

# Strengthening the Understanding of Religious Moderation at Islamic University

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## ABSTRACT

Religion may solve all human life problems, including violence, oppression, radicalism, terrorism, intolerance, fanaticism, and excessive behaviour in all areas of life, including education. Islamic higher education provides intellectual, social, and religious education to the community. Students, as the younger generation, lead civilization and show mature attitudes towards social issues, including rising religious issues and religious moderation. This study seeks to enhance the comprehension of religious moderation at Islamic University. This study employed a qualitative approach, utilising descriptive data analysis. Information was gathered through the means of interviews and documents. This study included a sample of 45 students enrolled in the Islamic Education program. The results suggested that implementing Islamic education centred on religious moderation to enhance students' comprehension of religious moderation in the Islamic Religious Education programme should be achieved through instructional approaches during lectures and mutual support from the academic community, professors, and students. Therefore, enhancing comprehension of religious moderation can foster a more profound understanding of adopting a peaceful, harmonious, non-anarchic, non-fanatical, non-arrogant, courteous, and respectful approach towards differing opinions while upholding the value of unity among students in the Islamic Religious Education programme at the University.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country with a diverse population consisting of various ethnicities, races, customs, classes, groups, religions, and social strata. The Indonesian society is a society with a highly complex level of diversity, a society with diversity (Afwadzi & Miski, 2021; Zakariyah et al., 2022). The richness and diversity of religion, ethnicity, and culture are like a double-edged sword. On one hand, this diversity is a treasure that must be preserved and defended because it has provided nuances and dynamics for the nation, and can become a wealth that may be rarely possessed by other countries.

However, on the other hand, the diversity of religion, race, and ethnicity can also become the starting point for disputes, vertical and horizontal conflicts (Nirwana & Darmadali, 2021; Idris & Putra, 2021).

Looking at the potential of diversity above, in the era of open democracy, Indonesia certainly has a lot of differences in views and interests among its diverse citizens. It is important to manage these differences in a way that ensures that all aspirations can be channeled properly (Subchi et al., 2022; Husna & Thohir, 2020). Similarly, in matters of religion, our constitution guarantees the freedom of religious communities to embrace and practice their teachings in accordance with their beliefs and convictions. Our state ideology, Pancasila, places great emphasis on the creation of harmony among religious communities. Indonesia has even become an example for nations around the world in successfully managing its cultural and religious diversity, and is considered successful in harmoniously combining religious practice with statehood (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2019).

Social conflicts and tensions on a small scale do indeed often occur, but we have always managed to overcome them and return to a consciousness of the importance of unity as a great nation, a nation blessed with diversity by the Creator. However, we must remain vigilant. One of the greatest threats that can divide us as a nation is religious-based conflict, especially when accompanied by acts of violence (Naim et al., 2022; Abidin & Murtadlo, 2020). The reason for this phenomenon is in the inherent predisposition of religion, regardless of its form or location, to exhibit a fundamental inclination towards prejudice, which is accompanied by intense emotional involvement and subjectivity. Consequently, it consistently engenders strong emotional attachments among its adherents. Religion is regarded as a hallowed and treasured entity, even by its most devoted followers. Excessive zeal for a particular interpretation of religious truth frequently results in hatred and conflicts, rather than leading to a serene and tranquil existence. This conflict, driven by religious beliefs, might affect distinct factions or denominations within the same religion, or arise between varied groups belonging to different religions. Usually, these religious conflicts begin when people blame each other for their different interpretations and understanding of religion. They feel morally superior and refuse to consider the perspectives and interpretations of others. In order to effectively handle the extensive range of religious beliefs in Indonesia, it is imperative to establish a clear vision and implement solutions that foster harmony and tranquilly in religious affairs. This can be achieved by placing emphasis on religious moderation, acknowledging and respecting various interpretations, and actively discouraging extremism, intolerance, and violence (Harahap et al., 2022; Idris et al., 2021).

