

# Inclusive Islamic Education: The Role of Religious Moderation in Transformation of Islamic Education Institutions in Riau

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## ABSTRACT

The transformation of Islamic Higher Education Institutions (hereafter, PTKIS) towards quality education with a religious moderation approach in the Indragiri Hulu District, Riau Province, is crucial for meeting contemporary challenges and fostering socio-economic development. This article explores the integration of religious moderation within the PTKIS environment in the Indragiri Hulu District and the developmental direction of private PTKIS in the region adopting a religious moderation approach. Research outcomes emphasize key transformational aspects, including curriculum adjustments to incorporate religious moderation content into every lecture. This aligns with moderate Islamic values and reflects the latest developments in science and technology, aiming to enhance accessibility and educational quality, creating an innovative learning environment. PTKIS in the Indragiri Hulu District is dedicated to creating an inclusive campus that respects diversity, promotes critical thinking, and instills tolerance. Emphasizing the improvement of teaching and research quality involves applying religious moderation values in all academic activities. Modernizing campus facilities, including digital libraries and state-of-the-art laboratories, is prioritized to meet contemporary educational standards. A hidden curriculum is implemented for broad student participation. Additionally, PTKIS collaborates with local governments, communities, and the industrial sector to establish close links between education and employment, preparing graduates with practical skills for a competitive job market. The transformation of PTKIS in the Indragiri Hulu District establishes a holistic, modern educational foundation aligned with religious moderation values, contributing positively to character formation, intellectual development, and active engagement in a diverse society.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Higher education plays a strategic role and function not only in the development of knowledge and technology, but more importantly, in how it prepares, guides, and shapes the character of its students to be innovative, responsive, creative, skilled, competitive, and cooperative in the development of the nation's civilization through the implementation of the three pillars of higher education. Based on the above exposition, it can be understood that the presence of higher education in the national development system is to produce knowledge and technology, conduct research activities, prepare high-quality and competitive human resources for Indonesia to face the dynamics

and competition in the labor market, both at the national and global levels. It also aims to cultivate a sense of patriotism through community service, without neglecting the values of religion and noble character.

Even the values of religion and noble character become distinctive identities that must be possessed by the younger generation of the Indonesian nation, reflected in their attitudes, behaviors, and activities in national life. The current world is undergoing extraordinary changes, marked by complexity, pluralism, and uncertainty. Bauman, a sociologist, for example, notes that life in the 21st century is moving from 'solid modernity' to 'languid modernity,' which continues to flow. Thus, whether we like it or not, we are forced to learn to become flexible, adaptable individuals, living and working under conditions of uncertainty. Unfortunately, in such conditions, Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTKI) with all their components have not adequately prepared themselves (Burton, Gidley and Fincher, 2010).

The 21st century, marked as the era of globalization, the fourth industrial revolution, and society 5.0 with the education system of "the realism of culture, not economic," demands a strengthening of the mind, heart, and soul as instruments of perennial spiritual intelligence. All of these embody the fundamental characteristics of Islamic education, aimed at controlling critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, media and technology, flexibility, leadership, and social skills (Doucette *et al.*, 2015).

As a religious-based institution of higher education, Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTKIS) play a crucial role in developing a moderate understanding of religion among students. PTKIS can fulfill its role as a center for learning and researching religion that upholds values of tolerance, inclusivity, and balance in comprehending and practicing religious teachings. By involving faculty, researchers, and students in interactive discussions and dialogues, PTKIS can contribute to shaping a generation that practices religion with a moderate attitude.

In the increasingly complex and heterogeneous context, quality education with a moderation approach to religion becomes even more essential. Furthermore, it is explained that universities have a noble goal: first, to make students have faith and piety towards the One Almighty God. This emphasizes that the foundation for developing the Indonesian generation is based on religious values derived from the beliefs and values of the Indonesian society. Secondly, universities have the goal of preparing graduates who master specific fields of knowledge and/or technology. Mastery of these fields provides them with the capability to compete healthily in the domestic job market, especially in the face of the 5.0 industrial revolution. Thirdly, universities must be capable of generating the development of science and technology through collaborative research activities between faculty and students. The results of this research are expected to contribute to the welfare of society, the progress of the nation, and the advancement of global civilization. According to Endang Sukara, the progress of a nation lies in its ability to utilize research and development products in science and technology as a basis for every decision-making process. Indeed, the development of science and technology has become an integral part of the social, economic, and political development of every nation in the world. Therefore, the development of knowledge and IPTEK through research activities should be the backbone for the development of universities and the nation as a whole. Fourthly, there is the existence of community service activities, as a form of collaboration between faculty, students, and the community.

