
Strategies Used by Islamic Religious Education Teachers to Instill a Spirit of Religious Moderation in Generation Z

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Abstract

This study explores the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers in strengthening religious moderation among Generation Z in response to the growing influence of digital media on students' religious understanding. The increasing circulation of religious content through social media platforms has raised concerns regarding the spread of intolerant and exclusive interpretations, necessitating educational intervention to maintain balanced religious perspectives. The purpose of this research is to analyse the strategies employed by Islamic Religious Education teachers in instilling moderation values in students within school environments. The research employs a qualitative case study approach involving Islamic Religious Education teachers, school principals, and Generation Z students as informants. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, and analysed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, comprising data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that teachers implement multiple integrated strategies, including role modelling, the integration of moderation values into learning materials, the strengthening of digital religious literacy, dialogical learning methods, and the cultivation of a moderate school culture. The results indicate that teacher exemplification is the most influential factor in shaping students' moderate attitudes, followed by interactive and contextual learning practices. Strengthening digital literacy also plays a crucial role in improving students' ability to critically evaluate online religious information. In conclusion, the combined implementation of pedagogical, digital, and cultural strategies effectively fosters tolerant, inclusive, and nationally oriented religious character among Generation Z students.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country with a high level of diversity across the dimensions of religion, ethnicity, culture, and language. This diversity constitutes both a national asset and a challenge in preserving unity and national cohesion. In this context, religious moderation has become an important strategy for building a harmonious, peaceful, and tolerant society. Religious moderation is understood as a way of viewing, practising, and engaging with religion that takes a middle path and avoids extreme attitudes in the interpretation of religious teachings (Husna & Thohir, 2020; Khasanah et al., 2023; Rahmadi & Hamdan, 2023).

The development of information and communication technology in the digital era has brought significant changes to various aspects of life, including the ways in which the public

understands and practises religious teachings. Ease of internet access enables every individual to obtain religious information through their personal devices. Digital platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and various religious websites have become primary sources of information for society, particularly Generation Z (Edi et al., 2024; Hafiz & Neni, 2025; Hasanah & Baharun, 2025). These conditions present a great opportunity for broadening religious perspectives; however, they also give rise to challenges that are far from simple, as not all circulating information is grounded in a strong knowledge base or can be held accountable (Devi et al., 2024; Missier, 2025; Safitri, 2025).

Generation Z is a generation that was born and grew up in an environment closely connected with digital technology. Known as digital natives, they have been accustomed to using the internet, social media, and modern technological devices from an early age. These characteristics enable Generation Z to access information quickly and widely. However, this capability is not always accompanied by the skills needed to verify the accuracy of the information obtained. As a result, they are susceptible to accepting and believing religious content without conducting critical scrutiny of its sources, context, or the authority of those disseminating it.

The current phenomenon of religious information circulating through social media reveals an increase in content carrying narratives of exclusivism, intolerance, and even radicalism. A great deal of religious content is delivered in a simple and visually engaging manner, making it easily accepted by younger generations, even when the substance conveyed does not necessarily conform to the principles of moderate Islamic teachings. In a number of cases, such content presents religion in a narrow framework, asserting singular truth claims while ignoring the diversity of perspectives that has long developed within the tradition of Islamic scholarship. These challenges are further reinforced by social media algorithmic mechanisms that operate on the basis of user preferences. When a person frequently accesses content on a particular theme, the algorithm will repeatedly recommend similar content, potentially trapping users in echo chambers that only expose them to views aligned with their existing beliefs. In a religious context, this can narrow one's understanding and reduce the opportunity to appreciate the genuine diversity of perspectives that is part of the richness of the Islamic tradition. Without proper education to counterbalance this effect, such conditions have the potential to cultivate intolerant and exclusive attitudes that are dismissive of difference (Mason, 2018).

