Religious Moderation in Islamic Boarding School-Based International Educational Institutions in Indonesia

Mukhammad Bakhruddin[1*], Evy Fatimatur Rusydiyah[2], Mirwan Akhmad Taufiq[2], Muhamad Wahid Nur Tualeka[1], Mochamad Syaifudin[3], Muhammad Syaikhon[4]

[1]Universitas Muhammadiyah Surabaya, Indonesia
[2]Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel Surabaya, Indonesia
[3]Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Al Khoziny Sidoarjo, Indonesia
[4]Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Surabaya, Indonesia
[*]Corresponding Author Email: bakhruddin@um-surabaya.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the implementation of religious moderation in international Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia using the national framework of religious moderation, which comprises moderation of thought, movement, and action. Employing a qualitative multiple-case study design, the research examines two institutions in Malang International Islamic Boarding School (IIBS) Al Izzah and IIBS Thursina through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation analysis. Data were analyzed thematically using a framework-based approach guided by the interactive model of Miles and Huberman. The findings reveal that religious moderation is implemented in an integrated and contextual manner. Moderation of thought is reflected in the alignment of Islamic teachings with national ideology and civic values. Moderation of movement is manifested through daily social practices that promote tolerance and dialogue. Moderation of action is evident in the rejection of violence and the selective accommodation of local culture in accordance with Islamic principles. Overall, the study challenges perceptions of international pesantren as exclusive institutions and highlights their role in fostering inclusive and peaceful religious life in Indonesia.

Keywords: Islamic Boarding Schools, Religious Education, Religious Moderation.

INTRODUCTION

Religion generally not only influences individual attitudes but also shapes important interpersonal relationships that are vital for social sustainability. (Hamza & Shirazi, 2025). A Muslim is committed to encouraging every individual to reflect upon and develop personal values of honor and civility regarding the coexistence of different religious and cultural groups (Nazmi, Yusuf, & Siregar, 2024), which also refers to values derived from the Qur'an and Sunnah (Alabdulhadi, 2019). Indonesian society has its own characteristics, where Muslims in Indonesia are known to have an adaptive and accommodative religious character that is flexible and tolerant. This is why it is said that the pattern of religious life of Muslims in Indonesia represents moderate Islam and avoids extremism (Syaikhu & Syaifudin, 2024; Yunanto, 2018).

Religious moderation is a central issue in strengthening religious life in a multicultural society, particularly in Indonesia, which has a diversity of ethnicities, cultures, and religions. Religious moderation is crucial as a strategy to prevent social polarization, extremism, and intolerance, as well as to create social harmony (Azra, 2022). Religious moderation is a balanced approach to religious practices, avoiding excessiveness or extremism. Every religion always invites its followers to engage in virtuous actions and behavior. Followers who poorly understand their religious teachings may fall into extremism or religious fanaticism (Kandil, 2023). Moderation, often associated with tolerance, has been defined in many ways in the literature. In the 'Declaration of Principles on Tolerance,' the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) states that tolerance is the respect, acceptance, and appreciation of the diversity of our world's cultures, expressions, and ways of being human (Husna & Albina, 2025). Tolerance is harmony in difference. It is not only a moral obligation but also a political and legal requirement. Tolerance, the virtue that enables peace, contributes to replacing a culture of war with a culture of peace (Alabdulhadi, 2019).

The Indonesian state has granted freedom to all its citizens to embrace and practice their religion in daily life according to their beliefs. Indonesia, a vast country consisting of 17,000 islands, 1,340 ethnic groups, and 652 languages needs to maintain and preserve the existence of religious moderation while safeguarding unity amidst its pluralism (Badan Pengembangan dan Pembinaan Bahasa, 2016; Elvana & Masduki, 2022). This is done so that nationalism remains ingrained in the hearts of its people and to avoid national disintegration. The heterogeneity of society will always be a triggering factor and is vulnerable to acts of violence, often leading to intolerance (Dowd, 2016). Therefore, it is crucial to strengthen the values of religious moderation to create a peaceful and harmonious society (Simanjuntak, 2023).

