The Role of Islamic Religious Education in Strengthening Religious Moderation in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Religious moderation has become a strategic program of the Indonesian government aimed at strengthening national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and accommodation of local culture. As a relatively new policy framework, it requires conceptual reinforcement and effective implementation. This study examines the role of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in strengthening religious moderation by first analyzing the Qur'anic concept of moderation *(wasatiyyah)* and identifying key challenges in its application within the Indonesian context. Using a qualitative narrative approach, data were collected through an extensive literature review of books, academic journals, and other credible sources. The findings indicate that IRE plays a crucial role in internalizing moderate religious values by integrating ethical teachings, contextual interpretation of religious texts, and pedagogical practices that encourage dialogue and mutual respect. The analysis further reveals that the effectiveness of IRE in promoting religious moderation depends on a comprehensive educational approach that prioritizes critical thinking, recognition of plurality and pluralism, and appreciation of socio-cultural diversity. This study contributes to scholarly discourse by clarifying the strategic position of IRE in state-led religious moderation efforts and offers policy-relevant insights for strengthening curriculum design and teacher practices to foster a more inclusive and peaceful religious life in Indonesia.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is widely recognized as a nation characterized by profound cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity. Religious plurality has long been a defining feature of Indonesian society, with Islam as the majority religion coexisting alongside other officially recognized religions and belief

systems (Lestari, 2020). In many regions, including rural villages, interfaith harmony has been successfully maintained through local wisdom and social cohesion (Solichin, 2022). This pluralistic reality represents both a social asset and a continuous challenge in maintaining national unity.

In recent years, however, the rise of religious extremism and intolerance has emerged as a significant concern, posing threats to social harmony and national stability. Several studies indicate that intolerance, exclusivism, and radical interpretations of religion continue to persist in various forms (Hendardi, 2020; Susilawati, 2020). Survey data from national institutions reveal public anxiety regarding religious-based violence and ideological extremism, while regional assessments show that certain provinces—such as West Java—remain vulnerable to intolerance and radicalism. Rather than reiterating statistical trends, these findings collectively demonstrate a structural challenge in managing religious diversity within Indonesia's democratic and multicultural framework (Maarif, 2009; Wahid & Madjid, 2007).

Under these circumstances, religious moderation (*moderasi beragama*) has become a strategic agenda promoted by the Indonesian government to reinforce national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and respect for local culture. Religious moderation is not merely a policy slogan but a normative framework intended to balance religious conviction with social responsibility in a plural society (Qodir, 2023). Scholars argue that moderation is essential for preventing ideological polarization and sustaining peaceful coexistence in multicultural states (Abdullah, 2017; Ropi, 2017).

Within this context, Islamic Religious Education (IRE) occupies a crucial and strategic position. Historically, Islamic education has been deeply embedded in Indonesia's educational landscape, long before religious moderation became an explicit state priority (Syam, 2021). As Muslims constitute the majority of the population, IRE plays a decisive role in shaping religious understanding, attitudes toward diversity, and civic responsibility among students (Mahamid, 2023; Naim, 2008). Consequently, strengthening religious moderation through education is widely regarded as a sustainable and long-term approach.

Nevertheless, contemporary Islamic Religious Education faces a conceptual and practical dilemma. Some scholars argue that it remains caught between historical idealism rooted in classical Islamic civilization and the pragmatic demands of modern global society, often influenced by Western epistemological frameworks (Hasan & Juhannis, 2024; Syarifah, 2018). This tension has resulted in pedagogical practices that are sometimes normative-textual, insufficiently contextual, and less responsive to contemporary challenges such as pluralism, extremism, and digital religious discourse (Aderus et al., 2024; Hefner, 2022).

Despite the growing discourse on religious moderation, there remains a research gap regarding how Islamic Religious Education conceptually and pedagogically contributes to strengthening religious moderation based on Qur'anic principles while responding to Indonesia's contemporary socio-religious challenges. Many studies discuss moderation at the policy or sociological level, yet fewer provide focused analysis on IRE as an integrative educational instrument grounded in Islamic theology and educational practice.

