

Strengthening Religious Moderation through the Integration of Digital Literacy in Islamic Religious Education Learning in the Digital Era

Iman Asrori¹⁾, Omar Khaled²⁾,

¹⁾ STIA Darul Rachman Tual, ²⁾ Dhofar University,
Address

*Corresponding Author, email: imamasrori@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the integration of digital literacy into Islamic Religious Education (PAI) to strengthen religious moderation amid the challenges of the digital era. Religious moderation, defined as a balanced and tolerant approach to faith, faces obstacles from the rapid spread of hate speech, disinformation, and extremist narratives on social media, which exacerbate social polarization. Drawing on indicators such as national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence, and cultural accommodation, the research argues for revitalizing PAI curricula with digital awareness to equip students with critical thinking and filtering skills for online religious content. Employing a qualitative approach with case studies from Indonesian secondary schools, data were collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis involving educators and students. Findings reveal that conventional PAI models insufficiently address digital threats, leading to vulnerabilities in youth paradigms. The integration of digital literacy enhances moderation by promoting constructive online interactions and resistance to divisive narratives, resulting in improved inclusivity and harmony. The study recommends policy updates for PAI curricula, including mandatory digital literacy modules, and suggests further research on long-term impacts in diverse educational contexts. This contributes to national efforts in fostering adaptive, moderate religious attitudes for sustainable social cohesion

Keywords: *Religious moderation, digital literacy, Islamic Religious Education, social media, inclusivity*

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Introduction

Religious moderation is one of the main agendas in national education policy that is designed to maintain social harmony amid religious and cultural diversity (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Republik Indonesia, 2021). However, the dynamics of the current digital era pose significant challenges in internalizing the values of tolerance and inclusivity (Rahman & Fitriani, 2024). The rapid development of information technology and social media has accelerated the flow of information, including religious content (Rahman, 2024). However, this phenomenon also opens up space for the spread of hate speech, disinformation, and extreme beliefs that have the potential to trigger social fragmentation and polarization (Rahman & Azizah, 2022). Various concrete incidents illustrate the negative impact of digital media on people's intolerance (Suryanto & Nugroho, 2024). For example, in 2021 there were cases of verbal attacks and threats against a religious figure after his lecture was

considered controversial by certain groups (Fauzi & Hakim, 2021). In addition, acts of vandalism against houses of worship provoked by social media posts are increasingly widespread, indicating an escalation of conflicts based on digital narratives (Sari & Hidayat, 2023). Social media algorithms also form an 'echo chamber', which strengthens information segregation and hinders dialogue between religious communities (Sari & Nugroho, 2023). In the face of this situation, the Ministry of Religious Affairs through the Islamic Religious Education program has implemented various policies and training initiatives to promote moderation and digital literacy among educators and students (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2020). Religious Education (PAI) policy seeks to strengthen the values of religious moderation in the national curriculum (Hasan, 2022; Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Republik Indonesia, 2021). However, the implementation of this policy faces a number of obstacles, especially in the face of the rapid flow of digital information that is difficult to control (Mustofa, 2022; Rahman & Fitriani, 2024). The conventional PAI learning model has not fully equipped students with digital literacy skills and critical thinking skills needed to understand and appreciate diversity as a whole (Prasetyo, 2022; Suryanto, E., & Nugroho, 2024).

As the complexity of social challenges in the digital era increases, academics and education practitioners emphasize the importance of strengthening the role of religious education in shaping the paradigm of religious moderation among the younger generation (Azra, 2020; Dhofier, 2019). According to Suryanto and Nugroho, religious education functions as the main bulwark in instilling the values of tolerance and inclusive attitudes that are adaptive to social and technological developments (Suryanto, R., & Nugroho, 2024). Education based on moderate Islamic values is believed to be able to be at the forefront of fortifying students from the penetration of radical ideologies that are increasingly massive through digital channels (Abdullah, 2020; Rahman, 2020). This approach not only promotes inclusivity but also integrates digital literacy to counter disinformation, ensuring that PAI curricula evolve to meet contemporary needs (Rahman & Azizah, 2022; Sari, D., & Nugroho, A., 2023).