The rise of what is called religious 'extremism' has drawn increasing global attention, especially due to the horrific terrorist incidents occurring worldwide. Bomb explosions, as an indication of extremist group networks in Indonesia, often occur, one of which was at the Makassar Cathedral on May 28, 2021, in Maluku (Husain, Eki, & Wahyuni, 2021). The whole world has been affected by such acts of religious extremism that target innocent victims and threaten civilian populations. Islamic law emphasizes several moral principles found in the Qur'an, such as the protection of human rights, freedom of religion, equality, and equal opportunities for human rights in civil society (Yeflilova, 2010). Additionally, studies from the UIN Bandung and UIN Jakarta research centers have found many Islamic teachings circulating in society that deviate far from the values of the Qur'an and Hadith, as well as survey results stating that Generation Z, the main consumers of information technology, are more vulnerable to the impacts of intolerance and far from moderate attitudes.

Islamic boarding schools, as the oldest Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia, play a strategic role in instilling religious moderation values among their students (Fatih, 2024).

In the last two decades, a phenomenon has emerged with international boarding schools adopting global curricula and building cross-national networks. This phenomenon raises questions about how religious moderation is internalized in the context of globalization and local cultural dynamics. Islamic boarding schools, as one of the oldest models of Islamic education in Indonesia, play a significant role in the lives and civilization of the society (Wahida, 2018). The increasing extremism in society certainly requires the role of Islamic boarding schools to stabilize community life. Education experts are concerned about the dehumanization, alienation, and de-spiritualization of Generation Z, especially in the era of information technology (Rusli, 2014). Boarding schools are considered a crucible that contributes to the journey of Indonesia. The model of Islamic boarding school education is seen as one of the saviors of Indonesia's territorial integrity. Boarding schools also serve as a prototype of a heterogeneous, secure, peaceful, and harmonious society that implements the values of moderation and serves as a bridge for various social and cultural groups (Nurulita, Luthfilah, & Susilo, 2024). Therefore, the religious moderation practiced in Islamic boarding schools is highly relevant in creating a tolerant society and preserving diversity in Indonesia (Handoko & Fadilah, 2022).

These values reflect religious moderation. The term moderation is closely associated with reducing violence or avoiding extremism in religious practices. Religious moderation is the essence of religion, and its implementation is essential in the context of a plural and multicultural society like Indonesia to achieve intra- and interfaith harmony. In Indonesia, the discourse of wasathiyah or moderation is often described through three pillars: moderation in thinking, moderation in movements, and moderation in actions (Gultom, 2022).

Previous studies have shown that traditional Islamic boarding schools are relatively more flexible in adopting local traditions (Azra, 2022). However, research on international boarding schools and their challenges in balancing global values with local wisdom is still limited. This aligns with studies from Hunduma & Mekuria (2024), which emphasize the importance of multicultural education in facing the challenges of globalization and strengthening social harmony.

Moderation studies in Islamic boarding schools have also been conducted by examining the moderation induced by students' understanding of their studies, such as fiqh and ushul fiqh (Aziz, 2020). Another study on religious moderation in Islamic boarding schools concluded that the Ma'had Aly As'adiyah does not excessively practice religion. It upholds the principle of tawazun (balance) in the use of both rational and textual proofs. It also practices tolerance by recognizing and respecting differences in religion, ethnicity, race, social status, and other aspects of life, and does not discriminate against others based on differences in belief, tradition, or origin (Husain et al., 2021).

Furthermore, recent international literature shows that Islamic education in the era of globalization must serve as a space for dialogue between universal values and local wisdom, as well as a social laboratory for strengthening moderation and inclusivity (Hajar, 2024). The concept of "glocalization" introduced by Roland (1995) emphasizes the importance of adapting global values in local contexts so that Islamic education remains relevant and capable of addressing the challenges of the times.