The essence of religious moderation lies in the pursuit of a balanced position between the two opposing ends of religious observance. One faction of the religious community staunchly adheres to a specific interpretation of religious texts, considering it as the only valid truth, and labelling other interpretations as abnormal. The group is usually known as ultra-conservative (Kamaludin & Purnama, 2021). Conversely, there exist religious adherents who exhibit an intense commitment to rationality, to the point of discarding the sacredness of their own religion or compromising their core convictions in order to display unwarranted acceptance towards adherents of different faiths. They are frequently identified as radical progressives. The moderation of both extremes is necessary, thus making the role of students pivotal in endeavours to enhance religious moderation education in society. According to Afif and Dwijayanto (2021), students have the ability to bring about significant transformations in the domains of education, society, and national affairs.

The spirit of religious moderation needs to be strengthened, as there was evidence from field observations that students in higher education were susceptible to being infiltrated by radicalism, easily accepting fake news (*hoaxes*), arrogance, and fanaticism towards religious beliefs. Radicalism or crime in general is a natural condition of society, as the sociological reality shows that radicalism is found in almost all layers and forms of society, whether it is a simple or complex social structure (Supriyanto, 2022). Furthermore, the understanding of religious moderation as a solution to prevent negative radicalism is influenced by the internal condition of the individual itself and external factors from the environment. Internal conditions, such as psychological or mental health conditions, economic

conditions, and so on, can affect this understanding. On the other hand, external or environmental factors can be influenced by the community, education, socialization, parenting, and so on. Among them, the researcher described that these young campus religious activists are also in the psychological phase of adolescence or late adolescence (Nugraha, 2020).

At this stage, adolescents have started to organize their psyche and determine the direction of their lives with more direction. At this phase, the orientation shifts to external factors, with attention to issues surrounding their environment and society (Wasehudin & Syafei, 2021). During this time, adolescents become more critical, have an independent attitude, and thoughts. The process of searching for identity and self-organization is carried out in accordance with the perspective that is built through the knowledge and doctrine received from their group. Generally, these individuals feel like activists in the religious field, and thus, they must be able to act, behave, and conduct themselves in a religious manner that is filled with righteousness (Firmansyah, 2021).

This can certainly awaken enthusiasm for religious knowledge that can support the attitude of personal righteousness for some individuals. The ideal Islamic behavior portrayed by the *salafus shaleh* is their role model. With the knowledge they can access, they try to display righteous behavior, including following the *Sunnah* in appearance and daily behavior. An interesting study for them is the popular jurisprudence (*fikih*) discussion about everyday *Sunnahs*. Generally, organizations among students, especially religious organizations, consider the veil phenomenon, which is said to be wearing a veil is not an obligation, but is seen as a more righteous attitude in practising religion. The attention of these campus religious activists is directed not only internally towards themselves but also towards their external world with criticism of their environment (Jailani & Suyadi, 2023). An ideal personality and an ideal environment are in accordance with the Islamic values that they believe in. In this understanding, a gap emerges between the idealized vision and the reality in their environment, which prompts them to criticize with the religious perspective they believe in. Generally, their attention is focused on piety and morality, which is why they view the external world through a moral lens. Due to this gap, *moral panic* arises, a feeling of discomfort and displeasure with behaviors deemed immoral according to Islam.

The group experiences a moral panic when they feel that a social or cultural value they hold is threatened by a perceived social order disruptor, known as a '*folk devil*.' The process of creating moral panic starts with the existence of something that is seen as a threat to social norms or the interests of the community; The media then portrays it in easily understandable symbols, which eventually create anxiety in society. As a result, responses emerge that ultimately drive social change in the community. In the context of the understanding of university students in a religious organization, they also view Western culture as a threat to Islamic morality, particularly towards the behaviors of young adults. One of their concerns is the issue of dating. Male-female relationships are highly restricted, therefore the phenomenon of dating among teenagers or college students is considered a bad thing (Wardi et al., 2023).

