

# Religious Moderation: The Concept and Practice in Higher Education Institutions

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## ABSTRACT

This article aims to capture the concept and practice of religious moderation in higher education institutions considered modern laboratories of religion because they accommodate students across the nation with various ethnicities and religions and diverse, unique characteristics. By providing such a learning environment, higher education institutions can disseminate the meaning of the difference to students. This study employed a literature review as the research design. Six articles published in national journals were selected as the data. Those articles were analyzed thematically. The results of this study are divided into two major themes, namely, the concept of religious moderation in higher education institutions and the practice of religious moderation in higher education institutions. This indicates that the indicators initiated by the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia as a feature of solid religious moderation in an educational institution have been practised or carried out daily. Higher education institutions, namely universities, are the leading laboratories in developing and implementing religious moderation. The results of this development are then given to other lower educational institutions and the general public.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Being a country that has a lot of diversity, not a few people think that Indonesia is one of the largest multicultural countries in the world, which can be seen from a geographical point of view, an extensive area, socio-culture, abundant language and cultural wealth (Syaifuddin, 2006). With this great nation, Indonesia certainly has significant problems, ranging from economic issues, education, environment, and health to religious difficulties and conflicts in Indonesia. This means that even though Indonesia is a country with a sizable positive capacity, Indonesia itself has a considerable negative capacity

(Harahap, 2018). This potential has somehow opened the people's wide possibilities that sometimes bring them into conflicts.

In recent years, religious conflicts have often occurred in Indonesia; even acts of violence and intolerance increase every year. This violation of religious freedom can potentially be carried out (Qodir, 2016). Therefore, the religious conflict in Indonesia is not a problem that is easily underestimated but needs to be considered and resolved wisely so that this great nation is not easily divided by various parties, both individuals and groups, who are not responsible for the problems he has just done (Yunus, 2014). Almost in the last two decades (2000-2020), Indonesia is still faced with a series of conflicts and violence with religious nuances. Several survey institutions such as the Setara Institute, The Wahid Institute, CRCs, and Komnas HAM released a series of violations during the two decades. Every region in Indonesia has cases (events) of violations of religious freedom. The possibilities are very varied, such as cases of new sects in religion, houses of worship, issues of Christianity, and Islamic regulations and circumstances of religious authorities (Setara Institute, 2014; Wahid et al., 2015). These problems, if left unchecked, will gradually expand the space for inter-religious conflict. As Varshney et al. (2004), in one of their research results, mentioned that the number of violence (violence with religious nuances) in Indonesia is still very high. This figure is 89.3% with victims and 16.6% only occasionally and without victims.

The cases above, if grouped broadly, are divided into two types; the communal ones, namely inter-religious (Muslim-Christian), and the sectarian, namely internal religious communities (fellow Muslims) (Fauzi, 2009). These are communal and mainly occur in building houses of worship (Jamaludin, 2018). While the sectarian nature (internal to the people) occurs in the emergence of new sects and teachings and religious practices different from the general public (Takdir, 2017). In the communal case, the construction of houses of worship is the most trending case to date and is a problem in almost every region. Many conflicts occur as a result of this case. These include attacking each other (fights), vandalism, and burning houses of worship (Jamaludin, 2018).

As a country with diverse ethnic, national, and religious backgrounds, religious moderation comes and is present to create harmony in spiritual life in Indonesia (Suharto, 2021). According to Saifuddin (2019), which is explained in the 2019 religious moderation book issued by the Indonesian Ministry of Religion, harmony is needed naturally because God made everything on this earth side by side or in pairs so that this religious moderation can protect someone who is practicing their spiritual teachings, a religious adherent is not trapped exaggeratedly or fanatically on one side of the created partner. This book explains the meaning of religious moderation, the importance of religious moderation in spiritual life in Indonesia, as well as the strategies used in religious moderation so that religious people become moderate, and there are many explanations to answer questions that are often asked by the public regarding religious moderation in Indonesia (Saifuddin, 2019).