This study aims to analyze the implementation of religious moderation developed by international boarding schools in line with the moderation design in Indonesia, which is outlined through three pillars: moderation in thinking, moderation in movements, and moderation in actions. These three pillars will form the foundation for this study. The focus on international

boarding schools as the object of study is due to the perceived exclusivism that society often associates with these institutions.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research approach using a multiple-case study design to analyze the implementation of religious moderation developed by international Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia. The qualitative approach is chosen to enable an in-depth, contextual, and interpretive understanding of how religious moderation is conceptualized, institutionalized, and practiced within pesantren-based international educational institutions. A case study design is particularly suitable for this research because it allows the exploration of religious moderation as a complex social phenomenon that is embedded in specific institutional, cultural, and ideological contexts, where the boundaries between the phenomenon and its setting are closely intertwined.

The research focuses on two purposively selected international Islamic boarding schools, namely International Islamic Boarding School (IIBS) Al Izzah Malang and IIBS Thursina Malang. These institutions were selected due to their international educational orientation and their relevance to public discourses that often associate international pesantren with exclusivism. This contextual background provides a critical lens for examining how religious moderation is developed and implemented within institutions that operate at the intersection of Islamic tradition and global educational frameworks.

The analytical framework of this study is grounded in the Indonesian conception of religious moderation, which is articulated through three interrelated pillars: moderation of thought, moderation of movement, and moderation of action. These three pillars serve as the main analytical lenses for examining institutional policies, educational designs, religious practices, and social interactions within the pesantren. By employing this framework, the study systematically analyzes the extent to which international Islamic boarding schools align their educational practices with the national design of religious moderation while responding to internal institutional dynamics and external societal perceptions.

The research subjects consist of key institutional actors, including caregivers, educators, administrators, and students who are directly involved in the formulation, transmission, and enactment of religious values within the boarding school environment. Rather than prioritizing the number of participants, this study emphasizes the depth, relevance, and contextual richness of information obtained from individuals who possess experiential knowledge and institutional insight related to the implementation of religious moderation in daily educational and social practices.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and documentation analysis. Interviews were used to explore participants' interpretations, experiences, and reflections regarding the implementation of religious moderation across the three pillars, while observations enabled the researcher to capture how moderation values are enacted in everyday learning activities, religious rituals, and social interactions within the pesantren. Documentation analysis complemented these methods by examining formal institutional texts such as curricula, vision and mission statements, policy documents, and program descriptions, which reflect the institutional articulation of moderation values.

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, data triangulation was applied by cross-examining information obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation. This process allowed for the validation of emerging themes and reduced the

risk of researcher bias by comparing multiple data sources within each case. Prolonged engagement in the research settings and iterative interpretation of the data further strengthened the reliability of the analysis.

Data analysis was carried out using a thematic and framework-based approach guided by the interactive model of Miles and Huberman. All qualitative data were transcribed, organized, and coded according to themes derived from the three pillars of religious moderation. The analysis involved an iterative process of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing, enabling the researcher to identify patterns, meanings, and institutional strategies related to moderation of thought, movement, and action. A cross-case analysis was then conducted to compare how religious moderation is implemented across the two international Islamic boarding schools, highlighting both convergences and contextual differences.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of religious moderation in international Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia cannot be understood merely through general indicators, but must be analyzed through a clear analytical framework that reflects the national design of religious moderation. In the Indonesian context, religious moderation is operationalized through three interrelated pillars, namely moderation of thought, moderation of movement, and moderation of action. These three pillars serve as the main analytical lens for examining how moderation values are conceptualized, institutionalized, and practiced within international pesantren, particularly in response to public perceptions that often associate such institutions with exclusivism.

Moderation of Thought

Moderation of thought in IIBS Al Izzah and IIBS Thursina is reflected in the way Islamic teachings are framed in relation to national ideology, citizenship, and pluralism. Both institutions demonstrate a clear alignment between Islamic values and the foundational principles of the Indonesian state, particularly Pancasila and national unity. This alignment is not merely rhetorical but is embedded in educational narratives, institutional discourse, and daily pedagogical practices.

Educators consistently emphasize that being a devout Muslim is not contradictory to being a committed Indonesian citizen. One educator at IIBS Al Izzah explicitly stated, "*All students here are future sons and daughters of Indonesia. We educate them to be strong Muslims who love their country and are ready to contribute to the nation.*" This perspective reflects a moderate theological outlook that rejects the dichotomy between religious identity and national identity.