Based on this gap, the guiding research question of this study is: How does Islamic Religious Education contribute to strengthening religious moderation in Indonesia when viewed from Qur'anic concepts and contemporary socio-religious challenges?. Accordingly, this study aims to: 1) Analyze the concept of religious moderation from the perspective of the Qur'an and its relevance to Indonesia's plural social context; and 2) Examine the role of Islamic Religious Education in strengthening religious moderation through educational content, pedagogical approaches, and value internalization. By addressing these objectives, this study seeks to contribute both theoretically and practically to discussions on religious moderation, offering insights for curriculum development,

teacher training, and educational policy aimed at fostering a moderate, inclusive, and peaceful religious life in Indonesia.

2. METHODS

A research method refers to a systematic procedure designed to identify, formulate, analyze, and address research problems in order to obtain data that are valid, relevant, and accountable (Sugiyono, 2013). Accordingly, this study employs a qualitative descriptive approach, which is particularly suitable for examining conceptual, normative, and interpretative issues related to religious moderation and Islamic Religious Education. This study uses library research as its primary research design. Data were collected from various written sources, including academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, research reports, and official documents relevant to religious moderation, Islamic education, and Qur'anic perspectives. These sources were accessed through academic databases, institutional repositories, and credible online platforms.

To ensure methodological rigor, the literature selection was guided by clear inclusion and exclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria consisted of: (1) publications discussing religious moderation, Islamic Religious Education, or Qur'anic concepts of moderation; (2) sources published within the last ten years, except for classical or foundational works; (3) peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and official reports from recognized institutions; and (4) publications written in Indonesian or English. Meanwhile, exclusion criteria included non-academic opinion pieces, unverified online content, duplicated studies, and sources lacking clear authorship or academic credibility (Z. Arifin, 2020).

The collected data were then organized and classified according to key analytical categories, such as the concept of moderation in the Qur'an, contemporary challenges of religious moderation in Indonesia, and the role of Islamic Religious Education in promoting moderate religious attitudes. Data analysis was conducted using thematic qualitative analysis, in which recurring themes, patterns, and conceptual relationships were identified, compared, and interpreted systematically. This analytical process enabled the researcher to synthesize diverse perspectives and construct a coherent narrative relevant to the research objectives.

Furthermore, the analysis employed a descriptive qualitative interpretation, emphasizing meaning, context, and normative values rather than numerical measurement. The findings were subsequently articulated in analytical descriptions that align with academic writing standards and ethical research principles (Sugiyono, 2013). For clarity, the overall research procedure followed these stages: (1) identification of research focus and keywords; (2) systematic literature search and selection based on inclusion criteria; (3) data classification and thematic coding; (4) interpretative analysis; and (5) synthesis of findings related to religious moderation and Islamic Religious Education. This structured approach ensures transparency, credibility, and replicability within the scope of qualitative library-based research.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. The Concept of Religious Moderation

Linguistically, according to the Great Indonesian Dictionary, moderation comes from the Greek word "Moderatio," which means "reduction" and "avoidance." The word "reduction" here refers to "reducing violence and avoiding extremes." Moderation in English means "reducing extreme attitudes" (Agama, 2019). Meanwhile, in Arabic, it is known as *wasath* or *wasathiyah*, which means middle or between two ends (Amin, 2014). According to Arabic language experts, the word wasath means "everything that is good according to its object." Like the word "philanthrope" which means an attitude between stinginess and wastefulness. The opposite of moderation is excessive, or *tatharruf* in Arabic, while in English it is interpreted as extreme, radical, and excessive. Moderation is also known

in various religions: in Islam it is known as the concept of *wasathiyah*, in Christianity it is known as the golden mean, in Buddhism it is known as the concept of *majjhima patipada*, in Hinduism it is known as *madyhamika*, in Confucianism it is known as the concept of *Zhong yong*. In all terms, it refers to one point of meaning, namely choosing a middle path between two extreme poles and not being excessive.

From a theological perspective, Islamic sources emphasize moderation as an inherent characteristic of the Muslim community. The *wasathiyah* identity is portrayed as a divine endowment that enables Muslims to uphold justice, balance, and ethical integrity in both religious and social life. The prophetic traditions and the practices of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions further demonstrate concrete manifestations of moderation, affirming that moderation is deeply embedded within Islamic teachings and praxis.