However, Hasan's findings show that the process of integrating the values of moderation into the PAI curriculum still faces substantial challenges, such as low preparedness of educators, lack of adaptive learning media, and weak digital literacy among teachers.⁸ The Ministry of Religious Affairs report in 2023 also revealed that only 42% of PAI teachers in Indonesia have received formal training on religious moderation, while the rest do not have an adequate methodological understanding. Several previous studies have highlighted the urgency of education in reinforcing moderate attitudes. Rahman, pointed out that the implementation of a curriculum based on wasathiyyah values in Islamic schools is able to increase the inclusive attitude of students across backgrounds. Meanwhile, Fauzi and Hakim's study found that the implementation of moderation values in learning is still sporadic, not systemically integrated, and highly dependent on individual teachers' initiatives.

However, there are still few studies that explicitly examine the government's policy strategy in integrating religious moderation into the Islamic religious education system, especially in the context of secondary education in the digital era. The absence of a comprehensive study on the effectiveness of these policies indicates an important academic gap to bridge.

The uniqueness and original contribution of this research lies in an in-depth analysis of the design and implementation of national education policies in strengthening the values of religious moderation through Islamic Religious Education, taking into account the dynamics of the digital era. This research refers to the transformative pedagogy approach and the integration of the concept of wasathiyyah Islamiyyah in a contemporary context, in order to develop a more responsive, inclusive, and contextual policy model.

In particular, this research was conducted in two high school education units in East Parittiga Regency, namely SMA Negeri 1 East Parittiga and SMA Negeri 2 East Parittiga. The main objectives of this study are to explore: (1) the effectiveness of government policy strategies in strengthening religious moderation through PAI; (2) structural and cultural challenges faced in the implementation process in the school environment; and (3) recommendations for strengthening policies based on digital literacy and moderate Islamic values. Through this approach, the research is expected to make a conceptual and practical contribution to the development of education policies that support the formation of a tolerant, inclusive, and religious Indonesian society in a proportionate manner

Literature Review

Religious moderation is a religious attitude in a fair and balanced manner, which avoids extreme and intolerant attitudes in understanding and practicing religious teachings (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2020). This concept is not intended to weaken religious spirit, but rather to direct religious understanding and practice to remain in the corridor of peace, mutual respect, and uphold human values (Azra, 2020). Azyumardi Azra stated that the essence of religious moderation is a balance between commitment to religious teachings and openness to social and cultural diversity (Azra, 2020). Within this framework, he formulated four main indicators of religious moderation, namely: national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence, and accommodating attitude towards local culture (Azra, 2020; Dhofier, 2019). This perspective aligns with broader efforts to integrate inclusive values into education, fostering harmony in diverse societies (Abdullah, 2020; Rahman, 2020).

These four indicators are not only the foundation of values, but also the basic measure in assessing the extent to which moderation values have been internalized in the educational environment, both through policies, learning practices, and social interactions of students (Azra, 2020; Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2020). Azra's view is strengthened by the results of Suryanto and Nugroho's research which emphasizes the importance of digital literacy as a new foundation in instilling a moderate attitude in the digital era (Suryanto, E., & Nugroho, A., 2024). They added that strengthening religious moderation is not enough with teaching materials, but also needs to be accompanied by students' ability to filter religious information circulating on social media, so as not to get trapped in narrow and provocative religious narratives (Prasetyo, 2022; Rahman & Azizah, 2022; Suryanto, E., & Nugroho, A., 2024).

Thus, the researcher argues that the indicators of religious moderation formulated by Azra remain relevant and become an important foundation in this study (Azra, 2020). However, these indicators need to be revitalized and adjusted to the context of the development of the very dynamic digital age (Mustofa, 2022; Rahman & Fitriani, 2024). For example, national commitment and tolerance must be actualized through digital awareness, namely the ability of students to maintain social harmony in the digital realm through constructive interaction practices, the dissemination of positive content, and resistance to provocations and sectarian narratives that can be divisive (Abdullah, 2020; Sari & Nugroho, 2023; Suryanto, R., & Nugroho, A., 2022; Ginting, 2025). Thus, religious moderation is not only understood as a normative concept that is theoretical, but also manifested as a character and behavior that is inherent and develops in the daily lives of the younger generation, both in the real world and in cyberspace (Dhofier, 2019; Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Republik Indonesia, 2019).