Similarly, an administrator at IIBS Thursina explained that national commitment is integrated into religious learning through contextual interpretation of Islamic teachings, noting that "*Islam teaches us to protect unity and avoid division. Loving the country is part of our responsibility as Muslims living in Indonesia.*" This demonstrates that moderation of thought in both institutions functions as a counter-narrative to transnational or exclusivist ideologies that delegitimize the nation-state.

These findings resonate with AlQashouti & Shah (2025), who argue that educational institutions play a strategic role in safeguarding religious moderation by filtering learning materials and strengthening national commitment, particularly in contemporary educational settings.

Moderation of Movement

Moderation of movement refers to how religious values are expressed in social interactions, institutional programs, and collective activities. In both IIBS Al Izzah and IIBS Thursina, moderation is evident in everyday practices that prioritize tolerance, cooperation, and peaceful coexistence, both within the pesantren environment and in interactions with the broader society.

Students from diverse regional, cultural, and social backgrounds live together in boarding settings, which naturally requires the development of tolerance and mutual respect. An educator at IIBS Thursina explained, "*Students here come from many regions. Living together teaches them to respect differences, not only in culture but also in ways of thinking.*" This lived experience becomes a practical arena for internalizing moderation values beyond formal instruction.

Tolerance is also cultivated through institutional openness toward dialogue and collaboration. A teacher at IIBS Al Izzah noted that students are encouraged to engage in discussions and group deliberations, stating, "*We train students to solve problems through discussion, not through forcing opinions. This is part of our character education.*" Such practices indicate that moderation of movement is enacted through participatory and inclusive social mechanisms. These findings align with broader studies on tolerance, which emphasize that sustained interaction and cooperation across differences are essential for nurturing harmonious coexistence in plural societies (Dowd, 2016; Kunasekaran, Gill, Talib, & Redzuan, 2013).

Moderation of Action

Moderation of action in both institutions is strongly reflected in their rejection of violence in all forms, including physical, verbal, and ideological violence. Violence is consistently framed as incompatible with Islamic teachings and institutional values. Educators emphasize peaceful engagement, dialogue, and ethical conduct as the primary means of addressing differences and conflict.

An educator at IIBS Al Izzah stated, "*Any form of violence, especially in the name of religion, is clearly rejected here. Islam teaches peace, not coercion.*" This stance is reinforced through daily practices that habituate students to non-violent conflict resolution, such as collective decision-making, shared responsibilities, and respectful communication.

At IIBS Thursina, similar values are articulated. One administrator explained, "*We always teach students that change should come through knowledge and good character, not through anger or force.*" This reflects an institutional commitment to anti-violence that extends beyond formal teachings into lived ethical practice. Such findings support existing research that highlights the importance of education in reducing tendencies toward ideological violence and extremism by fostering peaceful religious interpretations (Duarte, Ramos, Barbosa, Vergani, & de Carvalho, 2025).

Accommodation of Local Culture

Accommodation of local culture constitutes an important aspect of moderation in action, particularly within pesantren that operate in diverse cultural environments. Both IIBS Al Izzah and IIBS Thursina demonstrate an openness toward local cultural expressions, although with varying degrees of selectivity.

At IIBS Thursina, local culture is broadly embraced as part of students' identity formation. An educator explained, "*Students are allowed to express their regional culture,*

including *clothing and language, as long as it aligns with Islamic values*." This openness reflects an understanding of culture as a neutral and dynamic human expression rather than a religious marker.

IIBS Al Izzah, while also accommodating local culture, applies a more selective approach. An educator clarified, "*We respect local culture, but we are careful with traditions that contain elements contrary to Islamic teachings, such as animism or offerings*." This selective accommodation reflects a moderated balance between cultural appreciation and theological boundaries.

These findings affirm that both institutions view culture as an integral part of human life, consistent with Islamic principles, provided that cultural practices do not contradict core religious teachings. This perspective aligns with Mustakim et al. (2021), who emphasize that empowering students to engage with local culture can strengthen religious moderation and prevent radicalism.