One of the characteristics of the religious understanding of students (Abdullah & Nento, 2021), the characteristics can be described as follows; First, they are textualists. Students, in general, tend to follow the textual evidence as it is, what is said in the Qur'an and the Hadith of the Prophet, they tend to apply it as it is. Often, understanding the context of the verse or Hadith is not their concern. Similarly, interpretation receives less attention compared to translation. Secondly, the religious knowledge of students on campus is utilized to improve behavior in accordance with the Islamic teachings they understand. Therefore, their orientation towards understanding religion is aimed at building their own and their environment's morality.

The existence of a gap or discrepancy between what they idealize and the behavior of society in general raises criticism towards behaviors that are deemed inconsistent with religious teachings. The National Counter-Terrorism Agency (BNPT) even asks the academic community to be vigilant of radical movements within the campus, especially towards new students as an *entry point*. The vulnerable group susceptible to being influenced and involved in radical movements are young people

who are curious but whose personal conditions are not yet stable (Suyudi & Putra, 2022). In the perspective of sociology itself, radicalism or crime in general is a natural condition of society (*crime is a natural part of society*). This is said because the sociological reality shows that radicalism is found in almost all layers and forms of society, whether it be simple or socially complex communities.

Thus, radicalism is divided into two types or forms. Firstly, individual radicalism (*individual violence*), which is radicalism carried out by an individual towards others. Secondly, group radicalism (*group or collective violence*), which is a form of radicalism carried out by a group of people towards an individual or another group (Henslin, 2016). In other words, the understanding of religious moderation as a solution to prevent negative radicalism is influenced by both internal individual conditions and external factors (environment). The continuing occurrences of terrorism and actions that lead to radicalism in Indonesia, particularly in the education sector, are concrete evidence of how the understanding and appreciation of the values of religious moderation are still low. Therefore, various approaches to counterterrorism and radicalism must always be pursued. The research on religious moderation has been conducted extensively to strengthen and realize attitudes of religious moderation amidst the flow of the times and the level of religious understanding of each layer of society. Firstly, Kawangung (2019) conducted a research examines the Religious Moderation Discourse in the Plurality of Social Harmony in Indonesia. The result found that religious moderation refers to achieving harmonious living by upholding human dignity. Secondly, Husna & Thohir (2020)'s research on Religious Moderation as a New Approach to Learning Islamic Religious Education in Schools reveals that religious moderation must continue to be upheld in schools to prevent extremism. Thirdly, Fawaid & Astutik (2023)'s research on efforts to build a religious moderation attitude through Islamic religious education among students in public universities. The findings show that the substance of the Islamic religious education curriculum should be directed by lecturers to strengthen moderate attitudes and provide guidance and mentoring to students. Fourth, a study conducted by Munir & Herianto (2020) explored the influence of mental health, organizational activity, and academic achievement on the level of understanding of religious moderation. The findings of the study show that these factors have an impact on students' understanding of religious moderation. And fifth, a study by (Zarkasyi, 2018) appraised the moderation of Indonesian Muslims with special reference to Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama. The findings of this study show that Muslims in Indonesia, both Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama, have a long history of organization through educational institutions. Religious moderation can be realized, one of which is through their educational institutions.

The literature does not provide information on how Islamic education, which is based on religious moderation, can enhance the comprehension of students, particularly those enrolled in the Islamic Education programme at the Faculty of Education and Teaching, Raden Fatah State Islamic University in Palembang. Thus, implementing deradicalization programmes at Islamic higher education institutions is one effective approach to enhancing students' comprehension of religious moderation. Hence, the author aims to investigate and explore this research thoroughly to provide research findings that would enhance the comprehension of religious moderation among university students, particularly in the Islamic Education programme at Raden Fatah State Islamic University Palembang.

