

The Role of Islamic Religious Education in Cultivating Religious Moderation Among Digital Youth

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ABSTRACT

The development of digital technology has changed the way adolescents access and understand religious teachings. Amidst the rapid flow of unverified information, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) plays a strategic role in shaping moderate character among digital youth. This study aims to analyze the role of PAI in fostering religious moderation, with a focus on learning strategies, the role of teachers, the use of digital media, as well as the challenges and solutions to its implementation. The study was conducted using a qualitative approach through case studies at MAN 1 and MAN 2 Sragen, using in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. The results show that the PAI curriculum in both madrasas has been integrated with moderate values such as tolerance, social justice, and respect for differences. PAI teachers play a crucial role as facilitators and agents of change, while the use of digital technology has proven effective in increasing students' interest in learning about contemporary religious issues. Students who participated in moderation-based PAI learning showed significant improvements in religious digital literacy, tolerance, and the ability to engage in dialogue amidst diversity. Challenges such as low teacher digital literacy and the negative influence of social media still need to be addressed through ongoing training and collaboration with various parties. This finding strengthens the position of Islamic Religious Education as a transformative instrument in forming a young generation that is religious, inclusive, and adaptive to social and technological dynamics.

INTRODUCTION

The development of the digital era has had a significant impact on the mindsets, behaviors, and religious identities of today's youth. As a generation that grew up with the internet, social media, and information technology, digital youth are highly vulnerable to the rapid and massive flow of information that does not always align with moderate religious values (Chotimah et al., 2024; Machendrawaty et al., 2022). In this context, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in schools plays a strategic role in protecting the younger generation from extreme, intolerant, or even radical religious beliefs. PAI, designed adaptively and responsive to the challenges of the times, is able to instill moderate values such as tolerance, justice, and respect for differences. The primary goal of this education is to shape adolescents who not only understand their

religious teachings textually but also are able to implement them contextually in a diverse society ('Aini & Zamroji, 2025; Afida et al., 2025; Ma'arif et al., 2022).

In building religious moderation among digital youth, Islamic Education must be able to integrate the values of moderation explicitly into the learning curriculum (Muhlisin et al., 2023). Values such as respecting differences, rejecting violence, and upholding social justice and national unity need to be systematically instilled through creative and dialogical learning methods (Nurteti et al., 2024). The Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum, integrated with the values of moderation, not only teaches Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) and aqidah (faith) in a normative manner but also provides space for students to reflect on universal Islamic values in their digital lives. Strengthening this curriculum is inseparable from the commitment of educational institutions and educators to building an inclusive and tolerant system, particularly in addressing the diversity of cultures, schools of thought, and religious expressions (Masturin, 2023; Musyahid & Kolis, 2023).

Apart from the curriculum, the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers is very important in instilling the value of moderation (Jati & Bachtiar, 2024). Teachers are not only instructors, but also role models and facilitators who guide students in navigating complex digital realities. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers need to be equipped with special training on religious moderation and digital literacy so they can navigate contemporary issues such as hate speech, religious hoaxes, and radical narratives that are widely circulated on social media. K=/'the teacher's ability to deliver Islamic Religious Education (PAI) material with a reflective and contextual approach is crucial for the successful internalization of moderate values in students (Rahmatika, 2022; Syahrin & Widodo, 2025) Without teacher preparedness, moderation education will remain mere discourse, powerless in the face of the uncontrolled flow of digital information.

Teenagers, as a digital generation, are very familiar with social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and other platforms. Therefore, one relevant strategy is to use digital platforms as a means to convey messages of religious moderation creatively and communicatively (Ibda et al., 2023). Islamic Religious Education teachers, educational institutions, and religious communities need to develop engaging, interactive, and data-driven digital religious content to compete with the widespread negative content on the internet. This approach not only adapts to adolescents' learning styles but also provides them with the space to express religious values in a positive and contextual way (Machendrawaty et al., 2022; Ni'mah et al., 2024).