Overall, the findings indicate that international Islamic boarding schools are not inherently exclusive institutions, as often perceived by the wider public. Instead, through the integration of moderation of thought, movement, and action, both IIBS Al Izzah and IIBS Thursina actively construct educational environments that promote national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and cultural accommodation. The differences observed between the two institutions reflect contextual and ideological nuances rather than contradictions in their commitment to religious moderation.

By situating moderation within daily practices, institutional discourse, and educational design, these pesantren demonstrate that international-oriented Islamic education can function as a strategic space for strengthening religious moderation in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

This study finds that international Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia implement religious moderation in ways that align with the national framework of moderation through the integration of moderation of thought, movement, and action. The cases of IIBS Al Izzah Malang and IIBS Thursina Malang demonstrate that Islamic teachings are articulated in harmony with national values, fostering a theological outlook that supports unity and civic responsibility. Religious moderation is enacted not only at the conceptual level but also through everyday social practices that promote tolerance, dialogue, and non-violence. Living arrangements, learning processes, and institutional culture function as effective spaces for internalizing moderate religious values. The accommodation of local culture, applied selectively in accordance with Islamic principles, further reflects moderation in practice. Overall, the findings challenge the perception of international pesantren as exclusive institutions and highlight their potential role as strategic educational spaces for cultivating inclusive, peaceful, and nationally grounded religious life in Indonesia.

REFERENCE

Alabdulhadi, M. M. J. (2019). Religious tolerance in secondary Islamic Education textbooks in Kuwait. *British Journal of Religious Education*, *41*(4), 422–434. https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2019.1585329

AlQashouti, B. M., & Shah, M. (2025). Conceptual framework of Islamicity sustainable development index. *Journal of Islamic Accounting and Business Research*, *1*(1), 1–41. https://doi.org/10.1108/JIABR-06-2024-0232

Aziz, A. (2020). Akar moderasi beragama di pesantren (Studi kasus di Ma'had Aly Sukorejo Situbondo dalam terbentuknya nilai-nilai moderasi beragama). *Ar-Risalah: Media Keislaman, Pendidikan Dan Hukum Islam*, *18*(1), 142. https://doi.org/10.29062/arrisalah.v18i1.348

Azra, A. (2022). *Islamic education: Tradition and modernization*. Bandung: Rosdakarya.

Badan Pengembangan dan Pembinaan Bahasa. (2016). *Kamus besar Bahasa Indonesia* (Edisi Keli). Jakarta: Badan Pengembangan dan Pembinaan Bahasa. Retrieved from https://kbbi.kemdikbud.go.id

Dowd, R. A. (2016). Religious diversity and religious tolerance: Lessons from Nigeria. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *60*(4), 617–644. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002714550085

Duarte, F. P., Ramos, J. P., Barbosa, P., Vergani, M., & de Carvalho, C. M. (2025). Effectiveness of educational programmes to prevent and counter online violent extremist propaganda in English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, German and Scandinavian language studies: A systematic review. *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, *21*(2), 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1002/cl2.70042

Elvana, N., & Masduki, M. (2022). Islamic religious education in pesantren in fostering religious moderation. *JIGC (Journal of Islamic Guidance and Counseling)*, *6*(1), 1–8. https://doi.org/10.30631/jigc.v6i1.47

Fatih, M. K. (2024). Peran pesantren dalam penguatan moderasi beragama di Indonesia. *Alamtara: Jurnal Komunikasi Dan Penyiaran Islam*, *8*(2), 165–198. https://doi.org/10.58518/alamtara.v8i2.3180

Gultom, O. (2022). Moderasi beragama. *Perspektif*, *17*(1), 35–49. https://doi.org/10.69621/jpf.v17i1.149

Hajar, A. (2024). Navigating globalization: Reforming Islamic education for the 21st century. *Sinergi International Journal of Islamic Studies*, *2*(1), 53–65. https://doi.org/10.61194/ijis.v2i1.599

Hamza, S. M., & Shirazi, N. S. (2025). The role of religiosity in shaping sustainable behavior: A global perspective. *American Journal of Islam and Society*, *42*(1), 42–83. https://doi.org/10.35632/ajis.v42i1-2.3604

