengthening religious moderation in schools is an important part of national education policies, in order to form a generation that has a balance between religion and nationality.

4. School as a Space for Socialization of Moderate Character

Schools not only function as a place of formal learning, but also as a space for socializing values. PAI is the main instrument in building an inclusive school culture that respects differences. In this case, moderate character education cannot stand alone, but must be internalized in all aspects of school life starting from teaching and learning activities, worship habits, to social interaction between school residents (Rahman, 2019).

Activities such as interfaith dialogue, commemoration of religious holidays, or interfaith social service programs can be real practices of the value of moderation. This is in line with the concept of hidden curriculum in character education, which is values that are instilled through school social and cultural experiences without being written in the formal curriculum (Lickona, 2012). Therefore, schools that succeed in cultivating moderate character are those that are able to build a peaceful, inclusive, and collaborative ecosystem.

5. The Challenges and Relevance of Moderation in Contemporary Islamic Education

In today's global context, currents of radicalism and intolerance often infiltrate educational spaces. Therefore, strengthening the role of PAI in instilling moderate character is an urgent need. As expressed by Azra (2021), the challenge of Islamic education is not only to maintain religious orthodoxy, but also to develop adaptive thinking towards modernity and pluralism.

However, the implementation of religious moderation education in schools still faces obstacles, such as teachers' low understanding of the concept of moderation, limited teaching

materials, and the influence of transnational ideologies that tend to be exclusive (Fadli, 2022). Therefore, teacher training, curriculum revision, and education policy support are needed to strengthen the values of diversity and tolerance.

From a theoretical perspective, the results of this study confirm that religious moderation is not an additional concept in PAI, but the essence of Islamic education itself. Islam teaches balance (tawazun), justice (adl), and tolerance (tasamuh), all of which are the foundations of moderate character. Thus, PAI has great potential as the main pillar of the formation of a generation that is religious and democratic, faithful and civilized, and has an Islamic identity as well as a national perspective.

Conclusion

Based on the results of literature reviews and theoretical analysis that have been carried out, it can be concluded that **Islamic Religious Education (PAI)** has a very significant role in shaping the **moderate character** in schools. PAI not only functions as an instrument for the transmission of religious teachings, but also as a vehicle for the transformation of moral, social, and spiritual values oriented towards balance, tolerance, and universal humanity. This is in line with Azra's (2017) view that Islam is a religion that emphasizes the principle of wasathiyah, which is a middle and fair attitude in thinking and acting, which is the basis for the creation of a peaceful and inclusive religious life.

Moderate character education in PAI serves to instill values such as **tolerance, respect for differences, love of peace, and non-violence**, all of which are manifestations of the Islamic teachings of rahmatan lil 'alamin (Nugroho, 2021). Through the curriculum, learning methods, and teacher examples, these values can be systematically internalized to students. Schools as formal educational institutions play a strategic role in providing a social space conducive to the growth of moderate character through an inclusive and dialogical school culture (Rahman, 2019).

This study also shows that the success of the formation of moderate character is highly dependent on **the quality of PAI teachers**, curriculum design **that is responsive to diversity issues**, and support for education policies that favor strengthening **religious moderation** (Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia, 2021). Without these three aspects, Islamic education has the potential to become rigid and not adaptive to social change. Therefore, strengthening the values of moderation in PAI is not only a conceptual need, but is an important strategy to build a peaceful, open, and civilized Islamic civilization.

Thus, it can be affirmed that **PAI has a fundamental role in shaping a generation of Muslims who are moderate, inclusive, and oriented towards universal human values**. Through the integration of moderate Islamic values in learning and school life, religious education is able to become an effective moral fortress against the symptoms of intolerance, radicalism, and social disintegration in the midst of a multicultural society like Indonesia.

Suggestions

Based on the results of this study, there are several suggestions that can be proposed to strengthen the implementation of moderate character education through Islamic Religious Education in schools.

First, **for PAI teachers**, there is a need to improve pedagogical and ideological competence in order to be able to comprehensively understand the concept of religious moderation and implement it in the learning process. Teachers must be role models in being moderate and inclusive, because students' character is formed through the example of teachers (Lickona, 2012).

Second, **for curriculum developers**, it is necessary to reorient **the PAI curriculum** to better emphasize the values of tolerance, diversity, and global peace. The teaching material focuses not

only on ritual and dogmatic aspects, but also on a dialogical and contextual understanding of Islam. An adaptive curriculum will help students internalize the value of moderation in real life.

Third, **for educational institutions and policymakers**, it is recommended to strengthen a **moderate and humanist school culture** through extracurricular activities, teacher training, and policies that emphasize the importance of religious moderation. The Ministry of Religious Affairs, the Education Office, and madrassas can synergize in creating a PAI learning model based on moderation and nationality.

Fourth, **for future researchers**, it is recommended to conduct **empirical research** on the effectiveness of the implementation of religious moderation values in PAI learning, both through field qualitative and quantitative approaches. This kind of research will enrich the theoretical findings produced in the literature review and provide concrete recommendations for educational practice in schools.

Thus, Islamic education oriented to moderate character is not only an ideal concept, but can also be realized in the national education system. This will strengthen the role of PAI as the main pillar of the formation of a religious, tolerant, and peace-loving generation within the framework of national and state life based on Pancasila.

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