Interpreting the conceptual findings within the contemporary Indonesian context reveals that religious moderation is not merely a theoretical construct but a sociocultural and educational imperative. Literature on Islamic education in Indonesia consistently argues that moderation (*wasathiyah*) must be integrated into educational curricula to foster attitudes of tolerance, balance, and justice among learners. Indeed, PAI (Islamic Religious Education) is identified as a strategic platform for cultivating moderate religious values, contextual understanding, and respectful engagement with diversity (B. Arifin & Huda, 2024).

Studies further confirm that religious moderation education contributes to the implementation of multicultural education in Indonesian schools, emphasizing mutual respect and reducing intolerance in diverse communities. This aligns with the notion that moderation includes principles such as *tawasuth* (moderation), *tasamuh* (tolerance), and *i'tidal* (balance), which can be explicitly embedded into teaching materials and pedagogical practices (Kurniati et al., 2024). Several recent studies also suggest practical connections between religious moderation and contemporary challenges such as radicalism and exclusionary attitudes. For example, research shows that Islamic Religious Education that foregrounds moderation values helps shape a generation capable of peaceful coexistence and interfaith dialogue, strengthening national unity and collective responsibility in a plural society like Indonesia (Sudarmin & Amaluddin, 2024).

However, alternative perspectives highlight potential tensions in policy and practice. Some scholars critique the implementation of government-led religious moderation initiatives for imposing normative frameworks that may inadvertently marginalize dissenting or conservative voices, or result in symbolic rather than substantive transformation in educational institutions. These critiques remind us that the application of moderation must be adaptive rather than rigid, resisting simplistic binaries of moderate–conservative and engaging diverse theological interpretations (Ilmiah & Kadi, 2024).

Despite these strengths, it is important to recognize research limitations. Most studies on religious moderation in Indonesian educational contexts remain literature-based or conceptual, with limited empirical evidence derived from field data involving key stakeholders such as teachers, students, and community leaders. Thus, future research that incorporates qualitative fieldwork or mixed-method designs could strengthen the empirical foundation of moderation education and its effects on learners' attitudes and behaviors. Overall, the literature reviewed consistently positions Islamic Religious Education as a key instrument for translating theological foundations of moderation into lived educational practices, bridging Qur'anic principles with contemporary needs for tolerance, civic responsibility, and peaceful coexistence in plural societies.

3.2. Religious Moderation from the Perspective of the Qur'an

At least the word *wasth* in its various forms in the Qur'an is mentioned five times, respectively in QS. al-Baqarah/2: 143 and 238, QS. al-Maidah/5: 89, QS. al-Qalam/68: 28, and in QS. al-Adiyat/100: 5. Basically, the use of the term *wasth* in these verses can refer to the meaning of "middle, fair and choice" (Shihab, 2005).

1. *Ummatan Wasathan*

The word *ummatan wasathan* is often used as a reference to religious moderation because the

characteristics of moderate people are justice which in the view of Muslims is called *wasathiyyah*. *Wasathiyah* in the Qur'an is referred to using the word *wasathan* which is juxtaposed with the word *ummatan* found in QS. al-Baqarah/2: 143. The word *ummat* in the form of mufrad is repeated 51 times and the plural form (*ummama*) is 13 times in the Qur'an. The word *ummat* comes from the word *amma-yaummu* which means to head towards, emulate, and support. While *al-wasath* in Arabic is an *isim* used for *mufrad*, *jama' muzakkar* and *muannats*. Therefore, if the word *wasathan* is isnad to the word *ummat* then it means a balanced people, a middle people and the best people.25 As in QS. al-Baqarah/2: 143.

According to Ibnu Katsir in Al-Ahzim's interpretation, the word *wasath* here is the best choice. As revealed, the Quraysh were the chosen Arab people, both in lineage and place of residence, meaning the best as said by the Prophet Muhammad. *Wasathan fi Qaumihi* which means he is the best and noblest person. Meanwhile, according to At-Thabari, the word "*wasathan*" means "fair." Sayyid Quthub also interpreted the word as meaning "good," "prime," "just," and "middle." Muhammad Quraish Shihab, in this case, gave the meaning of the word as "moderate," "just," and "moderate." This is reinforced by the *asbabun nuzul* (revelation) of the verse, narrated by Ibn Ishaq, who said: "Ismail ibn Khalid told me from Abu Ishaq from Barra', regarding a Muslim question. "Those Muslims who died before our Qibla changed, and how will we pray while we still face the direction of Baitul Maqdis?" Then the verse was revealed, stating that Allah will not waste the faith of His servants who have worshipped Him, and emphatically stating that their fate remains in Paradise."