The execution of community service aims to implement the outcomes of science and technology or to glean insights from the dynamics of community life in managing available resources. There are several reasons why the concept of religious moderation is chosen to enhance the transformation of private Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTKIS) towards quality education within the framework of religious moderation. Firstly, the Religious Moderation Program is part of the Strategic Plans outlined by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia for the period 2020 - 2024. Indonesia, marked by diversity in ethnicity, culture, religion, social aspects, political aspirations, and economics, necessitates the importance of organizing and managing a multicultural society to prevent potential conflicts arising from differences. Secondly, the heterogeneous conditions of the

Indragiri Hulu community, including cultural, socio-economic, political aspirations, religious, and faith aspects. With more than 20 ethnicities residing in the Indragiri Hulu district, such as the Rejang tribe comprising 43% (Talang Mamak Tribe), and five religions being practiced, including Islam as the majority religion with 97%, along with Catholicism, Protestantism, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Thirdly, faculty members and students of STAI Nurul Falah Airmolek hail from various regions, such as West Sumatra and North Sumatra provinces, bringing along differences in student organizations like HMI, PMII, IMM, NU, and Muhammadiyah. Lastly, despite the absence of an established unit managing religious moderation (moderation house) equivalent to the Head of the Center within the Research and Community Service Institute (LPPM), the religious moderation center lacks a concept, empirical experience, implementation strategy, and development direction within the higher education institution in the Inhu district.

The research problem formulation regarding the transformation of Private Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTKIS) towards quality education with a religious moderation approach can be formulated as follows: 1) How is the understanding of religious moderation in the PTKIS environment in the Inhu District from the perspective of the academic community? 2) What is the direction of the development of religious moderation in the PTKIS environment in the Inhu District from the perspective of the academic community? This research essentially encourages PTKI not only to address the academic needs of students capable of living in the 21st century but also to strengthen the mission of da'wah and academics alongside integration-interconnection as the main character of PTKI. Thus, achieving Islam *Rahmatan lil'alam* in this global era requires delivering quality education amidst this rapidly changing and uncertain era.

The research on the implementation of religious moderation in higher education institutions, specifically focusing on STAI Nurul Falah Airmolek and STAI Madinatun Najah Rengat, aims to fill a significant gap in the existing literature. While there is growing recognition of the importance of promoting religious moderation in educational settings, there remains a dearth of studies that delve into the specific strategies, challenges, and impacts of integrating religious moderation into the curriculum of Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia.

By examining the implementation of religious moderation within these institutions, this research offers novel insights into how religious values can be effectively taught and internalized in a context where Islam plays a central role. This study contributes to the literature by providing empirical data on the strategies used by educators to promote religious moderation, the attitudes and perceptions of students towards these initiatives, and the potential impacts on both the campus community and wider society.

Furthermore, this research sheds light on the role of higher education institutions in countering extremism and fostering social cohesion. By highlighting the experiences and perspectives of stakeholders involved in the implementation process, it offers practical recommendations for educators, policymakers, and other stakeholders seeking to promote religious moderation and tolerance in similar contexts.

In summary, this study offers a unique contribution to the field by addressing a gap in the literature and providing valuable insights into the implementation and impact of religious moderation initiatives in Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia. It adds new perspectives and empirical data that can inform future research, policy development, and educational practices aimed at promoting religious harmony and peaceful coexistence in diverse societies.