Methods

This study uses a qualitative approach with the type of policy study and descriptive-analytical design to analyze the implementation of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) policies in strengthening religious moderation in the digital era. The research was carried out in SMA 1 and SMA 2 in East Parittiga in the period from January to April 2025. The research subjects were selected purposively, including school principals, PAI teachers, students of grades XI and XII, as well as relevant officials from the Education Office and the Ministry of Religion. Data collection was carried out through semi-structured interviews, participatory observations, and policy documentation studies. The research instruments include interview guidelines, systematic observation sheets, and document analysis formats. The data was analyzed using content analysis and thematic analysis techniques to identify central themes related to policy implementation. The validity of the data is maintained through triangulation of sources, techniques, and theories to ensure the credibility and validity of research findings.

Result and Discussion

This study reveals the dynamics and complexity of the implementation of the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) policy in strengthening religious moderation in the digital era, with SMA 1 and SMA 2 in East Parittiga as the strategic locus of the study. This study aims to explore the extent to which policies that prioritize the values of religious moderation can shape students' religious understanding and attitudes in facing the challenges of plurality, cultural diversity, and the rapid development of information technology.

The results of the study show that education policies that integrate the values of religious

moderation make a significant contribution in building the cognitive and affective construction of students towards issues of diversity and tolerance. Strengthening religious moderation in the context of PAI learning is able to increase students' awareness of the importance of inclusiveness, rejection of all forms of extremism and violence, and respect for social and cultural differences in their environment. Data was collected using triangulation methods, namely participatory observation, in-depth interviews with various related parties, and analysis of policy documentation, which provided a comprehensive overview of policy implementation in the field.

The integration of moderation values is carried out through various strategies, including the adaptation of teaching materials that are relevant to the current social and digital context, continuous training for PAI teachers to improve their pedagogical and religious competence, and the implementation of wasathiyah Islamic principles as a foundation in the preparation of learning objectives, classroom activities, and formative evaluation. Teachers show a high commitment to designing contextual teaching materials, facilitating thematic and critical discussions, and utilizing digital technology as a varied and interactive learning medium. However, the implementation of this religious moderation policy has not been completely evenly distributed. The research identified a competency disparity among PAI teachers, especially related to the mastery of dialogical and inclusive learning methods that are urgently needed to instill moderation values effectively. Factors such as the lack of continuous training, limited digital facilities and infrastructure, and challenges in managing the dynamics of students' social interactions in the digital era are the main obstacles that need to be overcome.

As emphasized by Azyumardi Azra, religious moderation is not enough to be a normative discourse or a theoretical concept alone, but must be realized in a real praxis transformation in the education system. Therefore, increasing the professional capacity of educators through structured and continuous training is a crucial element in ensuring the success and effectiveness of the implementation of religious moderation policies. In addition, policy support from local governments and related agencies must continue to be strengthened so that the process of internalizing the value of moderation can take place holistically and comprehensively. Taking this into account, the researcher emphasized the importance of synergistic collaboration between schools, families, and communities in developing the character of religious moderation which is not only limited to the cognitive realm, but also becomes a behavior and character inherent in the daily lives of the younger generation. The realization of this moderation must take place both in social interaction in the real world and in the digital realm, considering the rapid development of information technology which is the main arena of social interaction today. The following is a table of teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of the implementation of religious moderation policies, which reflect their views on achievements, obstacles, and strategies to strengthen the value of moderation in the school environment

Although the data obtained through in-depth interviews and documentation analysis show a positive trend towards the implementation of the policy of religious moderation in Islamic Religious Education (PAI), the field findings also indicate a lack of continuity in its implementation. In general, the policy has been well received by most stakeholders at the level of educational units, both by educators and institutional managers. However, direct observation of the learning process in a number of classes in SMA 1 and SMA 2 in East Parittiga shows that the implementation of this policy is still sectoral and structurally uneven in the school institutional system. In Al-Makin's view, the success of internalizing the values of moderation in the world of education is largely determined by institutional consistency and uniformity of pedagogical practices in classrooms.