In addition to formal education, extracurricular religious activities such as Islamic Spirituality (Rohis), short-term Islamic boarding schools (pesantren kilat), and social and religious activities are important vehicles for fostering the practice of religious moderation. In these activities, students are encouraged to directly experience the values of tolerance, cooperation, and empathy through social interactions across diverse backgrounds (Syahrin & Widodo, 2025). Values learning occurs not only in the classroom, but also in real-life interactions between students in a diverse environment. Therefore, schools need to design religious programs that are not exclusive or dogmatic, but that build students' social and humanitarian awareness (Giyono & Suyitno, 2025; Rustandi & Kusnawan, 2023).

A reflective and contextual approach is also an important part of a religious moderation education strategy. Teachers need to connect learning materials to phenomena students experience in the digital world, such as religious content on social

media, hate speech cases, or differences in religious understanding on the internet (Musyahid & Kolis, 2023). With this approach, students not only learn abstract religious theory but also engage in critical discussions that help them understand how religious teachings can provide solutions to current problems. This reflection strengthens adolescents' ability to sort information, develop a tolerant attitude, and resist being easily provoked by extreme content ('Aini & Zamroji, 2025; Nurteti et al., 2024).

However, efforts to instill religious moderation among digital youth are not without challenges. The main challenge is low digital literacy among youth and educators, which makes them vulnerable to provocative and unreliable religious content. Furthermore, the negative influence of social media, which tends to prioritize sensation and virality, reinforces polarization, stereotypes, and prejudice against different groups (Hafiz et al., 2025). Students' understanding of moderation is also still limited and is often understood only as an attitude of compromise or neutrality, not as an active choice to live harmoniously in diversity (Chotimah et al., 2024; Hanif et al., 2025).

To address these challenges, strengthening digital literacy through systematic training for teachers and students is necessary. Digital literacy encompasses not only technical internet skills but also the ability to think critically about information, understand media ethics, and develop inclusive communication skills. Furthermore, schools need to involve parents in efforts to instill the value of moderation by providing education and a space for dialogue between home and school. This collaboration is crucial so that the values taught don't stop at school but are reinforced within the family and community (Ni'mah et al., 2024; Syahrin & Widodo, 2025).

The results of the effective implementation of moderation education in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) show that adolescents become better able to filter out extreme religious information, demonstrate a more tolerant attitude, and are prepared to live in a pluralistic society. Research shows that adolescents exposed to moderation-based PAI learning show a decreased tendency towards exclusive attitudes, negative stereotypes, and the potential for radicalism. They are also more open to dialogue regarding differences and have a high level of social sensitivity in interacting with others (Machendrawaty et al., 2022; Musyahid & Kolis, 2023). This proves that Islamic Religious Education, if managed well, can be a transformative tool in shaping a moderate religious identity among digital youth.

Based on the description above, this study aims to analyze the role of Islamic Religious Education in fostering religious moderation among digital youth, with a focus on learning strategies, teacher approaches, the use of digital media, as well as the challenges and solutions faced. The research focuses on how the integration of moderation values into Islamic educational practices can shape adolescents who are religious yet inclusive, tolerant, and adaptive to diversity and technology. The novelty of this study lies in its comprehensive approach that combines curricular, pedagogical, and digital dimensions in the context of moderate Islamic Religious Education learning for the digital generation (Masturin, 2023). Thus, the results of this study are expected to serve as a foundation for developing an Islamic education model that is relevant to the challenges of the times and capable of producing a young generation of Muslims who are balanced in their religious and social lives.

METHODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive analytical research type (Sugiyono, 2019), to examine the role of Islamic Religious Education in fostering religious moderation among digital youth. A qualitative method was chosen because this study aims to deeply understand the phenomenon of religious moderation in the context of education and the digital era, as well as to analyze the process of forming moderate attitudes through Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning. This research design uses a case study with a focus on educational institutions that have implemented an Islamic Religious ...

Research data was collected through triangulation methods, including in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers, students, principals, and religious leaders to gain a comprehensive perspective on the implementation of religious moderation in learning. Participatory observation was conducted during the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning process in classrooms and religious extracurricular activities to observe student interactions and the application of moderation values. Document analysis included the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum, teaching materials, digital learning media, and student work related to religious moderation.

