

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF MADRASAH IBTIDAIYAH THROUGH RELIGIOUS MODERATION APPROACH: A STUDY OF BASIC EDUCATION LITERATURE IN INDONESIA

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Abstract: Elementary School (MI), as an Islamic-based basic education institution in Indonesia, has a strategic role in shaping a quality generation, both in terms of academics and character. However, challenges such as low quality of education, lack of innovation, and potential radicalism demand relevant quality improvement strategies. The religious moderation approach emerges as a promising solution to improve the quality of MI through strengthening tolerance, inclusiveness, and balance in religious education. This article aims to review the literature on improving the quality of MI through a religious moderation approach, focusing on the concept, implementation, and impact on basic education in Indonesia. The literature study method is used to analyze Scopus-indexed journals, SINTA, and supporting books. The results show that religious moderation can improve the quality of Elementary Schools in MI through an inclusive curriculum, contextual learning methods, and the role of teachers as role models.

Keywords: Elementary School, Religious Moderation, Literatur Review

INTRODUCTION

Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) is one of the important pillars of the basic education system in Indonesia. As a formal educational institution under the auspices of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, MI is tasked with conveying general knowledge such as mathematics, the Indonesian language, and natural sciences and is responsible for shaping students' Islamic character through in-depth religious education. In this context, MI is expected to be a forum for forming a generation that is intelligent, noble, and able to live harmoniously in a diverse society. However, the reality on the ground shows that many MIs are still lagging in quality compared to public primary schools in terms of facilities, teaching staff, and students' academic achievements. (Ratnah et al., 2024)

Indonesia's cultural, religious, and ethnic diversity makes basic education crucial in maintaining social stability. With more than 17,000 islands and 700 regional languages, Indonesia has the highest level of pluralism in the world. In this diversity, MI has a strategic role to instill tolerance and mutual respect from an early age. However, challenges such as the low quality of education, (Tarigan, 2023) lack of innovation in teaching methods and the potential spread of radicalism through poorly managed religious education are real obstacles that must be overcome. Therefore, an approach is needed to answer these challenges while improving the quality of MI. (Ahmad et al., 2024)

Religious moderation emerges as a relevant and strategic concept in this context. The term religious moderation, or in Islamic tradition known as *Al-Wasathiyah* (Musyarrofah & Zulhannan, 2023), refers to a middle attitude that avoids extremism, both in the form of excessive fanaticism

and indifference to religious values. This concept is in line with the vision of national education as stated in Law No. 20/2003 on the National Education System, which is to create people of faith, piety, and noble character, as well as being able to contribute to social life. In MI, religious moderation can be the foundation for forming students who understand Islamic teachings deeply and can apply them in daily life inclusively and harmoniously. (Andrianto, 2025).

The challenge of MI quality cannot be separated from Indonesia's social and religious dynamics. History shows that religious-based conflicts, such as those in Ambon and Poso in the early 2000s, often stem from a narrow and intolerant understanding of religion. Primary education, including MI, is responsible for preventing similar things from happening in the future by instilling moderation values from an early age. Early studies show that the religious moderation approach can reduce the potential for radicalism among students, (Nashir, 2024) while improving their ability to think critically and interact with diverse environments. This makes this approach a solution that is reactive and proactive in improving the quality of education.

The attitude of tolerance of madrasah ibtida'iyah students can be realized through the cultivation of tolerance through teaching provided by teachers, activities that are integrated into the teacher's learning process, (Kamal, 2023) the role of MI in the national education system has received increasing attention along with the government's policy to strengthen moderate religious-based education. The Ministry of Religious Affairs, through various programs such as teacher training and curriculum development, has made religious moderation one of its national priorities. (Hendra, 2022.) In the 2020-2024 National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN), religious moderation is integrated to maintain social stability and prevent extremism. In the context of MI, this policy opens up opportunities to transform basic education into higher quality in academics and student character building.