Broadly speaking, the verse explains the change in the direction of the Qibla, from facing Baitul Maqdis in Palestine to facing the Kaaba in Mecca. This change in the direction of the Qibla clarifies who follows the Prophet and who remains Christian and Jewish. Therefore, for people who follow the Messenger of Allah, praying facing the direction of the Qibla, then that person is the best person (ummatan wasathan), or someone who receives guidance from Allah (As-Syuyuthi, 2008).

Interpreted in contemporary contexts, particularly within plural societies such as Indonesia, *ummatan wasathan* provides a theological framework for addressing challenges of extremism, intolerance, and religious polarization. Recent empirical and conceptual studies show that Qur'anic moderation is increasingly operationalized through Islamic Religious Education as a means of cultivating balanced religious attitudes, civic responsibility, and respect for diversity (Hasan & Juhannis, 2024). Islamic education, when grounded in the *wasathiyah* paradigm, serves as a strategic instrument to counter radical narratives by integrating justice, ethical reasoning, and contextual interpretation of religious texts into pedagogy. However, alternative perspectives caution that moderation may be interpreted as overly normative or state-driven, potentially marginalizing conservative religious expressions (Ropi, 2019). In addition, this literature-based analysis is limited by its reliance on textual and secondary data, lacking direct empirical evidence from classroom practices or student experiences. Previous empirical studies indicate that the effectiveness of *wasathiyah*-oriented education depends on teachers' interpretive capacity and institutional support (Hefner, 2022). Therefore, while *ummatan wasathan* offers a robust Qur'anic foundation for religious moderation, future field-based research is necessary to examine how these values are internalized and practiced within educational settings and broader social life.

2 *Wustha*

Still in the same surah, there is the word *wustha*, namely in QS. al-Baqarah/2: 238. Ibn Kathir explains in this verse that Allah has commanded to maintain all prayers at their respective times, maintain their provisions and you perform them exactly on time. In the verse, there is the word *wustha* related to the matter of prayer. *Wustha* prayer is a prayer whose time is in the middle. However, there are different points of view, the first says that the dawn prayer is the *wustha* prayer, if the day begins with sunset. In contrast, the second opinion says that the *wustha* prayer is the Asr prayer because they begin the day with the rise of dawn. Both opinions are attributed to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). That during the Ahzab war, the Prophet (peace be upon him) and his troops were forced to postpone the Asr prayer.

This debate keeps them (the enemies) busy discussing the *Wustha* prayer, leading to arguments and quarrels that lead to them forgetting to pray on time. In this regard, there is a commandment for Muslims to perform prayers on time with reverence. Punctuality in performing worship will also influence a person's habits in doing things, always striving to complete every task on time. Praying on time can prevent reprehensible acts, such as being unfair to those who disagree with them or share the same religion. Therefore, performing prayers on time and with reverence can maintain a consistent attitude of justice regardless of one's background; this is the behavior of a moderate person.

When interpreted within contemporary socio-religious contexts, the concept of *wustha* extends beyond ritual observance to ethical and social dimensions of moderation. Recent studies indicate that punctuality and discipline cultivated through ritual practices contribute to the internalization of self-control, justice, and respect for others—values closely associated with religious moderation (Rahmadi & Hamdan, 2023). In the Indonesian context, Islamic Religious Education plays a strategic role in translating the theological meaning of *wustha* into daily attitudes, fostering habits of fairness and responsibility that counter tendencies toward extremism and intolerance (Qodir, 2023). Nevertheless, alternative perspectives argue that ritual discipline alone does not automatically produce moderate attitudes unless accompanied by reflective and contextual pedagogy. Moreover, this literature-based analysis is limited by the absence of empirical observation regarding how students internalize punctual prayer practices in educational settings. Empirical studies suggest that moderation-oriented outcomes depend significantly on instructional methods and the broader school culture (Hefner, 2022). Thus, while *wustha* provides a strong Qur'anic foundation for moderation, further field-based research is required to examine its practical impact on shaping moderate religious behavior in plural societies.