Data analysis used the Miles and Huberman model, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Coding was conducted to identify key themes related to the role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in fostering religious moderation, the challenges of the digital era, and effective learning strategies. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation, method triangulation, and member checking with key informants. Research credibility was strengthened through prolonged field engagement for at least six months and peer debriefing with Islamic religious education experts. To ensure the transferability of the research results, a thick description of the research context and the characteristics of the research subjects was conducted.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of Islamic Religious Education Curriculum Based on Religious Moderation

The results of the study indicate that MAN 1 Sragen and MAN 2 Sragen have implemented an Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum integrated with the values of religious moderation. Based on the analysis of curriculum documents, it was found that the Islamic Religious Education learning materials have been enriched with content on tolerance, social justice, and respect for differences. Materials such as "Islam and Diversity," "Morals in National Life," and "The Wisdom of Differences in the Qur'an" have been integrated into the learning syllabus. Islamic Religious Education teachers at both madrasas use a contextual approach in delivering the material, by linking Islamic teachings to the realities of students' digital lives.

Learning observations showed that Islamic Religious Education teachers used interactive discussion methods and case studies to address religious phenomena in the digital age. Students were encouraged to analyze religious content on social media, identify the characteristics of extreme religious understandings, and construct arguments based on Islamic principles of moderation. Student work, including essays, short videos, and social media posts, demonstrated a strong understanding of the concept of

wasathiyah (the middle path) and its application in everyday life.

Digital Learning Strategies in Islamic Education

The research revealed that both madrasas have utilized digital technology as a medium for Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning. Teachers use platforms such as Google Classroom, YouTube, and interactive learning apps to deliver religious moderation materials. The digital content developed includes learning videos on tolerance, podcasts on religious discussions, and infographics on the values of Islamic moderation. Students are also involved in creating digital content promoting messages of religious moderation.

Interviews with students revealed a positive response to digital-based Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning. Students felt more engaged and understood the material more easily when it was presented through a medium they were familiar with. However, challenges were also identified in terms of teacher digital literacy, as not all PAI teachers possessed adequate skills in using learning technology.

The Role of Islamic Education Teachers in Cultivating Religious Moderation

The research findings indicate that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers play a central role in fostering religious moderation among students. Teachers serve as role models, discussion facilitators, and mentors in addressing contemporary religious issues. Interviews with PAI teachers revealed that they have received specialized training on religious moderation and digital literacy to improve their competency in facing the challenges of the digital era.

Islamic Religious Education teachers employ a dialogic approach in their teaching, providing space for students to express their views on religious issues. They also act as mediators when disagreements arise among students, helping to create an inclusive and tolerant learning climate. Observations indicate that Islamic Religious Education teachers are able to guide classroom discussions to promote values of moderation without neglecting students' diverse religious understandings.

The Impact of Islamic Religious Education Learning on Students' Moderation Attitudes

Based on the results of a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with students, it was found that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning based on religious moderation had a positive impact on student attitudes and behavior. Students demonstrated improvements in tolerance for differences, critical thinking skills regarding religious information on social media, and respect for cultural and religious diversity. They were also more selective in consuming and sharing religious content on social media.

Interview results indicated that students had a better understanding of the concept of religious moderation as an active stance in building social harmony, rather than simply neutrality or compromise. They were able to identify and avoid content containing hate speech or extreme narratives. Students also demonstrated the ability to engage in dialogue with peers from different religious backgrounds with a more open and respectful attitude.

Challenges in Implementing Religious Moderation

The research also identified several challenges in implementing religious moderation through Islamic Religious Education (PAI). The main challenges include teachers' limited digital literacy, the negative influence of social media, and a limited

understanding of the concept of religious moderation. Some teachers still face difficulties integrating digital technology into Islamic Religious Education (PAI) lessons, while students are sometimes exposed to extreme religious content through social media.

Interviews with school principals indicate a continued need for teacher capacity building through ongoing training and curriculum development that is more adaptive to technological advancements. Furthermore, collaboration with parents and the community is also needed to strengthen efforts to instill the values of religious moderation.