## 2. METHODS

This research combines qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding qualitatively, supported or strengthened by statistical data, termed a Mixed Methods Research. The qualitative approach can be utilized to gain a profound understanding of the transformation of Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTKI) and how the religious moderation approach is implemented in educational practices. For qualitative data obtained through methods such

as interviews, observations, and document analysis, thematic analysis will be employed. Thematic analysis involves systematically identifying patterns or themes within the data, which helps in understanding the underlying meanings and concepts. Through this approach, themes related to the strategies, challenges, perceptions, and impacts of religious moderation initiatives will be identified and analyzed to draw meaningful conclusions.

In addition to thematic analysis, content analysis techniques may also be utilized, particularly for analyzing documents, reports, and textual data related to religious moderation programs, policies, and curriculum materials. Content analysis involves systematically categorizing and interpreting textual data to identify recurring patterns, themes, or discourses, providing valuable insights into the content and context of religious moderation initiatives.

The quantitative approach can be employed to measure the effectiveness of the transformation and its impact on the quality of education. The research subjects may involve PTKIS in the Indragiri Hulu District, namely STAI Nurul Falah Airmolek and STAI Madinatun Najah Rengat. Data collection techniques include direct observation, interviews with PTKI administrators, faculty, and students. Additionally, questionnaires or surveys are used to gather data from a broader range of respondents. Multiple data sources are utilized, including interviews, surveys, and document analysis. By triangulating data from these different sources, a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the implementation and impact of religious moderation in higher education can be achieved. For example, findings from interviews with faculty members and students can be compared and contrasted with survey results to identify converging themes or discrepancies.

Participants for interviews are selected using purposeful or criterion sampling. This method involves selecting individuals who possess specific characteristics or experiences relevant to the research questions. Criteria for selecting interview participants may include: 1) Faculty members (lecturers) with experience in teaching courses related to religious moderation or involved in implementing religious moderation initiatives. 2) Administrators or decision-makers involved in shaping the curriculum or policies related to religious moderation within the selected PTKIS. 3) Students representing different academic levels (e.g., undergraduate, graduate) and disciplines who have experienced or participated in activities related to religious moderation.

In conducting interview ethical considerations are paramount, particularly when conducting research within a religious educational context. Here are some key points regarding ethical considerations and their management: 1) Informed Consent: Prior to conducting interviews or surveys, participants will be provided with detailed information about the research objectives, procedures, potential risks and benefits, and their rights as participants. Participants will have the opportunity to ask questions and provide informed consent voluntarily. Consent forms will be used to document participants' agreement to participate in the study. 2) Confidentiality: Confidentiality of participants' information will be strictly maintained throughout the research process. All data collected, including interview transcripts and survey responses, will be anonymized and stored securely. Participants will be assured that their identities will not be disclosed in any research outputs without their explicit consent. 3) Respect for Religious Beliefs: Researchers will demonstrate sensitivity and respect for the religious beliefs and practices of participants. Care will be taken to avoid imposing any biases or judgments based on personal beliefs. Questions and discussions will be conducted in a non-confrontational manner, fostering an environment of mutual respect and understanding. 3) Minimizing Harm: Efforts will be made to minimize any potential harm or discomfort to participants arising from their involvement in the research. This includes providing support mechanisms for participants who may experience distress during interviews or surveys and ensuring that research activities are conducted in a culturally appropriate and non-intrusive manner. 4) Approval and Oversight: The research protocol, including ethical considerations, will undergo review and approval by relevant institutional review boards or ethics committees. Any revisions or modifications to the protocol will be made in accordance with their recommendations. Additionally, ongoing oversight and monitoring will be conducted to ensure compliance with ethical guidelines throughout the research process. By

adhering to these ethical principles and procedures, the research upholds the rights and well-being of participants while generating valuable insights into the implementation and impact of religious moderation initiatives in higher education.

### 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this research are connected to the theory articulated by Muhaimin, particularly regarding the stages of internalization: transformation, transaction, and transinternalization. Furthermore, there are strategies or processes for instilling character values, namely power strategy (strength strategy), persuasive strategy (opinion formation strategy), and normative re-educative strategy. As previously mentioned, the transformation of Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTKIS) towards quality education with a religious moderation approach is achieved through activities, implementation in the hidden curriculum in classrooms, and discussions among students (Vishwakarma *et al.*, 2023). The activities in transforming PTKIS towards quality education with a religious moderation approach employ methods such as lectures, question-and-answer sessions, and discussions (Biiznillah and Khoiri, 2020).