## 2. METHODS

This study was a type of qualitative research with a descriptive analysis approach. The qualitative descriptive approach can be understood as research that describes qualitative data as it is or naturally. Then, the data is analyzed to reveal the facts that occur or appear (Sugiyono, 2014). This research involved 45 students of the Islamic Education program, Faculty of Education and Teaching Sciences, Raden Fatah State Islamic University Palembang, consisting of 25 students from the third semester of the 2020 academic year and 20 students from the fifth semester of the 2019 academic year. The sample for data analysis in this research was selected using purposive sampling technique. Data

were collected through interviews and documentation, with a focus group discussion, in order to gain in-depth information. Primary data through interviews were conducted on December 16 and 17, 2021, in person. Each student was given questions related to their understanding of religious moderation and current religious issues such as news about religion in society, social media, fake news, radicalism, terrorism, fanaticism, and intolerance. From the questions asked, for secondary data documentation, the author gathered information in the form of books on religious moderation by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia in 2019, M. Quraish Shihab's book *Wasathiyah: Insights into Religious Moderation*, and journals on religious moderation online. This data was employed as reinforcement, complements, and sharpens the data related to this research.

### 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 *Islamic Education*

Islamic education aims to shape Indonesian individuals who have faith and piety towards the One Almighty God, possess noble character, and are capable of maintaining peace and harmony in both internal and interfaith relationships. Islamic education is also directed towards developing the abilities of students in understanding, internalizing, and practicing religious values that harmonize with the mastery of science, technology, and the arts. These messages are contained within Islamic teachings on religious moderation. Islamic education based on religious moderation will be more closely related to the methods that an educator will take and use in delivering and imparting learning materials on religious moderation. There are three learning strategies that can be taken by Islamic education based on religious moderation towards students: first, inserting religious moderation content into relevant course materials. In fact, some course materials already contain religious moderation content. The substance of religious moderation is already present in the learning curriculum at all levels and types of Islamic education within the Ministry of Religious Affairs environment, including Raden Fatah State Islamic University in Palembang. Secondly, optimizing learning approaches that can foster critical thinking, an appreciation for differences, respect for others' opinions, tolerance, democracy, the courage to express ideas, sportsmanship, and responsibility. Education, society, and national affairs are all areas where students, as Afif and Dwijayanto (2021) argue, can and should effect major change. This type of Islamic education approach based on religious moderation is carried out when transforming knowledge to students both inside and outside the classroom. Thirdly, organizing Islamic education programs through specific education, training, and preparation with a special theme on religious moderation. It can also be done by organizing religious courses with religious moderation content. Fourthly, reaching the evaluation aspect. Lecturers need to observe simultaneously to evaluate the achievement of the learning process that has been carried out with methods that can cultivate a moderate attitude.

#### 3.2 *Religious Moderation*

From the research results obtained through student interviews and documentation, the researcher found awareness of the efforts made by students, both from 25 third-semester students of the 2020 cohort and 20 fifth-semester students of the 2019 cohort, regarding the importance of strengthening the understanding of religious moderation among students. The lecturers in the Islamic religious education program at the Faculty of Education and Teaching Science must make a strong and continuous effort to educate on the meaning of respecting differences of opinion among religious communities, including differences of opinion among students themselves. In lectures, both lecturers and students are required to understand various religious courses, both from the university curriculum and specialized courses in the study program, so that students are able to comprehend the importance of Muslims knowing and studying religious understanding, both within Islam and non-Islam, as expressed by a respondent (IN). As students, we must also be friendly and accepting of differences as long as they do not conflict

with our beliefs as followers of a religion (interview with IN on December 16<sup>th</sup>, 2021). Then the second, understanding the rules, provisions and signs in understanding Islam, the third is being careful in applying Islamic teachings that are not properly supported by understanding. Fourth, there is a strengthening of understanding of Islam in accordance with the correct guidance and fifth, being open to thought, and reform but still able to screen and be positive.

From the outcome of the interview, it was emphasized that strengthening religious moderation must be positively charged and properly understand religion so that it is not misguided (interview with MD on December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2021). Furthermore, this understanding is also corroborated by AD's opinion that he always tries to be open, understands every difference that exists, thinks wisely, and often travels or travels so that he can observe the outside world (interview with AD on December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2021). Then, NP argued that it is our duty to accept differences but continue to unite in differences, do not let conflicts and prolonged problems arise and we must be in the middle position not to become a heater or stove (interview with NP on December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2021).

