

The Transformation of Religious Moderation in the Islamic Religious Education Curriculum

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Abstract

Religious moderation has become a crucial discourse in Indonesian Islamic education amid rising radicalism, intolerance, and identity polarization. This study focuses on how religious moderation is organically practiced in a multireligious educational setting. The study employs a qualitative case study design at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri 1 Kepulauan Meranti, Riau, utilizing document analysis, participant observation, and in-depth interviews with 15 informants. Data were analyzed through the stages of thematic reduction, display, and verification following Miles and Huberman. The findings indicate that religious moderation cannot be reduced to state policy alone but must emerge as a theological consciousness rooted in the Islamic value of *wasathiyah*. The study concludes that a holistic-integrative transformation of the Islamic Religious Education curriculum encompassing content, methods, activities, and character assessment is absolutely necessary to foster a generation that is moderate, tolerant, and committed to national unity. The case of State Madrasah Tsanawiyah 1 in the Meranti Islands, Riau, demonstrates that the coexistence of Islamic madrasahs and Buddhist educational institutions can serve as a living laboratory for religious moderation education, evidenced by organic interfaith cooperation that transcends formal policy mandates.

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INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of radicalism, intolerance, and religious polarization that has swept Indonesia over the past decade has placed Islamic educational institutions in a strategic yet highly pressured position. Data from the National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT) shows that extremist networks consistently target school and university students in their recruitment efforts. In line with this, a survey by the Wahid Foundation, (2023) indicates that some madrasah students exhibit intolerant tendencies toward followers of other religions. This social reality underscores that religious education cannot continue as usual.

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In academic studies, the integration of religious moderation into the Islamic Religious Education curriculum has not yet received proportionate attention. Most existing research remains focused on the level of policy dissemination (Mukhibat et al., 2024; Jannah & Futaqi, 2026; Muvid et al., 2023), while in-depth studies on the philosophical and theological transformation of the value of *wasathiyah* into curriculum design and teaching practices particularly in a multireligious context remain very limited. This study aims to fill that gap.

This study aims to analyze the philosophical foundations of religious moderation (*wasathiyah*) and its relevance to the reformulation of the contemporary Islamic education paradigm; to formulate strategies for integrating religious moderation into the Islamic Religious Education curriculum through a holistic-integrative approach; and to empirically examine the implementation of religious moderation as a lived experience in a multireligious environment. This study tests the hypothesis that effective religious moderation cannot arise solely from a top-down state policy approach, but must be rooted in an organic theological consciousness that is transformed through curriculum design and authentic social interaction. Three research questions are posed: i) What are the philosophical foundations of religious moderation from an Islamic perspective, and how are they relevant to contemporary Islamic education?, ii) How is the holistic-integrative strategy of religious moderation implemented in the Islamic Religious Education curriculum?, iii) How is religious moderation practiced organically within multi-religious educational communities in madrasah schools?

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative case study design, as recommended by Yin (2018). This design was chosen because the study aims to understand the phenomenon of religious moderation within a unique and specific social context: MTsN 1 Kepulauan Meranti, which is directly adjacent to the Budi Patria Dharma Foundation in Selatpanjang, Riau. The units of analysis include: the madrasah institution as an organizational entity, the curriculum and instructional materials for Islamic Religious Education, as well as social interactions among religious communities within the madrasah environment (Diana & Ulumuddin, 2025; Mahbubi, 2026; Dewantara, 2025; Engkizar et al., 2025; 2026).

Research informants were selected through purposive sampling based on the relevance of their roles and direct involvement in the phenomenon under study. The study involved 15 informants consisting of: the madrasah principal, the vice principal for curriculum, Islamic Religious Education teachers (5 people), non-Islamic Religious Education teachers (3 people), educational staff from neighboring institutions, local community leaders, and student representatives (3 people).

Data was collected through three complementary methods. First, a desk review of policy documents (Decision of the Minister of Religion No. 93 of 2022), the Islamic Religious Education curriculum, and academic literature on *wasathiyah*. Second, participant observation over a two-month period (February–March 2026) to observe social interaction practices among religious communities and the implementation of Islamic Religious Education. Third, in-depth interviews with 15 informants to obtain the philosophical foundations and reasoning behind the practices of religious moderation taking place at MTsN 1 Kepulauan Meranti.

Data were analyzed through three stages as outlined by Miles and Huberman (2018): (1) thematic data reduction based on the research questions; (2) data display through thematic tables, relationship matrices, and interview excerpts representing key patterns; and (3) verification through comparison and contextualization of the data within social reality. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation

(interviews, documents, observations), member checking, and peer debriefing with experts in Islamic education.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Philosophical Foundation of *Wasathiyah* in Contemporary Islamic Education

Research findings indicate that the educational community at MTsN 1 Kepulauan Meranti understands religious moderation substantively not merely as a government policy, but as a theological value rooted in Islamic teachings. Based on an analysis of curriculum documents and in-depth interviews, it was found that the practice of religious moderation at this madrasah reflects at least four of the ten values of *wasathiyah*: *tawassuth*, *tasamuh*, *i'tidal*, and *musawah*. Their manifestations are summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Manifestations of *Wasathiyah* Values at MTsN 1 Kepulauan Meranti

<i>Wasathiyah</i> Value	Manifestation in Educational Practice
<i>Tawassuth</i>	A non-extreme attitude in interpreting religious teachings in Islamic Education subjects; teachers prioritize contextual and dialogical approaches
<i>Tasamuh</i>	Recognition and respect for the existence of the Buddhist educational institution (Budi Patria Dharma Foundation) located directly adjacent to the madrasah
<i>I'tidal</i>	Provision of worship facilities (<i>mushola</i>) for Muslim teachers and students within the Buddhist-based school environment as a form of relational justice
<i>Musawah</i>	Absence of religious-based discrimination in daily inter-institutional interactions; 80% of educators in the neighboring institution are Muslims