If correlated with Muhaimin's theory of the stages of value implantation, it aligns with the stages of value transformation, transaction, and transinternalization. As mentioned earlier, this strategy utilizes three methods: lectures, question-and-answer sessions, and discussions. The lecture method shares a common goal with the stage of value transformation, where the teacher/professor merely informs students about good and less favorable values or, in this case, about religious moderation through verbal communication (Nasukah and Winarti, 2021). Then, the question-and-answer and discussion methods align with the goals of the transactional value stage. In this stage or method, the understanding of values or knowledge, in this case, the understanding of religious moderation, is conveyed through two-way communication or interaction between students and the teacher/professor, as well as among fellow students, involving mutual interaction (Al-Faruqi, 1995). In other words, both teachers and students are actively engaged. As for the transinternalization stage, this stage goes much deeper than mere transaction. In this stage, the appearance of the teacher or professor in front of students is not just their physical presence but also their mental attitude (personality). Similarly, students respond to the teacher not just based on their physical movements or appearance but also their mental attitude and personality. In this stage, all methods used to understand religious moderation, including lectures, questions, and discussions, are crucial because every action, attitude, and behavior of the teacher becomes an assessment and example for students when discussing the understanding of religious moderation – not just during the learning process but at any time and place (Muhaimin, 1996).

Next is the learning of religious moderation, through various activities mentioned earlier, whether using lecture and question-and-answer methods, providing explanations about the material. This indirectly encourages or shapes students to understand religious moderation, whether done directly or indirectly, encompassing thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors. This aligns with Muhaimin's theory of value cultivation strategies, particularly the persuasive strategy, wherein this strategy is employed to shape the views and opinions of school/campus communities. Lastly, the normative re-educative strategy aims to re-educate and replace the old paradigms of thinking within the school/campus community with new ones (Nurcholis, 2019).

In connection with this theory, private Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTKIS) itself have students from diverse backgrounds, including Nahdlatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah, and others. As explained earlier, there is an effort to impart an understanding of religious moderation to all students, starting from the time they become new students and continuing throughout their learning in class. From the results of this research, it can be understood that both private Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTKIS) are implementing the normative re-educative strategy.

Furthermore, the findings or research results related to the implementation strategy of religious moderation in the environment of Higher Education Institutions in the Inhu District, from the perspective of the academic community and students at STAI Nurul Falah Airmolek and STAI

Madinatun Najah Rengat, include the incorporation of hidden curriculum, aligning with Thomas Lickona's theory regarding three essential components in building character education: moral knowing (knowledge of morals), moral feeling (feelings about morals), and moral action (moral conduct).

Firstly, moral knowing involves an individual's knowledge about something. In the context of this research, students acquire knowledge of moderate values in religion through the hidden curriculum applied by lecturers through discussions among students. Secondly, moral feeling is related to one's attitudes about something they know, whether it be love, hate, or others. In the research context, it relates to how students, with the knowledge they gain about moderate religious values through the hidden curriculum, develop their attitudes and behave differently from others. Thirdly, moral action means behaving in accordance with what one knows and how they feel. In the research context, it pertains to the behavior of students after the implementation of the hidden curriculum. Lecturers play a crucial role in instilling moderate religious values in students, requiring various strategies for effective communication (Masykuri, Qodriyah and Bz, 2020).

According to Mr. Afif, the Chairman of STAI Madinatun Najah, lecturers play several important roles in national education, especially in the application of moderate religious values to students, including being a conservator (preserver) of the value system that is a source of maturity norms. In building religious moderation based on the conservator role, lecturers maintain moderate religious values in accordance with their existing values. Religious tolerance, justice, balance, simplicity, unity, fraternity, and other religious moderation values are worth preserving in the school environment (Nur and Mukhlis, 2015). These can be instilled in students through regularly conducted activities, such as gatherings and reminders about the importance of religious moderation directly before starting classes, as well as incorporating religious moderation values into every course material on campus (Maarif, 2014).