As a nation characterised by religious, cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity, Indonesia requires the strengthening of religious moderation as a foundation for social life (Daheri et al., 2023; Mazya et al., 2024; Pajarianto et al., 2022; Suhardiyanto et al., 2025). Religious moderation is an important approach to preserving social harmony, as it promotes balanced, tolerant, fair, and respectful attitudes towards differences. These values need to be instilled in students from an early age so that they are equipped to resist the various negative influences proliferating in the digital space. Educational institutions therefore bear a significant responsibility in forming students with moderate character and a sense of national identity. In this educational context, Islamic Religious Education (Pendidikan Agama Islam/PAI) teachers occupy a highly strategic position in instilling religious moderation values in students. Teachers are not only responsible for delivering the learning materials prescribed in the curriculum, but also serve as figures who embody these values in their daily lives. A teacher's openness to

differences, respect for diversity, and commitment to constructive dialogue become role models that students can emulate in their interactions within the social environment.

According to reports from international digital governance studies and global internet usage trends, more than five billion people are active internet users worldwide, with social media constituting one of the primary sources of information consumption among youth (DataReportal, 2025). UNESCO also highlights that digital ecosystems significantly influence belief formation among adolescents, particularly when algorithmic systems reinforce echo chambers that limit exposure to diverse perspectives. These conditions indicate that while the digital environment empowers access to knowledge, it simultaneously amplifies the risks of misinformation and ideological polarisation at a global scale.

In Indonesia, a similar challenge emerges with greater complexity due to the country's high religious, cultural, and ethnic diversity. The rapid penetration of social media platforms has contributed to the widespread circulation of religious content, some of which contains intolerant or exclusive interpretations. This situation is particularly concerning given that Indonesia is home to one of the largest Muslim populations in the world, where maintaining religious harmony is a fundamental pillar of national stability. Strengthening religious moderation is therefore not only a social necessity but also a national priority.

Generation Z, as digital natives, are highly exposed to religious narratives circulating through platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram. While this accessibility provides opportunities for expanding religious knowledge, it also exposes them to unverified content that may contain radical or exclusive interpretations. Empirical studies on digital religious behaviour indicate that adolescents often lack sufficient critical literacy to evaluate the credibility of online religious sources, rendering them more susceptible to misinformation and simplified doctrinal messages.

Previous research has extensively discussed the role of Islamic Religious Education in shaping students' moral and spiritual development. Studies by Nurohman et al. (2025) and Dewi et al. (2025) emphasise that teachers play a central role in embedding moderation values through classroom learning, while other research highlights the importance of integrating digital literacy into efforts to prevent radicalism among youth (Syahputra & Rahman, 2026). However, most of these studies tend to focus on either pedagogical approaches or digital literacy in isolation, without comprehensively integrating both within a contextual, school-based strategy.

The existing gap lies in the limited exploration of how Islamic Religious Education teachers systematically integrate role modelling, digital literacy, dialogical learning, and school culture into a unified framework for strengthening religious moderation among Generation Z. In addition, empirical studies examining these strategies through a qualitative case study approach within real educational environments remain relatively scarce, indicating the need for more in-depth research that captures lived experiences and contextual practices.

The urgency of this research is driven by the increasing exposure of students to digital religious content that often lacks scholarly validation. Without structured educational intervention, there is a risk that young learners will develop rigid, intolerant, or fragmented religious perspectives. Schools and teachers must therefore respond proactively by designing adaptive strategies that are relevant to the characteristics of the digital generation while preserving the core values of religious moderation.

The novelty of this study lies in its integrative approach, which combines teacher exemplification, curriculum-based moderation integration, digital literacy strengthening, dialogical pedagogy, and school culture reinforcement into a single coherent strategy. Unlike previous studies that tend to focus on isolated aspects, this research provides a holistic framework that reflects the actual dynamics of Islamic Religious Education practices in shaping moderate religious attitudes among Generation Z.

The primary purpose of this study is to explore and analyse the strategies employed by Islamic Religious Education teachers in instilling religious moderation values among Generation Z students. Specifically, the research aims to identify how these strategies are implemented in classroom learning, school environment practices, and digital literacy guidance, with the objective of constructing a comprehensive understanding of effective educational approaches for fostering moderate religious character in contemporary schooling contexts.