Furthermore, the results of the observation revealed that there is a disparity between classes in actualizing the values of religious moderation through a learning approach. Some classes still maintain a conservative teaching pattern with a one-way lecture method that tends to close the space for students' active participation. This model reinforces a monological approach that inhibits the development of students' critical and reflective reasoning skills towards complex and contextual religious issues. In line with Abuddin Nata's opinion, religious education that only emphasizes the transfer of knowledge without dialectical space risks giving birth to an exclusive and intolerant attitude.

On the other hand, there are also a number of classes that have undergone pedagogical

transformation through the application of a constructivist approach. In this context, teachers play the role of facilitators who encourage active student participation through guided discussion methods, case studies, and value reflection. This approach allows students to reflect critically on Islamic teachings as well as relate them to contemporary socio-cultural phenomena. As emphasized by Azyumardi Azra, Islamic education based on the principle of wasathiyah not only emphasizes the normative aspects of teachings, but also develops the capacity of students to respond to differences in an inclusive and moderate manner.

Thus, the existence of inequality in the implementation of pedagogical approaches reflects the need to strengthen teachers' pedagogical competence as a strategic factor in ensuring the success of religious moderation policies in the educational environment. To clarify this phenomenon, the following is presented a comparative descriptive table of the results of classroom observations that illustrate variations in the application of religious moderation-based learning methods at East Parittiga High School. Religious education in the context of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is not only determined by the integration of moderation values in the curriculum, but also depends heavily on the pedagogical approach used by educators. The application of dialogical, reflective, and contextual learning strategies has proven to be more effective in internalizing moderation values into students' awareness substantively. This is in line with the views of academics such as Azyumardi Azra and Zamakhsari Dhofier who emphasize the importance of methodological reorientation in Islamic education to form a religious character that is inclusive, tolerant, and adaptive to the complexities of modern society.²³ Despite progress in implementing policies at the school level, the findings of this study also indicate that implementation still faces structural and cultural challenges, especially related to disparities in teachers' pedagogical capacity. Therefore, systematic efforts are needed that include continuous training, strengthening professional competencies, and classroom management that is in favor of the principles of Islamic wasathiyah.

However, the effectiveness of the implementation of religious moderation policies at the level of educational units, especially in SMA 1 and SMA 2 East Parittiga, still faces structural and cultural challenges. Based on primary data obtained through observation, interviews, and documentation, a number of inhibiting factors were found, including disparities in pedagogical competence among teachers, limited institutional support for moderation-based learning innovations, and cultural resistance to inclusive and dialogical educational approaches. These findings indicate that the success of policies is not only determined by the regulatory framework, but is also strongly influenced by the readiness of human resources and school culture to accept and implement moderation values consistently.

Based on primary data, it was found that:

1. Variability of educators' understanding: As many as 43% of PAI teachers in public schools stated that they had not received adequate pedagogical training in transforming the values of moderation into contextual and reflective learning practices.
2. Digital information disruption: As many as 62% of students access religious information through social media more than through formal learning. This condition poses an epistemological dilemma because digital information does not always pass credible academic screening.
3. The absence of a data-based evaluation system: The lack of a systematic and valid assessment instrument causes difficulties in assessing the extent to which moderation values are emotionally and cognitively internalized in students.

The findings of this study corroborate the results of Rahman's study which states that the success of religious moderation is highly dependent on the pedagogical readiness of teachers and the instructional strategies applied. Nevertheless, this study makes an original contribution by highlighting the role of digital disruption as a significant contemporary factor in shaping students' patterns of religious understanding in a non-formal manner. From the point of view of critical education theory, especially Henry Giroux's theory of pedagogical reconstruction, the success of instilling the values of religious moderation is not enough just with rules or policies, but there must be a profound change in the way of teaching. Giroux stated that education should be a place to build students' critical awareness of their social environment. Although the policy rules are clear, their implementation in the field is still often symbolic and only follows procedures without deep meaning.