Handoko, C., & Fadilah, N. (2022). Eksistensi pondok pesantren dalam penguatan moderasi beragama. *Tafahus: Jurnal Pengkajian Islam*, *2*(1), 54–62. https://doi.org/10.58573/tafahus.v2i1.21

Hunduma, C. M., & Mekuria, Y. S. (2024). Multicultural education and global citizenship: Literature review. *Multidisciplinary Reviews*, *7*(10), 1–14. https://doi.org/10.31893/multirev.2024223

Husain, S., Eki, A., & Wahyuni, D. (2021). Moderasi beragama berbasis tradisi pesantren pada Ma'had Aly As'adiyah Sengkang Wajo Sulawesi Selatan. *Harmoni*, *20*(1), 48–66. https://doi.org/10.32488/harmoni.v20i1.455

Husna, A., & Albina, M. (2025). Religious communities and tolerance: Essential foundations for creating a peaceful and harmonious society. *MAQOLAT: Journal of Islamic Studies*, *3*(3), 278–284. https://doi.org/10.58355/maqolat.v3i3.135

Kandil, E. (2023). The Relationship between Religions and Tolerance. *International Journal of Humanities and Language Research*, *6*(2), 1–14. https://doi.org/10.21608/ijhlr.2024.279416.1025

Kunasekaran, P., Gill, S., Talib, A., & Redzuan, M. (2013). Culture as an indigenous tourism product of Mah Meri community in Malaysia. *Life Science Journal*, *10*(1), 1600–1604. Retrieved from https://www.lifesciencesite.com/lsj/life1001/

Nazmi, K., Yusuf, M. F., & Siregar, M. N. (2024). Pendidikan multikultural (Multicultural education) melalui hadis. *Jurnal Arjuna : Publikasi Ilmu Pendidikan, Bahasa Dan Matematika*, *2*(4), 118–129. https://doi.org/10.61132/arjuna.v2i4.1085

Nurulita, D., Luthfilah, M. M., & Susilo, S. (2024). Implementation of multicultural values in the social interactions of santri who have different ethnic criteria. *Fikroh: Jurnal Pemikiran Dan Pendidikan Islam*, *18*(1), 1–8. https://doi.org/10.37812/fikroh.v18i1.1641

Roland, R. (1995). Glocalization: Time-space and homogeneity-heterogeneity. In *Global Modernities* (pp. 25–44). London: Sage Publications.

Rusli, R. (2014). Agama dan manusia dalam pendidikan Hamka (Studi falsafat agama). *Intizar*, *20*(2), 205–220. Retrieved from https://jurnal.radenfatah.ac.id/index.php/intizar/article/view/430

Simanjuntak, P. (2023). Moderasi beragama: Suatu langkah menjaga kebhinekaan. *CENDEKIA: Jurnal Ilmu Sosial, Bahasa Dan Pendidikan*, *4*(1), 104–116. https://doi.org/10.55606/cendikia.v4i1.2279

Syaikhu, A., & Syaifudin, M. (2024). Religious moderation in Islamic education in Indonesia. *An-Nuha : Jurnal Kajian Islam, Pendidikan, Budaya Dan Sosial*, *11*(2), 157–171. https://doi.org/10.36835/annuha.v11i2.744

Wahida, B. (2018). Dakwah halaqah Pondok Pesantren As'adiyah Pusat Sengkang. *Al-Hikmah*, *12*(1), 131–148. https://doi.org/10.24260/al-hikmah.v12i1.1089

Yeflilova, H. (2010). ustice, human rights, and the quasi-civil society in a Muslim context. *European Journal of Economic and Political Studies*, *3*(2), 127–144. Retrieved from https://arastirmax.com/en/publication/european-journal-economic-and-political-studies/3/2/justice-human-rights-and-quasi-civil-society-muslim-context/arid/07d6122a-b020-43c0-a3c3-4779bcbc1daf

Yunanto, S. (2018). *Islam moderat vs Islam radikal*. Yogyakarta: Media Pressindo.