Looking at the phenomenon above, it is clear that religious moderation has received an in-depth discussion. However, the debate is mainly at community and government institutions, not at educational institutions. Therefore, this study emphasizes that educational institutions are suitable for spreading students' sensitivity to differences. Opening the space for dialogue, the teacher understands that religion carries messages of love, not hate, and the system in schools is free to accept these differences. One of the recommendations issued in the Jakarta Minutes reads that the government must lead a moderate religious strengthening movement as the mainstream by promoting the importance of good religious life as a spiritual and moral guide.

The classroom is a foundation for national ideas, teaching multiculturalism, presenting religious messages more gently, and expanding the love for humanity (Nisa, 2021). This manifests itself in a religiously moderate curriculum. Schools are at least a place to introduce moderate religious organizations, especially public schools and private schools affiliated with the two mass organizations, such as Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah. Therefore, moderate Islamic organizations in Indonesia need to take an active role because both of them are responsible for transnational ideologies that require changes in the Indonesian political system.

Studies on religious moderation in Indonesia have been found in some different settings (Arifinsyah et al., Azis et al., 2021; 2020; Kawangung, 2019). However, none of the studies discusses the concept and practice in higher education contexts. Therefore, the purpose of writing this article is to capture (describe and explain) moderate attitudes (religious moderation) and implementation in the higher education environment under the question, "What is the concept and practice of religious moderation in higher education institutions in Indonesia?". This is based on the fact that educational institutions are the spearhead in instilling moderation in students so that harmony and tolerance will be created to strengthen national unity and integrity. Besides that, a school is a miniature form of society because it is a gathering place for students from various racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds, providing the proper example of religious moderation.

## 2. METHODS

This study uses a literature review as the research design. The data were garnered from the largest scientific article database platform, Google Scholar. The keywords used to search the data were 'religious moderation', 'religious moderation in Indonesia', 'religious moderation in higher education', and 'religious moderation in Indonesian higher education'. From the search, 27 articles were published in national journals. The researchers selected six papers from these articles to explain the concept and practice of religious moderation in Indonesian higher education institutions. Furthermore, the data were analyzed in-depth using data analysis techniques through data condensation, data display, and data verification. At the outset, the researcher sorted the data based on two main categories, namely the concept of religious moderation which described the perception on what it means to be moderate in religion, and the practice of religious moderation which exemplified how this concept is implemented in the daily practice of people in higher education institutions. Then, the sorted data were interpreted using some relevant literature explained in the following section.

## 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### The Concept of Religious Moderation in Indonesia

Religion plays an essential role in the life of the Indonesian people, especially in formulating social norms. Religion, on the one hand, requires its adherents to be exclusive. But on the other hand, religion also teaches an inclusive or open attitude. Religion is present to protect and protect the rights of people to live and preserve human life. Religion has a significant position and role in the life of the Indonesian nation. This acknowledgement of the critical situation and function of religion is reflected in the stipulation of the principle of Belief in One God as the first principle of the state philosophy of Pancasila, which is also understood as the precepts that animate other declarations (Fauzi & Subiyantoro, 2021). To describe this concept, three writers have mentioned it profoundly in the following table.

**Table 1. The systematic summary of the religious moderation concept in Indonesia**

Writer(s)	Year	Method	Concept
Abror	2020	Library research	Religious tolerance is not about melting into one another's beliefs. Nor to exchange beliefs with different religious groups. Tolerance here is in the sense of <i>mu'amalah</i> (social interaction), so that there are common boundaries that may and may not be violated. This is the essence of moderation in a frame of tolerance

Writer(s)	Year	Method	Concept
			where each party is expected to be able to control themselves and provide space to respect each other's uniqueness without feeling threatened by their beliefs or rights.
Arifinsyah	2020	Library research	Awareness of human nature to be good, a moderate attitude promotes hospitality and compassion, upholds human dignity, and lives a life based on religion, morals and universal ethics, being aware and becoming part of world citizens, preventing radicalism and preserving harmony, managing plural and multicultural societies, and creating harmony between various streams within one religion.
Fahri & Zainuri	2019	Literature study	Religious moderation is represented through the attitude of <i>tawazun</i> (balance), <i>i'tidal</i> (straight), <i>tasamuh</i> (tolerance), <i>musawah</i> (equality), <i>syura</i> (deliberation), <i>ishlah</i> (reformation), <i>aulawiyah</i> (taking priority), and <i>tathawwur wa ibtikar</i> (dynamic and innovative)