However, implementing religious moderation in MI is inseparable from various obstacles. (Husna & Thohir, 2020) One is resistance from some communities, which still view this approach as a form of secularisation or reduction of the essence of religion. In addition, the limited competence of teachers in understanding and teaching moderation values is another obstacle. (Shiddiqoh, 2024) The literature shows that the religious moderation approach is challenging to realize optimally without adequate support, both in terms of training and infrastructure. Therefore, this study is relevant to identify effective strategies to overcome these obstacles while improving the quality of MI.

This article addresses this need with a systematic literature study approach. By analyzing various literature sources, including Scopus-indexed international journals, SINTA-indexed national journals, and supporting books, this article aims to provide a comprehensive overview of how religious moderation can catalyze improving the quality of MI. The focus of the study includes the concept of religious moderation, its implementation strategy in MI, and its impact on basic education in

Indonesia. This approach is expected to provide theoretical and practical contributions to MI managers and education policymakers.

The urgency of this study is increasingly felt in global and national challenges faced by the world of education today. Basic education in Indonesia, including MI, must adapt to rapid social and technological changes. Religious moderation is relevant in a religious context and in shaping students' attitudes that are adaptive, critical, and open to the times. Thus, this article talks about improving the quality of MI internally and its position in supporting the vision of inclusive and sustainable national education.

METHODOLOGY

This research uses a literature study approach with a theoretical review method.(Sugiyono,2018) Data were collected from various literature sources, including Scopus-indexed international journals that discuss religious moderation and Islamic education, SINTA-indexed national journals that focus on basic education and Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, and supporting books relevant to education management and religious moderation in Indonesia.

The analysis process began by identifying key themes, such as the definition of religious moderation, implementation strategies in MI, and indicators of improving education quality. The data were then analyzed qualitatively to develop a synthesis supporting this article's main argument. Inclusion criteria included publications within the last 10 years (2015-2025) to ensure relevance to current conditions.

DISCUSSION

The Concept of Religious Moderation in Education

Religious moderation is a balanced religious attitude and practice that avoids extremism (both radicalism and liberalism) and promotes tolerance and justice.[9] In the Islamic context, this concept refers to *ummatan wasathan* (the middle people) as mentioned in the Qur'an, Surat Al-Baqarah verse 143, which affirms Muslims as a just and chosen community.[10] In education, religious moderation aims to create a harmonious and inclusive learning environment that supports the formation of moderate student characters.

According to Qomar (2019), religious moderation in education focuses on preventing extremism and developing a contextualized understanding of religion that is relevant to modern life. In MI, this approach can be realized through teaching values such as *tawassuth* (moderate), *tasamuh* (tolerance), and *i'tidal* (justice). These values become the foundation for forming students who can practice religious teachings without compromising social relations in a diverse environment.

A study by Lukens-Bull (2019) in a Scopus journal confirms that moderation-based education in Muslim countries, including Indonesia, has a positive impact on reducing social conflicts. This research shows that schools that adopt a moderation approach tend to produce graduates who

are more tolerant and able to contribute to a multicultural society. In the context of MI, this concept can be a framework to strengthen Islamic identity while supporting social harmony in Indonesia.

The Quality Challenge of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in Indonesia

The literature shows that MI faces many challenges in improving its quality, which can be detailed as follows: Quality Gap: Many MIs, especially in rural areas, have limited facilities, such as inadequate classrooms, lack of laboratories, and minimal access to educational technology. In addition, the quality of the teaching force is often an obstacle, as some MI teachers do not have professional certification or adequate training. This leads to a significant quality gap compared to public primary schools, especially regarding students' academic achievement.

Rigid Curriculum: Religious learning approaches in MI are often dogmatic and less contextualized with students' social realities. Religious subject matter tends to be delivered textually without links to contemporary issues such as interfaith tolerance or cultural diversity. As a result, students find it challenging to apply religious values in their daily lives, ultimately limiting character education's effectiveness in MI.