The Medina Charter, which was disseminated by Rasulullah ibn Abi Talib, is an answer to the social realities of the lives of religious people, as evidenced by the above opinion. This has been the case ever since the Prophet Muhammad PBUH first illustrated it. Bringing people together via shared diversity. On the intellectual, spiritual, social, and economic fronts. For this reason, it's important to look at the Islamic concept of religious moderation (*wasathiyah*) and how it relates to the role of the state in implementing the ideals of justice and balance. A thorough investigation of the Prophetic traditions is necessary for the analysis and application of this idea. As part of this initiative, Muslims can look to the Medina Charter for guidance on how to conduct themselves in all aspects of their lives, not just their faith. This is why the following writer defines *wasathiyah* (religious moderation) in Islam. *Wasatha*, also spelt *Wasathiyah*, is the Quranic phrase for religious moderation. The five verses in the Qur'an where this word appears are: Q. S. Al-Baqarah 143, Q. S. Al-Baqarah 238; Q. S. Al-Maidah 89; Q. S. Al-Qalam 28; and Q. S. Al-A'adiyat 4-5 (Shihab, 2019: 4). Many Muslim scholars base their interpretations of the Qur'an on verse 143 of Surah al-Baqarah, which they describe as follows:

*“And likewise We have made you (Muslims) “the middle people” that you may bear witness to the people and that the Messenger (Muhammad) may bear witness to you. We have not made the Qiblah to which you used to turn, but that we may recognize those who follow the Messenger and those who turn back. Indeed, (the transfer of the Qiblah) is very hard, except for those who have been instructed by Allah. And Allah will not waste your faith. Indeed, Allah is the Most Merciful, the Most Merciful to mankind”*

The above verse is utilized by many experts as a starting point regarding religious moderation in this study, as described by Ar-Razi's opinion in M. Quraish Shihab (2020: 10) there are various meanings of the verse that have been delivered, first the word fair. This word is interpreted as the same attitude towards all directions that do not lead to one direction or ignore other directions. Secondly, the word *wasath* in the above verse means the best. Third, the most excellent or the best. The fourth meaning is if Muslims as *ummatan wasathan* means having a moderate or middle between excellence and deficiency in various matters. In addition, this opinion is also strengthened by M. Quraish Shihab that the nature of *ummatan wasathan* means that they can have differences in paths, all of which can be accommodated in a wide path as long as the path they take is characterized by peace. Allah hints that if they are truly different, but all can go hand in hand on one wide road, then they can lead to the pleasure of Allah SWT (Widodo, 2019; Muchtar et al., 2022). Thus, the mention of Muslims as *ummatan wasathan* is an effort so that they can display themselves as a chosen people who have attitudes full of justice, both during worship as individuals or during interactions as members of society. Islam offers teachings to maintain a moderate attitude (interview with WJS on December 16<sup>th</sup>, 2021). This is also recognized by students of the Islamic education study program at the Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training, Raden Fatah State Islamic University Palembang, LA said that as the middle community and the people

of the Prophet Muhammad, they must be an example for other groups (interview with LA on December 16<sup>th</sup>, 2021).