Religious moderation cannot be separated from the term tolerance or tolerance. Religious moderation is a process, and tolerance is the result or outcome if restraint is applied. The word tolerance can be defined as openness, in the sense of liking everyone, allowing others to express their views, and not interfering with their freedom of thought. If we think about tolerance in this sense, we can say that it is an openness to hearing diverse points of view; tolerance works both ways, allowing people to express their opinions and accept ideas as long as they do not undermine the religious beliefs of those with whom they are disagreeing. In order to achieve a sense of national unity, tolerance for various religions is an essential component. In the meantime, the accomplishment of national growth is based on national harmony. In order to achieve a life of safety, peace, and harmony, religious communities must work together with a tolerant attitude and substantive mutual respect (Sairin, 2002).

In the Index of Religious Harmony (KUB published by the Center for Research and Development of Religious Guidance and Religious Services (2019), tolerance is one of the most significant indicators for creating religious harmony, namely, a condition of religious life that interacts harmoniously, tolerantly, peacefully, and mutually. Respect and respect religious differences and the freedom to practice one's worship.

Moderation in Islam is known as *wasathiyah*. According to Salami, *wasathiyah* comes from Arabic, taken from the root word, namely *wasath*, which means in the middle or in between. The word *wasath* also has many meanings, including the best, fair, balance, main, moderate, strength, security, unity, and *istiqamah* (Abror, 2020). Meanwhile, the opposite of moderation (*wasathiyah*) is excessive (*tatharruf*) and overstepping (*ghuluw*), which also means extreme and radical. Based on some of the meanings of *wasathiyah* as above, it can be concluded that, in essence, *wasathiyah* has flexibility and contextual characteristics depending on where the word is used. So in principle, *Wasathiyah* is an

attitude and behaviour that is not rigid but also not too flexible, not partial but has regulations and contains good values (Shihab, 2019).

The term "religious moderation" can be used to describe religious viewpoints, attitudes, and practices that strive for a medium ground between the extremes of right and left, i.e., those that are neither radical nor conservative (liberal). A person who practices religious moderation is someone who does not follow a dogmatic or fanatical path but rather one that is accepting, open, and committed to supporting ideals such as fairness, equity, and equality (Pajarianto et al., 2022). In a courteous and tolerant manner of religion, religious moderation avoids becoming radical or liberal, notably textual conservatism or neglecting context, or overly liberal, namely deifying reason and ignoring the text. If we're being broad, it's safe to say that someone who practices religious moderation does so with an eye toward avoiding the extremes while still upholding fairness and justice for all (Sutrisno, 2019).

Religious moderation is founded on two fundamental concepts that serve as the foundation for both religious activity and behaviour. As a starting point, justice is the attitude and behavior of never being biased or partial, always siding with the truth, putting things in their proper context, and giving something to those who deserve it; in a similar vein, religious moderation is an attitude and behavior of always upholding justice and truth in religious life. Second, there is the concept of balance, which refers to the philosophy's commitment to always striking a balance between reason and revelation, between this world and the next, between text and context, between physical and spiritual, and so on. To be out of balance does not imply being unprincipled; rather, it implies taking a solid stance and not leaning towards one side (Junaedi, 2019). Moderation in religion, understood as a concept that upholds the value of equilibrium must be capable of striking an equalizer in the relations of texts and ideas, of spirit and flesh and blood, of worldly and heavenly things, of religion and the state, of science and religion, of age versus age of development, modernity and tradition. It will be possible to achieve acceptable levels of tolerance and harmony in religious life if the two essential principles of religious moderation are correctly used in religious attitudes and behaviour in daily life. This will be true for both inter-religious and inter-religious relationships (Fahri & Zainuri, 2019).