3. *Ausath*

The term *ausath* appears in QS. al-Mā'idah/5:89 in the context of *kaffārah* (expiation) for a broken oath. Ibn Kathir, citing Ibn Jarir al-Tabari, explains that this verse prescribes feeding the poor with food that is *ausath*—that is, food of moderate, reasonable quality and quantity, comparable to what one normally provides for one's family. Linguistically and ethically, *ausath* conveys the principle of proportionality, fairness, and responsibility. Rather than encouraging minimal or excessive charity, the Qur'an establishes a standard of balance that reflects social justice and moral accountability. This interpretation demonstrates that moderation in Islam is operationalized through concrete social obligations, emphasizing consistency between personal consumption and social responsibility.

In contemporary socio-religious contexts, particularly in plural societies such as Indonesia, the concept of *ausath* offers an ethical framework for cultivating moderation through responsibility and social empathy. Recent empirical studies indicate that religious teachings emphasizing proportional charity and accountability contribute to reducing exclusivist attitudes and fostering social solidarity (Qodir, 2023). Islamic Religious Education plays a strategic role in translating the Qur'anic value of *ausath* into pedagogical practices by encouraging learners to internalize fairness, trustworthiness, and social responsibility as core religious virtues (Ropi, 2017). Nevertheless, some scholars caution that normative interpretations of moderation may overlook structural socio-economic inequalities that limit individuals' capacity to act proportionately. Moreover, this literature-based analysis is constrained by the absence of direct empirical observation of how *ausath*-based values are implemented in educational or community settings. Previous empirical research suggests that the effectiveness of moderation-oriented instruction depends on contextualized learning strategies and institutional support (Hefner, 2022). Therefore, while *ausath* provides a strong Qur'anic basis for religious moderation, future field-based studies are necessary to examine its practical influence on shaping moderate religious behavior amid contemporary social challenges.

4. *Ausatuhun*

The word *ausatuhum* is found in QS. al-Qalam/68: 28. According to Ibn Kathir, the meaning of the word *ausatuhum*, as quoted by Ibn Jarir, is that the person who says the word Insha Allah is considered

a tasbih. Meanwhile, according to M. Quraish Shihab, the word *ausathuhum* is interpreted as the best or most moderate group. In this verse there is a message that we as Muslims must be wise in our attitudes and actions, we should think first and always remember Allah. If in doing something we think first and remember Allah, then when we want to do something that is contrary to the teachings of Islam, we will consider the consequences for which we must be responsible. Because the best person is someone who is wise in making decisions so he always tries to be moderate.

In contemporary Indonesian society, the concept of *ausatuhum* is highly relevant to addressing challenges such as religious radicalism, intolerance, and impulsive moral reasoning. Empirical studies in Islamic education indicate that reflective religiosity—characterized by critical thinking and spiritual awareness—significantly correlates with moderate religious attitudes among students (Romli et al., 2024). Islamic Religious Education thus occupies a strategic position in cultivating *ausatuhum*-type individuals by embedding Qur'anic ethics of reflection, self-restraint, and responsibility into pedagogical practices (Hefner, 2022). However, alternative interpretations argue that moderation should not be reduced solely to individual moral cognition but must also address structural and socio-political dimensions that shape religious behavior. Moreover, this study is limited by its reliance on literature-based analysis, which restricts its ability to capture lived experiences and contextual variations in applying *wasathiyah*. Previous field-based studies suggest that without supportive institutional environments, the internalization of moderation values may remain normative rather than transformative (Qodir, 2023). Consequently, future empirical research is required to examine how *ausatuhum*-based values are operationalized within educational institutions and broader social contexts.

5.   *Fawasathna*

The word is found in QS. al-'Adiyat/100: 4-5. According to Ibn Kathir, the word *fawasathna* means the horses gathered and took up positions in the middle of the field. Ibn Hatim, al-Bazar, and al-Hakim also narrated from Ibn Abbas, who said that the Prophet Muhammad at that time sent cavalry, by sending Bani Kinanah, namely al-Mundzir bin Amru al-Ansari, one of the leaders in the Bai'at Aqabah, but for a month there was no news. The verse explains that when fighting in the path of Allah, do not be afraid to face the enemy and try to raise the fighting spirit among Muslims. Always be ready to fight and jump into the battlefield when called to destroy the attacking enemy. From here there is a message that fighting against minority groups who are discriminated against because of differences in ethnicity, race, culture, or religion is mandatory. So that these discriminated groups receive protection and freedom as citizens.