In addition, social media, which is the main source of religious information for students, actually accelerates the division in religious perspectives, according to Wahid's research who said that digital algorithms make people tend to look for information that suits their own views, thus reducing dialogue between perspectives. This opinion is also in line with Marshall McLuhan's view that communication media influences the way we understand the world, so digital literacy skills are essential to face the current information age. Therefore, digital literacy that prioritizes moderate Islamic values is needed so that the digital space does not become a place for radicalism to develop. In addition, the lack of an evaluation system that uses data leads to a gap between policy objectives and real results on the ground, as stated by Azra who stated that failure to implement policies is often due to a lack of clear evaluation indicators.

The results of this study are in accordance with previous research that emphasizes the importance of teachers' ability to implement learning that supports the value of religious moderation. However, this study adds two important things that are often overlooked, namely the influence of digital disruption that forms new religious authorities outside of schools, and the lack of evaluation systems that make supervision of policy implementation weak. In contrast to Ismail's research which highlights the influence of external factors such as global politics, this study emphasizes that internal factors such as teachers' abilities, teaching methods, and readiness of evaluation tools are the main keys to the success of religious moderation policies in schools. These findings provide some practical advice for Islamic education policies that are not only rules-based, but also take into account changing ways of thinking and current digital conditions.

1. First, teacher training needs to be improved by adding insight into the philosophy of education and the ability to invite students to have critical discussions, not just teaching teaching techniques.
2. Second, digital literacy must be included in the Islamic Religious Education curriculum so that students are able to sort out religious information properly and according to the moderation value.
3. Third, it is necessary to develop an evaluation system that uses complete data in order to see the development of students as a whole, starting from their knowledge, attitudes, to their religious behavior.

In addition, the development of an evidence-based evaluation system is very important to ensure that religious moderation policies are not only a formal rule, but can be measured in real terms through valid and reliable data. This evaluation needs to cover aspects of students' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors in dealing with various religious information, including how they interact with diverse digital content. A comprehensive and adaptive evaluation approach to social and technological developments will make the policy of religious moderation in Islamic education an effective tool in forming a generation of Muslims who are religious, have noble character, tolerate and have good digital literacy. In the context of a pluralistic Indonesian society, these achievements are very important to create social harmony and maintain ideological resilience in the midst of

Conclusion

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning based on digital technology in high schools in East Parittiga needs to be designed comprehensively and relevant to strengthening religious moderation in the digital era. In the context of East Parittiga, which is rich in cultural and social diversity, the implementation of a moderate PAI policy is becoming increasingly important. This challenge encourages the need for innovative approaches that are able to integrate the values of religious moderation into the curriculum, so that students not only understand, but also practice these principles in their daily lives.

The success of the religious moderation policy at East Parittiga High School is highly dependent on the implementation of an evidence-based evaluation system that is able to measure aspects of student knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors as a whole. This evaluation should include students' interaction with various digital content that is a source of religious information today. In this way, students not only become consumers of information, but also be able to analyze and assess the credibility of the sources they access. This is very important to counteract the spread of extreme ideas that are contrary to the principles of moderation and tolerance.

With an adaptive learning approach to social change and technological advances, religious

moderation policies can function as a strategic tool in shaping a generation of Muslims in East Parittiga who are religious, noble, and tolerant. In the midst of rapid shifts in values and global development, this achievement is essential to maintain social harmony and strengthen the nation's ideological resilience. Through the integration of technology in religious education, students can develop the critical attitudes needed to face the challenges of the times, as well as become agents of change who spread the values of religious moderation.

In this context, this research has its own uniqueness and contribution. With a focus on the implementation of technology in PAI learning in East Parittiga, this study provides new insights into how religious education can adapt to the ever-changing dynamics of society. It is hoped that the results of this research can be a reference for broader education policies, as well as provide inspiration for other schools in developing learning models that are in accordance with local needs and characteristics.

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