For everyone to grasp religious moderation accurately and effectively, they must first become familiar with the indicators of religious moderation themselves. The religious attitudes and behaviour of several indicators of religious moderation can be used as a reference in religious attitudes and behaviour, particularly in Indonesia, which is characterized by archipelagic and multicultural characteristics (Abdullah et al., 2021). The following are indicators of religious moderation:

1. upholding national commitment;
2. are tolerant and harmonious;
3. non-violent ideology;
4. accommodate local culture;
5. can be accepted by the mind or is rationalist;
6. contextualist and tends to be textualist;
7. which does not appear in the primary source, is ijihad.

Religiosity as a guide to worship is not what religious moderation aspires to be. However, it also serves as a model for how we might best connect with one another and the rest of creation as God's creatures. The goal of religious moderation is to achieve contentment both now and in the life to come.

### **The Practice of Religious Moderation in Educational Institutions**

As a new approach, implementing religious moderation education requires specific instruments that must be met. These instruments are expected to provide general direction regarding religious moderation education, practical guidelines that are easy to apply, and techniques for measuring the success of religious moderation education.

**Table 2. The systematic summary of the religious moderation practice in Indonesia**

Writer(s)	Year	Method	Practice
Purwanto et al.	2019	Case study	The internalization method is carried out face-to-face in lectures, tutorials, seminars and the like. The evaluation is carried out through screening of Islamic insights orally and in writing on regular reports from lecturers and tutors.
Hefni	2020	Not mentioned	strengthening religious moderation content through the digital space as a counterweight to the rapid flow of information in the social media space. The counterbalance in question is a counter-narrative to create a substantive and essential religious framing, namely moderate and tolerant.
Nisa	2021	Descriptive qualitative research	Teaching staff is the first segmentation of the application of religious moderation education, the learning system can be through curriculum formation, integration or injection through extracurricular activities, as well as a school atmosphere that supports the educational system.

Several instruments are needed for the successful implementation of religious moderation education (Murtadlo, 2021), including:

1. Guidelines for implementing religious moderation education are translated into general policies, curriculum, and learning implementation plans (RPP). This section will be the starting point for the assessment (assessment) of religious moderation education in institutional units;
2. Integrative curriculum development. Practices carried out so far still seem partial to rely on particular subjects such as religious subjects;
3. Diversification of concrete examples of religious moderation activities. This section can be realized in the forms of interfaith student collaboration activities, making vlogs of religious moderation activities, and other similar activities;
4. Exemplary moderate behaviour from religious moderation education agencies, which include educators, supervisors, community leaders, student organization administrators, parents, and siblings;
5. The measurement system for the success of religious moderation education. This section is carried out by clarifying the measure of the success of religious moderation education from the availability of educational services, the achievement of average character scores, and other possible measuring tools that can be used to measure the success of religious moderation education.

Educational institutions are said to be one of the reasons for developing an intolerant understanding and the problem of economic inequality and weak law enforcement. In educational institutions, intolerant views emerge from higher education and secondary education. In the university environment, intolerant understandings breed, including those born from certain religious understanding study groups. In contrast, intolerant ideas are born from religious activities involving

people outside the institution in secondary education. Likewise, religious education institutions like Islamic boarding schools are interested in being a nursery for intolerant understanding (Hefni, 2020).

Formal education is education in an institution that has received legality from the government. As well as education in elementary schools to universities, both from government-owned educational institutions and from foundations. The university is led by a rector who is expected to give a new feel to the university. Under the auspices of the foundation, private universities usually have full authority in controlling or electing the chancellor (Khalifa & Ayoubi, 2015). The chancellor is elected by appointing internal and external parties. In this case, the head of the private university or the rector is determined by the foundation's board. It is straightforward for a university under private auspices to determine the direction of its higher education development (Joo et al., 2014). This includes the development of religious moderation in terms of its cultivation in universities. Religious moderation is a hot theme launched by the Ministry of Religion to be applied to all levels of society. College is no exception. Moderation behaviour in an institution like this is like prioritizing the benefit of all groups, likewise with selecting leaders in an institution. If you choose a mediocre leader but can minimize conflicts, that is prioritized (Purwanto et al., 2019).