From an interpretative perspective, *fawasathna* reflects a model of moderation that is dynamic and transformative rather than passive. Islamic moderation does not imply neutrality in the face of injustice but entails moral courage to protect marginalized groups and resist structural discrimination. In the Indonesian context, this interpretation is particularly relevant to ongoing challenges related to religious intolerance, social exclusion, and identity-based discrimination. Empirical studies indicate that Islamic Religious Education (IRE) which integrates values of justice, social responsibility, and ethical courage plays a strategic role in preventing radicalism and fostering inclusive citizenship (Zuhdi, 2018). Nevertheless, literature-based research such as this study is limited by its normative and textual orientation and lacks direct engagement with lived social realities. Moreover, alternative interpretations tend to restrict the meaning of *fawasathna* to its historical-military context, thereby denying its broader ethical relevance. To address these limitations, future research should integrate Qur'anic exegesis with empirical field studies to ensure that *fawasathna* is understood as a moral foundation for peaceful advocacy, social justice, and the protection of minority rights rather than as a justification for violence.

3.3. Challenges of Strengthening Religious Moderation

Indonesia is a country with a majority Muslim population. As a multicultural and multireligious society, strengthening religious moderation faces challenges, including from within the Islamic faith itself. Some of the challenges faced in strengthening religious moderation include:

1. Radicalism and extremism: The problem of radicalism and extremism significantly impacts the strengthening of religious moderation. This is due to the existence of intolerant views and the spread of teachings that contradict moderate values and diversity. The research institutions mentioned in the introduction to this article demonstrate the persistence of radical and extremist ideologies and actions.

2. Limited understanding of religion: Some groups in society, particularly in rural areas or those with limited access to formal education, may have an inaccurate understanding of religion and tend towards extremism. This can be a challenge in strengthening religious moderation (Susilawati, 2020).

3. The influence of globalization: The influence of globalization has brought about cultural and lifestyle changes that can ultimately influence individuals' religious views. This situation can pose a challenge to strengthening religious moderation, especially among young people (Hidayat, 2019). This is increasingly apparent when non-mainstream organizations from outside infiltrate and blend in with Indonesian Islamic organizations. This poses a real challenge to strengthening religious moderation today.

4. Inadequate religious education: Inadequate religious education can hinder the development and strengthening of religious moderation. This inadequacy encompasses factors such as the moderate content of religious messages, the character of educators and the educational environment, and the lack of oversight of religious moderation, which can lead to the formation of incorrect religious understandings that can lead to extremism.

5. Social media: Social media can also pose a challenge to strengthening religious moderation. Some social media accounts popularize less moderate and intolerant teachings, which can influence public opinion. Inevitably, all levels of society are currently exposed to and involved in the rapid flow of technological information. In principle, not all of these streams can be fully consumed. The public needs to use filters to avoid falling victim to these intolerant and extreme messages.

To overcome the challenges in strengthening religious moderation, efforts can be made such as improving adequate religious education, developing educational programs that teach moderate values, encouraging interfaith cooperation in promoting tolerance and brotherhood, and strengthening public access to healthy and beneficial information and education.

These findings resonate strongly with Qur'anic interpretations of moderation, particularly the concept of *ummatan wasaṭan* (Qur'an 2:143), which emphasizes justice (*ʿadl*), balance (*tawāzun*), and ethical excellence (*khayriyyah*). Classical and contemporary exegetes interpret *wasathiyah* not merely as a middle position, but as a moral and epistemological framework that rejects both excess (*ifrāṭ*) and negligence (*tafrīṭ*) in religious practice (Kamali, 2015). When linked to contemporary Indonesian realities, these Qur'anic principles underscore the strategic role of Islamic Religious Education as a preventive and transformative instrument against radicalism and intolerance. Empirical studies demonstrate that well-designed PAI curricula emphasizing critical religious literacy, contextual Qur'anic interpretation, and interfaith engagement significantly enhance students' tolerance and civic commitment (Rahmadi & Hamdan, 2023). Nevertheless, this study is limited by its reliance on secondary literature, which restricts direct observation of lived religious practices and grassroots dynamics. Alternative interpretations—such as conservative arguments that equate moderation with theological compromise—must also be acknowledged, as they reveal ongoing contestations over religious authority. Future empirical research is therefore needed to test how *wasathiyah*-based education operates in diverse sociocultural settings and how digital religious spaces can be more effectively governed to support moderation.