So that the word *wasathiyah* is located in the Muslim community needs to be positioned in the context of the community's relationship with other communities. Muslim individuals or communities can be regarded as witnesses (*shahidan*) when they are dedicated to moderation and human values (Manshur & Husni, 2020; Sofyan et al., 2022). Because, if the understanding of *wasath* refers to the context of moderation, then he demands Muslims as witnesses or as witnessed, to be used as a link for other people, and at the same time they are referring to the Prophet Muhammad PBUH as an example that they deserve to emulate as a witness to the justification of all their activities (interview with DNS on December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2021). It can be said that the level of an individual's loyalty to moderation actually indicates the extent of their commitment to the value of justice. If an individual is more moderate and balanced, then their potential for acting with full justice becomes more open. Conversely, if someone is not moderate and tends to be biased, then they are more likely to be unjust. This idea shows the tradition of Islam, which Prophet Muhammad SAW directed his followers to often choose the middle path, which they believed to be the best path. Based on the hadith, Prophet Muhammad SAW advised the ummah to often choose the middle path, which they believe is the best path. In another hadith reported by Muslim, it was mentioned that the Prophet said, "*The best of affairs is the middle course*" (Muslim). Jabir Bin Samurah also once said, "*I have prayed with the Prophet Muhammad PBUH many times and I found that his prayer and his sermon were always in the middle*". In another narration, the word "*wasath*" is found when Ibn Abbas said that the Prophet Muhammad PBUH said, "*O people, avoid excess exaggerated in religion, for those who came before you were destroyed by their excess in religion.*" (Mahrus et al., 2020; Mindani et al., 2022). After its definition was clarified, the concept of *wasatiyyah* represents the criteria and substance of a religious teaching that embodies the meanings of moderation, balance, justice, and the best option. These three explanations are interrelated because a moderate attitude often represents fairness and the best choice.

Furthermore, the dimension of strengthening religious moderation among students needs to be understood as follows (Daheri, 2022):

1. Moderation in theology refers to the attitude of tauhid, meaning acknowledging and worshiping only one God. This attitude is positioned in the middle, as a balance between atheism, which is anti-theistic, and polytheism, or the worship of many gods. Tauhid means recognizing one God who is worthy of human worship. Tauhid also means believing that Allah is a single entity, without consisting of various elements or components. The concept of polytheism, which acknowledges many gods, is an irrational doctrine and falls under the category of *ghuluw* (exaggeration).
2. Moderation in worship, the Qur'an emphasizes that the creation of jinn and humans is intended for worshiping Allah SWT (Q.S az-Zariyat: 56). Worship means a submissive and obedient attitude towards Allah SWT, accompanied by a sense of admiration for Him. Some scholars mention that conceptually, all actions can bring about the pleasure of Allah SWT, with sincerity and pure intention from the conscience based on the principle enshrined in the Qur'an and the Prophet can be called worship. Categorically, the scholars divide worship into two categories: first, *mahdlah* worship (pure worship) which is a ritual individual worship, and secondly, social muamalah worship. Both are intended to build spiritual and social righteousness.
3. Moderation in the relationship between Islam and culture. Islam and culture should not be opposed to each other, as there are many good traditions and cultures, although they may not be found in a clear textual reference. The assumption is that Islam did not appear in a cultural vacuum. Islamic teachings have always been present in existing traditions, even though there may need to be a negotiation process of acculturation. Sometimes Islam will forbid certain cultural practices if they clearly conflict with the *aqidah*. At times, Islam changes and renews culture, when there is something that needs to be relevant to Islamic teachings, and there are times when Islam accommodates a culture that is in line with Islamic values or teachings. For example, the tradition

of giving an engagement ring to the bride-to-be during a proposal, as is practiced in Egypt. Of course, this tradition does not have a clear hadith as evidence. However, in substance, it actually strengthens the engagement bond and serves as a sign that the woman has been proposed to. Therefore, for other men who want to propose to her, they will know that the woman has been proposed by someone else. This means that the tradition reinforces the sunnah of the Prophet which states, "It is not permissible for a man to propose to a woman who is already engaged to his brother" (H.R. Bukhari).