The contribution of this research is both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it enriches the literature on religious moderation and Islamic education pedagogy by providing an integrated conceptual model. Practically, it offers insights for educators, school administrators, and policymakers in designing effective strategies to strengthen moderate religious values in digital-era education. The expected benefits include improved teacher practices, enhanced student critical literacy, and the formation of inclusive, tolerant, and nationally oriented young generations capable of navigating complex digital religious landscapes.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study method. The qualitative approach was chosen because this study aims to develop a deep understanding of the phenomenon of Islamic Religious Education (Pendidikan Agama Islam/PAI) teacher strategies in instilling the character of religious moderation among Generation Z students. This approach allows the researcher to obtain a comprehensive overview of the experiences, perceptions, and practices carried out by teachers within a real school environment. The case study method was used because the study focuses on a specific case — namely, the implementation of Islamic Religious Education teacher strategies in strengthening religious moderation within the school environment. A case study allows the researcher to examine the phenomenon in depth and comprehensively, taking into account the various aspects that influence the process of internalising religious moderation values among students.

The research was conducted at a junior high school that has implemented a religious moderation strengthening programme as part of its school culture and learning processes. The research location was selected purposively, on the basis that the school has various programmes supporting the formation of religious, tolerant, and nationally oriented character.

The research subjects consist of Islamic Religious Education teachers, the school principal, and Generation Z students. These three groups were selected because they are directly involved in the implementation and success of the religious moderation programme within the school environment. Islamic Religious Education teachers serve as the primary informants because they are directly responsible for designing, implementing, and evaluating learning processes that integrate religious moderation values, and possess practical experience

of the various strategies used to shape student character. The school principal was involved as an informant due to their strategic role in making policy decisions, developing school culture, and organising various programmes that support the strengthening of religious moderation. Students were selected as informants because they are the primary targets of the religious moderation values internalisation process; through their responses, the researcher can assess the extent to which the strategies implemented by teachers influence their religious attitudes, understanding, and behaviour. Informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, which was employed because the researcher required informants with direct knowledge, experience, and involvement in the school's religious moderation programme.

Data were collected through three techniques. The first was observation, used to obtain data regarding learning activities, interactions between teachers and students, and various school activities related to religious moderation strengthening. Through observation, the researcher could directly witness how moderation values are implemented in daily educational practice. Observation was conducted in a passively participatory manner, whereby the researcher was present at the research location to observe various activities without direct involvement in ongoing proceedings, allowing more natural data to be obtained that accurately reflects actual conditions.

The second technique was in-depth interviewing. Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format, allowing informants the freedom to explain their experiences and views more broadly. Through interviews, the researcher was able to explore information about learning strategies, obstacles encountered, and factors supporting the successful internalisation of religious moderation values. Interviews were conducted with Islamic Religious Education teachers, the school principal, and a number of students selected based on their involvement in learning activities and religious moderation strengthening programmes. All interview results were recorded and transcribed to facilitate the data analysis process.

The third technique was documentation, carried out by gathering various relevant documents such as learning tools, teaching modules, school programmes, activity photographs, programme implementation reports, and other supporting documents. These documents were used to strengthen the findings from observation and interviews, making the data obtained more complete and scientifically accountable. Documentation also serves as a supplementary data source in the triangulation process.

To ensure data validity, this study employed both source triangulation and method triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from teachers, the school principal, and students, while method triangulation was conducted by comparing the results of observation, interviews, and documentation.