Integration of Moderation Values in the Islamic Education Curriculum

The findings of this study indicate that integrating religious moderation values into the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum is a strategic step in shaping tolerant and inclusive student character. These findings align with the view that an Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum integrated with moderation values not only teaches Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) and aqidah (faith) normatively but also provides space for students to reflect on universal Islamic values in their digital lives (Masturin, 2023; Musyahid & Kolis, 2023). The implementation of a moderation-based curriculum at MAN 1 Sragen and MAN 2 Sragen demonstrates the educational institution's commitment to building an inclusive and tolerant system.

The contextual approach used by Islamic Religious Education teachers in delivering religious moderation material has proven effective in helping students understand the relevance of Islamic teachings to their digital lives. This supports the argument that Islamic Religious Education, designed adaptively and responsively to the challenges of the times, can instill values of moderation such as tolerance, justice, and respect for differences ('Aini & Zamroji, 2025; Afida et al., 2025). The use of interactive discussion methods and case studies enables students not only to understand the concept of moderation theoretically but also to apply it in real-life contexts.

Utilization of Digital Technology in Islamic Education Learning

Research results show that the use of digital technology in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning has a positive impact on student engagement and understanding. The use of digital platforms such as Google Classroom, YouTube, and interactive learning apps has been shown to increase student interest in religious moderation material. These findings support the argument that one relevant strategy is to use digital platforms as a means to convey messages of religious moderation creatively and communicatively (Machendrawaty et al., 2022; Ni'mah et al., 2024).

The development of digital content by teachers and students, including instructional videos, religious discussion podcasts, and infographics on the values of Islamic moderation, demonstrates that educational institutions have successfully adapted their learning approaches to the learning styles of digital youth. This aligns with the view that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers, educational institutions, and religious communities need to develop engaging, interactive, and data-driven digital religious content to compete with the widespread negative content on the internet (Smeer & Rosyidah, 2021).

However, the challenges identified in teachers' digital literacy demonstrate the need for continuous capacity building. These findings reinforce the argument that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers need specialized training in religious

moderation and digital literacy to enable them to navigate contemporary issues such as hate speech, religious hoaxes, and radical narratives widely circulated on social media (Syahrin & Widodo, 2025; Rahmatika, 2022).

The Role of Islamic Education Teachers as Agents of Change

Research findings indicate that Islamic Religious Education teachers play a highly strategic role in fostering religious moderation among students. Their roles as role models, discussion facilitators, and mentors in addressing contemporary religious issues have proven effective in shaping students' moderate attitudes. These findings align with the view that teachers are not only instructors but also role models and facilitators who guide students in navigating complex digital realities.

The use of a dialogic approach in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning demonstrates that teachers have successfully created an inclusive and tolerant learning climate. Teachers' ability to guide classroom discussions to promote moderate values without neglecting students' diverse religious understandings demonstrates high professionalism. This supports the argument that teachers' ability to deliver Islamic Religious Education (PAI) material with a reflective and contextual approach is crucial for the successful internalization of moderate values in students (Afida et al., 2025).

The specialized training that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers have received on religious moderation and digital literacy demonstrates educational institutions' commitment to preparing competent educators. However, research also demonstrates the need for continuous teacher capacity building to face the challenges of the evolving digital era. Without teacher preparedness, moderation education will remain a powerless discourse in the face of the uncontrolled flow of digital information.

The Impact of Islamic Education Learning on Student Character Formation

The research results show that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning based on religious moderation has a significant positive impact on student character development. Increased tolerance for differences, critical thinking skills regarding religious information on social media, and respect for cultural and religious diversity demonstrate the successful implementation of religious moderation in learning (Giyono & Suyitno, 2025). This finding supports previous research showing that adolescents exposed to moderation-based Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning showed a decreased tendency toward exclusive attitudes, negative stereotypes, and potential radicalism (Machendrawaty et al., 2022; Musyahid & Kolis, 2023).

Students' ability to identify and avoid content containing hate speech or extreme narratives demonstrates that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning has successfully developed critical digital literacy. This aligns with the view that a reflective and contextual approach to Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning helps students understand how religious teachings can provide solutions to current problems and strengthens adolescents' ability to sort information, develop tolerance, and resist being easily provoked by extreme content (Nurteti et al., 2024; 'Aini & Zamroji, 2025).