Source: Interview Findings and Document Analysis (2026)

Interview results with the madrasah principal confirm that an understanding of *wasathiyah* has become the guiding principle in the management of the madrasah: “*We do not teach an Islam that is hostile toward other religions. Our neighbor is the Budi Patria Dharma Foundation, and we have lived side by side in harmony for years. That is the true practice of wasathiyah.*”

These findings have fundamental implications for how we understand religious moderation in Islamic education. While religious moderation has largely been implemented as a government policy initiative (top-down), this study demonstrates that the sustainability of moderation actually depends on the extent to which it has become part of the community’s theological consciousness. This aligns with the argument by Soim et al., (2025), who assert that moderation must be an “inner consciousness” born from the depths of Islamic thought. A policy-based approach alone is vulnerable to changes in regime and political priorities, whereas theological consciousness integrated into the curriculum and school culture possesses far greater resilience. The case of MTsN 1 demonstrates that when the value of *wasathiyah* has become part of the institutional identity, moderation is no longer a subject taught but a value lived out (Akhmadi, 2019).

Strategies for Integrating Religious Moderation into the Islamic Religious Education Curriculum

An analysis of the Islamic Religious Education curriculum documents and syllabi at MTsN 1 Kepulauan Meranti indicates that the integration of religious moderation is carried out through three main channels: content, teaching methods,

and extracurricular activities. In terms of content, topics such as “*Ukhuwah Islamiyyah and Ukhuwah Insaniyyah*,” “Interfaith Tolerance,” and “Moderate Attitudes in Islam” are explicitly integrated into the syllabus. Regarding teaching methods, Islamic Religious Education teachers rely more on dialogic learning, case discussions, and reflections on social experiences than on one-way lectures.

An interesting finding emerged from classroom observations of 8th-grade Islamic Religious Education, where the teacher used the context of inter-institutional neighborhood life as contextual teaching material: “*Just look at the school next to us. We can learn together, respecting one another. That is true tolerance, not just in books.*” This contextualization approach aligns with the views of Nasri & Tabibuddin, (2023) regarding the revitalization of the function of Islamic education in a multicultural context.

These findings regarding the three pathways of integration both confirm and go beyond the findings of Mukhibat et al., (2024), which focused primarily on incorporating moderation into relevant subjects. This study demonstrates that the most effective integration occurs when all three pathways work synergistically. Dialogic learning methods without adequate moderate content will be hollow; conversely, moderate content without participatory methods will become meaningless rote memorization. This implies that religious moderation is a multidimensional character competency: cognitive (understanding the concept of *wasathiyah*), affective (internalizing the value of tolerance), psychomotor (practicing moderate attitudes), and spiritual (experiencing *wasathiyah* as a command from Allah). None of these dimensions can be developed through a single learning method (Suryanto, 2024; Abas et al., 2025; Ummi & Achadi, 2025; Suwar & Ichsan, 2024; Rambe et al., 2025).

Religious Moderation as a Lived Experience in a Multireligious Environment

The most significant finding of this study is the empirical evidence that religious moderation can develop organically through social interaction, rather than solely through policy directives. MTsN 1 Kepulauan Meranti and the Budi Patria Dharma Foundation are separated only by a physical fence, yet socially they demonstrate a harmonious and inclusive relationship. During the 2021/2022 academic year, the Budi Patria Dharma Foundation undertook building renovations by demolishing two floors of a four-story building directly adjacent to the madrasah a decision grounded in safety considerations and social responsibility toward its neighbors. Furthermore, approximately 80% of the teaching staff at the foundation are Muslim, and the school provides a prayer room for Muslim teachers and students. This fact demonstrates interreligious coexistence that is not merely formalistic but grows from a shared sense of awareness.

A senior teacher who has taught at the madrasah for 15 years stated: “*We have never felt there was a problem with their school’s presence. In fact, we look out for one another. If there is a major event, we inform each other so as not to disturb one another.*” This statement reflects mutual recognition and trust that no policy can provide (Nurainiah et al., 2024).

The fact that MTsN 1 Kepulauan Meranti has been able to maintain harmonious relations with Buddhist institutions for years without external policy intervention reinforces the thesis that Islamic educational institutions can function as active agents of social cohesion. This phenomenon can be understood through the framework of organic interreligious coexistence: when two communities share physical space and daily life, they build trust that cannot be created by policy alone. The implication for national Islamic education policy is the need to encourage more madrasahs to utilize the surrounding multicultural social context as a pedagogical resource, rather than fortifying themselves against differences.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the strongest practices of religious moderation do not stem from sophisticated curriculum design or intensive government policies, but rather from everyday social interactions grounded in the theological value of *wasathiyah*, which has become an integral part of the madrasah's institutional identity. The fact that a Buddhist-based educational institution was willing to renovate its building for the safety of a neighboring madrasah and provide a prayer room for Muslim teachers is evidence that true religious moderation transcends the boundaries of religion itself.

From an academic contribution perspective, this study focuses more on policy: without a strong theological foundation (*wasathiyah*) and without contextualization within a multicultural social reality, policies on religious moderation will lose their essence. This study also contributes a new analytical framework in the form of an integration triad (content-method-social context) as a comprehensive approach to measuring the effectiveness of religious moderation education.

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