A school setting with a target of realizing religious moderation must support various parties. One of the parties that must support it is the government. The government has a significant role in determining the development of religious moderation in school institutions. Decisions or recommendations from the government will go down to the teacher, so it is from this teacher that the values of moderation will be instilled in students at school. In this case, the role of a teacher is very crucial in education. The role of the teacher still exists even though a pandemic always hits an area. The role of the teacher as a tool is to keep students active in learning without having to go to school. This middle-of-the-road policy-making has indirectly made moderation in an educational institution (Ekawati et al., 2018).

Religious moderation in elementary schools is essential because elementary school is a time for a human to get a profound education and can be attached to a firm belief (Nashohah, 2021). At the time of primary education, humans get the criteria as a child in the golden age. The golden age referred to here is when children can receive knowledge without being clashed with previous knowledge. In other words, children will not debate the knowledge about religious moderation gained during the learning process with the knowledge they may have acquired at home or in the environment. Therefore, this is one of the advantages obtained by a teacher who teaches in elementary schools and targets religious moderation to be formed for students.

A child still in the essential education stage usually gets input on religious knowledge from non-formal schools but does not get all religious understanding. But only about the ability to read the Qur'an and procedures. Because at that time, children did not have an exceptional view of life or social activities related to religion. Therefore, it is straightforward for a religious education teacher to instill what he wants to invest in, in this case, knowledge of religious moderation. From this understanding, a child may know about solving problems in friendship. For example, if you find a fight between friends, intervening, providing experience, and being calm is the most important thing to do. The case of investigating who is guilty and who should be punished is another matter that might be resolved or closed with an apology (Sudrajat et al., 2021). Likewise, children participate in religious activities in the environment around the home or at school. It should be emphasized to children that in worship, they should underline very obligatory things such as prayer and reading the Qur'an must first be mastered and practised.

Religious moderation instilled in children is not in the form of arguments or decrees that are fatwas. However, it is more of a good and bad behaviour approach where this will be explained as things to do and not do (Zakariyah et al., 2022). For example, if you see a stone in the middle of the road. Even though the stone did not belong to him, nor did he have the right to the stone, the decision to move the stone to the side of the road was the right choice. When explaining this, the teacher will tell you that moving the stone does not change the ownership rights to the stone. While rolling stones can

help passersby. Actions like this can be a deep thought for students to be absorbed and applied to other areas of life. From this understanding, a child may know about solving problems in friendship. For example, if you find a fight between friends, intervening, providing knowledge, and being calm is the most important thing to do. The case of investigating who is guilty and who should be punished is another matter that might be resolved or closed with an apology (Tareen, 2015). Likewise, children participate in religious activities in the environment around the home or at school. It should be emphasized to children that in worship, they should underline very obligatory things such as prayer and reading the Qur'an must first be mastered and practised.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The concept of religious moderation is assumed as a way to increase wisdom passively and needs to be understood actively and rationally in interpreting diversity. The idea of religious moderation is still often understood to be limited to tolerance. It is still not understood that it also touches on national issues by creating a friendly diversity, wise viewing culture, and readiness to collaborate with fellow nations actively. Religious moderation lives in education, both formal and non-formal. Many universities carry out the development of religious moderation. These developments are applied to universities themselves, middle and elementary schools, Islamic boarding schools, and the community. The existence of educational institutions is the first step in grounding religious moderation in the broader community. Experts' study of religious moderation has become a new theory in solving problems in society, such as disputes and conflicts based on religion. In its implementation, most educators and education providers still do not fully understand religious moderation education. Religious moderation education needs to be described in technical instructions in stages according to the level of religious moderation agents. So far, the educational practice has followed the improvisation of individual educators without clear benchmarks. The study of religious moderation will become the centre of attention in the current era of globalization since this brings society to increase tolerance levels. Thus, further researchers are encouraged to conduct similar studies on this topic from different perspectives and settings.

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