4. Moderation in treating women. Women's position, when referring to the perspective of the Qur'an, is very noble and honorable. Women are placed in a moderate position between belittlement and excessive exaltation. In general, women are *equal* to men. They are not placed under men, but they are also not placed above men. Furthermore, Abdul Mustaqim stated that regarding women, first of all, they are created equally with men.
5. Moderation in the relationship between Islam and the state. Islam gives the choice to Muslims to determine the system of government. It does not have to be an Islamic state formally. In principle, the state can represent a sense of security (*baladan amina*) (Q. S Ibrahim ayah 35-37) And prosperity (*baldatun warabbun ghafur*) (Q. S Saba' ayat 15). Moderation in the relationship between Islam and the state. Islam provides options for Muslims to determine the government system. It does not have to be an Islamic state formally. In principle, the state can represent a sense of security (*baladan amina*) and prosperity. Muslims will be free to make political *ijtihad* based on the preparation and social capital of the community. Indonesia deserves to be an example as one of the countries with the largest Muslim population that has implemented the concept of religious moderation in Islam. Indonesia is not a formally Islamic state and constitutionally, but not a secular state. Indonesia is a peaceful country that upholds high tolerance and harmony in society. However, Indonesia has a strong foundation, which is Pancasila. Pancasila is a philosophical basis built by the *Founding Fathers* during nation-building and governance. Pancasila is not a religion, and Pancasila does not have any conflicts with any religion. That Pancasila is a sincere effort of the founding fathers of Indonesia that has been agreed upon by all layers of the nation as the foundation of the state. All the principles contained in Pancasila are not in conflict with the teachings of the Quran and Sunnah. Pancasila can serve as an entity to preserve diversity. Therefore, if there is an effort to replace the foundation of the Indonesian state with the Islamic Caliphate system, it will result in a shift away from religious moderation in Islam in Indonesia.
6. Moderation in interacting with non-Muslims. Often, religion has two sides, gentle and harsh. The gentle side can be shown to the group for internal solidarity, while the harsh side is shown to the outside group as a defense mechanism. If these two sides are not guarded by practicing religious moderation, religion can trigger social problems. Therefore, tolerance is a way to avoid extremist and syncretic ideologies. Tolerance is not syncretism, which tends to standardize all religions. Tolerance is also not a *proselytizing* attitude that assumes there is no similarity between religions.

From the dimension of strengthening the understanding of religious moderation above, we can see, reflect, and implement the true nature of religion. We agree that all religions have a strong commitment to carrying out their activities for their followers. However, all religions also agree to always teach their followers to avoid acts of violence, because no religion allows its followers to kill or harm others (Senata et al., 2021). All religions also teach their followers to be in solidarity, to respect, and to care for humanity in all aspects. The concept of actions guided by conscience is also taught by every religion because the goal of religion is for its followers to behave and speak according to the reality taught in the religion. Thus, in the end, all religions convey values of peace, equality, tolerance, and harmonization. In this regard, academic community, lecturers, and students continue to strive in efforts to strengthen the understanding of religious moderation in Islamic higher education institutions.



#### 4. CONCLUSION

The findings of the aforementioned study indicate that Islamic education at Raden Fatah State Islamic University Palembang employs a learning strategy centred around religious moderation. This approach aims to enhance students' comprehension and knowledge. This encompasses the integration of religious moderation content into the educational curriculum, enhancing learning methodologies, coordinating educational initiatives, providing students with specialised materials on religious moderation, and empowering instructors to evaluate students' comprehension of religious moderation. Moreover, it is imperative for the academic community, instructors, and students to collectively acknowledge and implement religious understanding in all aspects of life. This can be achieved by enhancing religious education through compulsory lectures in university courses, faculty courses, and study programme courses. Enhancing comprehension of religious moderation is crucial for students in the Islamic religious education programme. It guides them to effectively address and resolve religious matters within Indonesia's diverse culture. Based on this premise, all members of the academic community, including instructors and students, can achieve this goal by fostering camaraderie among religious communities, promoting peace, fostering a harmonious existence, advocating for equality and tolerance, adopting a moderate approach, preventing conflicts, avoiding selfishness, and fostering a sense of unity. Through collaborative efforts, it is possible to achieve long-lasting religious moderation, while prioritising the preservation of unity over divergences. Moreover, students enrolled in the Islamic religious education programme at the Faculty of Education and Teaching Science set a precedent for students in other study programmes within the Raden Fatah State Islamic University Palembang community.

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