Potential Radicalism: Without good management, religious education in MI risks spreading extreme views [15]. Several cases show that narrow and intolerant interpretations of religion can flourish in educational settings if teachers or curricula cannot filter content compatible with the value of moderation. This challenge emphasizes the need for innovative strategies to ensure that MI is a place to learn religion and an agent of inclusive attitude formation.

3. Implementation of Religious Moderation in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah

The religious moderation approach can be implemented in MI through three main aspects: curriculum, learning methods, and the role of teachers. The curriculum needs to be designed to reflect the values of religious moderation. the integration of *tawassuth* and *tasamuh* in PAI subjects can be done by including material on Islam Nusantara (Septianingsih et al., 2024), which emphasizes an Islamic approach that is inclusive and adaptive to local culture. For example, students can learn how Islamic traditions in Java or Sumatra coexist with local customs without losing the essence of religious teachings.

The Merdeka Curriculum, which will be implemented in 2022, provides flexibility for MIs to develop materials relevant to the local context. In this case, historical stories about moderate Islamic figures such as Gus Dur or Buya Hamka can be used as teaching materials to inspire students. With this approach, the curriculum is not only a tool for knowledge transfer but also a medium for forming tolerant and open attitudes.

Contextual Learning Methods: Learning methods such as Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) allow students to relate moderation values to their experiences. showed that group discussions on

cultural diversity in MI improved students' understanding of the importance of tolerance.(Fitriani et al., 2023) For example, students can be asked to discuss how they can live harmoniously with neighbors of different religions or ethnicities. In addition, role simulation is an effective method of training students to appreciate differences. In simulations, students can play the role of characters from diverse backgrounds so that they learn to understand other people's perspectives firsthand. This approach not only strengthens theoretical understanding but also social skills that are essential in community life.

Teachers' role as role models: MI teachers have a central role as agents of moderation.(Mulyana, 2023) Teachers' inclusive and fair attitude can be a real role model for students. A teacher who respects differences of opinion in class or shows empathy towards students from different backgrounds will positively impact student character building. Teacher training on religious moderation is also key to the success of this implementation. For example, the training program conducted by the Ministry of Religious Affairs has been proven to improve teachers' pedagogical competence in managing diverse classrooms. With adequate training, teachers can be more confident in delivering moderation materials and handling potential conflicts in the learning environment.

The religious moderation approach positively impacts the quality of MI in several aspects: Improved Student Character showed that MI students who were taught the value of tolerance had a more open and inclusive attitude than the control group. In this study, students exposed to the moderation approach showed a better ability to resolve conflicts peacefully and respect differences.

When students feel that religious learning does not contradict the reality of their lives, they tend to be more enthusiastic and active in the learning process, ultimately improving academic achievement. When students feel that religious learning does not contradict the reality of their lives, they tend to be more enthusiastic and active in the learning process, ultimately improving academic achievement. Then, the institution's reputation: MIs implementing religious moderation tend to have a positive image in the community as institutions supporting social harmony.

Challenges and Solutions in Implementation Although promising, implementing religious moderation in MI faces challenges such as resistance from conservative communities, teachers' lack of understanding of the concept, and limited resources. Solutions that can be implemented include intensive socialization and the involvement of parents and communities in understanding the importance of religious moderation. Then, teachers will conduct continuous training programs to improve their competence in teaching moderation. Infrastructure Support Utilisation of digital technology to enrich religious moderation materials.

CONCLUSION

The religious moderation approach offers an effective strategy to improve the quality of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in Indonesia. Through an inclusive curriculum, contextualized learning methods, and the role of

teachers as role models, MI can produce graduates who are not only academically competent but also have moderate, tolerant, and inclusive characters. This literature review confirms that religious moderation is a tool to prevent extremism and a catalyst for transforming higher-quality basic education. The recommendation for future research is to conduct an empirical study to measure the effectiveness of implementing this approach in MI directly.

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