3.4. The Role of Islamic Religious Education in Strengthening Religious Moderation

The previous discussion outlined Islamic moderation and the challenges of strengthening it. This section will outline the role of Islamic Religious Education in strengthening this moderation. Islamic religious education is considered a crucial foundation for instilling the values of religious moderation, especially for the younger generation of learners and their successors. As Indonesians, we certainly have high hopes that this religious moderation program will produce new agents who care about peaceful religious life within an Islamic framework (Ikhwan, 2020). Some strategic roles that can be played include:

Prioritizing an inclusive and tolerant approach to Islamic religious learning so that all groups feel accepted and free from discrimination. Religious Education theory states that religious education can influence the formation of individual attitudes and behavior. When linked to the role of Islamic religious education, it can be seen as a crucial factor in shaping moderate attitudes and behavior among Muslims (Allès & Tho Seeth, 2021). Emphasizing the values of unity and oneness in Islam can help overcome differences and encourage cooperation between religious communities. Building harmonious interfaith relations through dialogue and cooperation, thus creating a conducive atmosphere for learning and worship. This, of course, also aligns with the theory of religious moderation, which can be a solution to radicalism and intolerance among religious communities. In this context, the role of Islamic religious education can be seen as a means of teaching moderate and tolerant values to Muslims. Next, it discusses topics relevant to contemporary issues and encourages the development of skills needed in everyday life. Cultivating a critical attitude towards religion so that students and the community can understand and analyze Islam objectively and non-dogmatically. From the perspective of the sociology of religion, religious communities naturally place hope in society to play a role and positively influence social and political life (Arifinsyah et al., 2020). Furthermore, it is also important to provide religious moderation education through the development of an Islamic religious education curriculum to present a moderate Islamic movement by building tolerance among students of different religious backgrounds, spreading peace in their social environment, prioritizing interfaith dialogue, instilling an attitude of openness to outsiders (inclusiveness), and rejecting hate speech (Suprapto, 2020). This has begun in schools that have implemented a religious moderation curriculum, particularly schools under the Ministry of Religious Affairs, from elementary school to university.

Community empowerment is crucial in social life, and Islamic religious education can serve as the starting point for the formation of values. In this context, the role of Islamic religious education can be seen as a means to empower Muslims to become agents of change who promote moderate attitudes and behavior among fellow religious communities (Abidin & Murtadlo, 2020)). By developing Islamic religious education through religious moderation is expected to be able to form a generation that has a correct understanding of Islam and is able to collaborate with other religious communities to achieve common goals.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Islamic Religious Education (IRE) plays a strategic and irreplaceable role in strengthening religious moderation in Indonesia by fostering tolerance, justice, inclusivity, and critical thinking among learners. The findings demonstrate that IRE is most effective when it goes beyond doctrinal transmission and functions as a transformative educational space that integrates ethical teachings, contextual interpretation of religious texts, and dialogical pedagogical practices. Through this comprehensive approach, IRE facilitates the internalization of *wasathiyah* values by encouraging recognition of religious plurality, respect for socio-cultural diversity, and reflective engagement with contemporary social issues. As such, IRE contributes not only to individual character formation but also to the cultivation of social cohesion and peaceful coexistence within Indonesia's multicultural and multireligious society.

From a practical and policy-oriented perspective, this study underscores the need to strengthen IRE through coherent curriculum design, educator capacity building, and effective educational governance. Curriculum frameworks should explicitly embed Qur'anic principles of moderation, justice, and balance while promoting interdisciplinary and contextual learning. At the same time, teacher development programs must emphasize inclusive pedagogical competencies that support critical thinking, dialogue, and mutual respect in both classroom and digital learning environments. Furthermore, institutional supervision is essential to ensure alignment between national religious moderation policies and their implementation at the school level. Overall, this study offers policy-relevant insights by positioning IRE as a central instrument in state-led religious moderation efforts, while also acknowledging the limitations of literature-based research and highlighting the need for future empirical studies to assess the long-term impact of these educational initiatives across diverse Indonesian contexts.

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