Data analysis was carried out interactively using the Miles and Huberman model, comprising three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction was carried out by selecting and focusing on data relevant to the research objectives. Data presentation was conducted in the form of narrative description to facilitate the researcher's understanding of the connections among the data obtained. The final stage involved drawing conclusions and verifying the data, during which the researcher identified patterns, themes, and meanings emerging from the research findings. The conclusions obtained were then continuously verified throughout the research process to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the findings. Through this qualitative case study approach, it is hoped that the

study will provide an in-depth overview of the strategies employed by Islamic Religious Education teachers in instilling the character of religious moderation among Generation Z, and produce findings that can serve as a reference for the development of moderate, inclusive, and digitally relevant Islamic religious education.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The research results show that the exemplary behaviour of Islamic Religious Education teachers is the most dominant and effective strategy in instilling the character of religious moderation among Generation Z students. Teachers do not function solely as transmitters of learning material, but also as figures who are observed and emulated by students in their daily lives. Based on the observation results, Islamic Religious Education teachers consistently demonstrate behaviour that reflects religious moderation values, such as tolerance, fairness, courtesy, openness to differences, and respect for others' views. These attitudes are evident in teachers' interactions with students, colleagues, and other members of the school community.

Islamic Religious Education teachers do not display discriminatory attitudes towards students from different social, economic, or academic backgrounds. On the contrary, teachers endeavour to provide equal educational service to all students. This practice serves as a concrete example of the implementation of the value of justice, which is one of the core principles of religious moderation. Interview results with students indicate that they more readily understand and internalise moderation values when they directly observe these practices being enacted by their teachers. Students acknowledge that their teachers' friendly demeanour, respect for others' opinions, and reluctance to blame others leave a strong impression on their character formation.

These findings suggest that the internalisation of religious moderation values does not occur solely through the transfer of knowledge, but also through a process of identification and imitation of figures perceived to hold moral authority. Teacher exemplification therefore constitutes the primary foundation in building moderate character among Generation Z. In addition, teachers also endeavour to demonstrate a strong sense of nationalism through respect for national symbols, participation in civic activities, and the cultivation of a love of the homeland among students. These attitudes reinforce the understanding that religion and national identity are two mutually supportive and interrelated aspects of social life.

Integration of Moderation Values in Learning

Research result show that Islamic Education teachers integrate values moderation religious to in the entire learning process. Moderation values No taught as standing material alone, but entered to in various competence Islamic Religious Education learning. In the material faith, the teacher explains importance honor difference understanding during Still is at in corridor Islamic teachings. Participants educate invited understand that difference opinion is part from dynamics intellectuals who have develop since the time of previous scholars. In learning jurisprudence, the teacher gives example existence diversity the opinion of scholars in various problem Islamic law. Through approach said, participants educate understand that difference No must become source conflict, but rather can become means enrich outlook religious. In the eyes Al-Quran Hadith lessons, the teacher emphasizes verses and hadith that teach tolerance, brotherhood, justice and love dear. Learning directed so that participants

educate capable understand substance Islamic teachings as a religion that carries grace for all over nature. Meanwhile that, in Islamic Cultural History material, the teacher explains how about previous Islamic scholars and figures capable preaching in a way peace and respect culture local. Participants educate invited understand that the spread of Islam in Indonesia took place through polite and accommodating approach to culture community. Observation results show that teachers often linking material learning with reality life pluralistic society. Various issue contemporary like tolerance, diversity culture, social media, and challenges life nation made into example concrete in the learning process. Through strategy said, participants educate No only understand draft moderation in a way theoretical, but also capable connect it with life everyday. This is show that integration mark moderation in learning become means effective in build awareness inclusive religiosity.

Strengthening Religious Digital Literacy

Findings study show that strengthening religious digital literacy be one of strategy important things that Islamic Education teachers apply in face characteristics Generation Z. As very generation near with digital technology, participants educate get part big information religious through the internet and social media. Teachers realize that no all information circulating in digital space has level validity and credibility that can accountable. Therefore that, the teacher gives education about importance do verification to source information before trust or spread it. In the learning process, the teacher introduces various source religious that has authority clear scientific knowledge, such as reference books, official websites institution religious, journal scientific, and the work of credible scholars. Participants educate taught for compare various source information before take conclusion. The teacher also provides understanding about danger hoax, speech hatred, and narrative a lot of extremism circulating through social media. Participants educate invited analyze various example digital content so that capable differentiate information of a nature educative with potential information misleading. Interview results show that participant educate become more be careful in accept information religious after get learning about digital literacy. They start used to do checking sources and consider credibility transmitter information. Findings This show that religious digital literacy No only increase ability participant educate in access information, but also strengthens Power critical they to various narrative religion that develops in cyberspace.