Students' understanding of religious moderation as an active attitude in building social harmony, rather than merely neutrality or compromise, demonstrates the success of the learning process in changing students' perceptions of the concept of moderation. This is important because one of the main challenges in implementing religious moderation is students' limited understanding, which is often interpreted only as an attitude of compromise or neutrality (Hanif et al., 2025; Chotimah et al., 2024).

Development Challenges and Strategies

Despite the positive results, this study also identified several challenges still faced in implementing religious moderation through Islamic Religious Education (PAI). The main challenges include teachers' limited digital literacy, the negative influence of social media, and a limited understanding of the concept of religious moderation, highlighting the need for a comprehensive development strategy.

To address the challenges of teachers' digital literacy, ongoing training programs are needed that encompass not only technical skills in using technology but also pedagogical skills in integrating technology into Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning. This aligns with the view that digital literacy encompasses not only technical internet skills but also the ability to think critically about information, understand media ethics, and develop inclusive communication skills (Syahrin & Widodo, 2025; Ni'mah et al., 2024).

The negative influence of social media, which tends to prioritize sensationalism and virality, requires a specific strategy in the form of developing more engaging and high-quality digital religious content. Educational institutions need to collaborate with digital communities and content creators to develop content that can compete with negative content on social media. Furthermore, media literacy and information verification skills need to be strengthened in the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum.

Collaboration with parents and the community is also key to the successful implementation of religious moderation. Research shows the need to involve parents in efforts to instill the values of moderation by providing education and a space for dialogue between home and school. This collaboration is crucial so that the values taught don't stop at school but are reinforced within the family and community (Masturin, 2023).

Implications for the Development of Islamic Education

The findings of this study have important implications for the development of Islamic education in the digital era. The successful implementation of religious moderation through Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at MAN 1 Sragen and MAN 2 Sragen can serve as a model for other Islamic educational institutions. Learning models that integrate the values of moderation with the use of digital technology have proven effective in developing tolerant and inclusive student character.

This research also demonstrates the importance of developing an Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum that is adaptive to technological developments and the challenges of the times. A static curriculum that is unresponsive to social change will struggle to achieve the desired character-building goals. Therefore, a mechanism for continuous evaluation and curriculum renewal is necessary.

The role of Islamic Religious Education teachers as agents of change in fostering religious moderation also has implications for the development of teacher education programs. Islamic Religious Education teacher education programs need to be strengthened with materials on religious moderation, digital literacy, and learning methodologies responsive to the needs of digital youth. Furthermore, Islamic Religious Education teacher training and professional development systems need to be systematically designed to ensure adequate competency to face the challenges of the digital era.

The results of this study also demonstrate that Islamic Religious Education, if

managed properly, can be a transformative tool in shaping moderate religious identities among digital youth. This demonstrates the relevance and importance of religious education in the context of national education, particularly in efforts to build a generation that is religious yet inclusive, tolerant, and adaptive to diversity and technology.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that Islamic Religious Education plays a strategic and significant role in fostering religious moderation among digital youth, as seen from its implementation at MAN 1 Sragen and MAN 2 Sragen. The integration of moderation values into the Islamic Religious Education curriculum, which include tolerance, social justice, and respect for differences, has proven effective in shaping inclusive and tolerant student character. The use of digital technology as a learning medium, such as the use of Google Classroom, YouTube, and interactive applications, has successfully increased student engagement and facilitated the delivery of messages about religious moderation in a contextual and creative manner. The role of Islamic Religious Education teachers as role models, discussion facilitators, and mentors in dealing with contemporary religious issues has proven to be key to the success of internalizing moderate values. Learning outcomes show that students experienced significant improvements in tolerance of differences, critical thinking skills regarding religious information on social media, and a better understanding of religious moderation as an active attitude in building social harmony. Although there are still challenges in the form of limited digital literacy of teachers and the negative influence of social media, this study proves that PAI which is managed adaptively and responsively can be a transformative instrument in forming a young generation of Muslims who are religious but remain inclusive, tolerant, and able to adapt to diversity and developments in digital technology.

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