Dialogue and Discussion Across Differences

The research results show that Islamic Religious Education teachers actively apply dialogue and discussion methods in the learning process. This strategy is considered effective for developing critical thinking skills and an open attitude towards diverse perspectives. Teachers employ group discussion methods, problem-based learning, and case studies to examine various religious issues relevant to students' lives. Through these methods, students are given the opportunity to express opinions, pose questions, and present arguments in a reasoned and systematic manner. In the course of discussions, teachers emphasise the importance of valuing others' opinions and avoiding the attitude of believing oneself to be exclusively correct. Students are encouraged to understand that difference is a part of life that must be approached with wisdom.

Observations show that the learning atmosphere becomes more dynamic and interactive when students are given space for dialogue. They appear more active in conveying their ideas and more open to accepting differing views. Interview results reveal that students feel more

comfortable discussing various religious issues because teachers provide equal opportunity for all students to participate. This dialogical approach has proven capable of enhancing students' tolerance, openness, and reflective thinking skills. Dialogue and discussion therefore serve as important means of strengthening religious moderation within the school environment.

Habituation Culture School Moderate

The research results show that the successful internalisation of religious moderation does not depend solely on the learning process in the classroom, but is also significantly influenced by the school culture that is built in a systematic manner. A moderate school culture is realised through various activities involving all members of the school community. One form of its implementation is the conduct of communal religious activities that cultivate values of togetherness, brotherhood, and social care. Schools also routinely organise commemorations of national days as a means of strengthening students' sense of national commitment. These activities convey the understanding that a religious spirit must go hand in hand with a spirit of preserving national unity.

Mutual cooperation programmes constitute an important component in the formation of moderate character. Through these activities, students learn to work together, respect differences, and develop concern for their surrounding environment. In addition, schools integrate moderation values into the strengthening of the Pancasila Student Profile (Profil Pelajar Pancasila). Values of mutual cooperation, global diversity, critical reasoning, and noble morality serve as effective means of strengthening religious moderation character. A school environment that is safe, comfortable, inclusive, and respectful of diversity provides a conducive space for students to practise moderation values in their daily lives.

Overall, the research results show that teacher role modelling, the integration of moderation values into learning, the strengthening of digital religious literacy, interfaith dialogue, and the cultivation of a moderate school culture are mutually reinforcing and complementary strategies in forming religious moderation character among Generation Z. These strategies have proven capable of fostering tolerant, open, non-violent, and nationally committed attitudes within students.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that Islamic Religious Education teachers play a central and strategic role in strengthening religious moderation among Generation Z through a multidimensional approach. The most influential strategy is teacher exemplification, whereby attitudes of tolerance, fairness, openness, and respect for differences serve as direct learning models for students. In addition, the integration of moderation values into Islamic Religious Education content, the strengthening of digital religious literacy, the implementation of dialogical and discussion-based learning, and the development of a moderate school culture collectively contribute to shaping students' inclusive, balanced, and critical religious understanding. These strategies are proven to be mutually reinforcing in fostering students' ability to filter religious information in the digital space while preventing exposure to intolerant or radical narratives.

For future research, it is recommended that studies expand their scope by employing mixed-method or quantitative approaches to more comprehensively measure the effectiveness and impact of each strategy on students' attitudes. Comparative studies across different

educational levels, regions, and school types are also needed to identify contextual differences in the implementation of religious moderation strategies. Furthermore, future research should explore the role of digital platforms and algorithmic influence more deeply, particularly how social media ecosystems shape students' religious perceptions. Longitudinal studies are also recommended to examine the sustainability of moderation values over time, assessing whether internalised attitudes persist beyond the classroom environment.

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