Additionally, lecturers serve as innovators (developers) of the knowledge value system. Innovations can be implemented to build religious moderation. One teaching model cannot be applied in all situations, conditions, and environments. Adjustments are needed so that it can be accepted by the existing environment. For instance, the application of religious tolerance attitudes to students can increase tolerance and eliminate discrimination (Rahman, 2017). Innovation can also be aimed at strengthening the religious character and nationalism of students through a series of activities, such as celebrating significant dates involving everyone. In summary, these innovations can be carried out through a series of activities, behavior changes, and others. (Nur'aini, 2021).

Lecturers also act as transmitters (successors) of the existing value system to students. In this role, lecturers can behave in accordance with moderate religious values in their daily lives. This behavior can then be emulated by all students in the academic community. As transformers, lecturers translate the existing value system through its application in their behavior, which is then actualized in the interaction process with students (Fahri and Zainuri, 2019). Lecturers as organizers are responsible for creating an accountable educational process. All activities in the academic community are the responsibility of all lecturers. Planned and executed activities need to pay attention to religious moderation values. For example, celebrations of significant days, community service, and student activities. In the classroom, teaching and learning activities can be carried out through discussions, rearranging students' seating arrangements to avoid them consistently choosing the same friends, and other activities. The participation of all parties is crucial to the success of every organized activity (Rinawati, 2015).

In conclusion, the implementation of religious moderation values to students plays a crucial role in the application of religious moderation, including being a conservator (preserver), innovator (developer), transmitter (successor), transformer (translator), and organizer (organizer) (Banks and Banks, 2004).

### **3.1 Inhibiting Factors in Implementation of Religious Moderation Values Using the Insertion Method in Courses**

Application of moderation values with the insertion method in courses at STAI Nurul Falah Airmolek and STAI Madinnatun Najah Rengat, in its implementation, has supporting and inhibiting factors. These factors can originate from outside the campus or within the campus itself. As mentioned by Mr. Afif, the Chairman of STAI Madinnatun Najah Rengat, the inhibiting factors in the application of moderation values with the insertion method in courses include the following: 1) Diversity in Understanding Among Lecturers: Some lecturers are familiar with the content of moderation values, while others may not fully understand it. This variation among lecturers affects the integration of moderation values into the learning process. 2) Inadequate Facilities: Both STAINF and STAI MN lack adequate facilities for learning, including classroom space, Wi-Fi in classrooms, and digital religious laboratories. This inadequacy limits lecturers from seamlessly incorporating moderation values into both offline and online learning activities. 3) Social Media Influence: The influence of social media is a challenge. Some students, after being exposed to moderation values during lectures, tend to consume content from radical religious figures on social media. This can impact students' perspectives on practicing religion in a polite, courteous, and cultured manner, both in school and society.

To address these challenges, a systematic training program or understanding sessions should be provided to lecturers. This training aims to ensure that lecturers have a thorough understanding of moderation values (Rahayu and Lesmana, 2020). When conducting classes, lecturers should be equipped to think about which moderation values are suitable for the course content and how to seamlessly integrate them into the learning process. The reasons for this approach include the diverse educational backgrounds of students, with many having attended either public schools or madrasahs. Determining a standard for Islamic education becomes challenging due to variations in students' abilities to comprehend religion based on their diverse educational backgrounds. (Rahman, Ruswandi and Erihadiana, 2021).

Furthermore, it is crucial to consider students who engage with content from radical religious figures and are influenced by external social interactions outside the school environment, such as peer interactions. This emphasizes the importance of addressing external influences on students' perceptions and behaviors related to religious moderation (Junaedi, 2019).

### **3.2 Perceptions and Behaviors of School Community Regarding Religious Moderation**

The implementation of religious moderation, in general, is a process involving conscious, planned, and accountable activities or efforts to train, guide, direct, maintain, and enhance the knowledge and religious insights, social skills, and religious attitudes of children through the implementation of Islamic teachings (creed/monotheism, worship, and morals) that have the specificity of a *wasatiyyah* thought pattern, subsequently practiced in daily life. The application of religious moderation values is a necessity. The current perception of lecturers regarding religious moderation is seen as one of the solutions to religious issues in Indonesia, such as the proliferation of extremist and radical ideologies. Although if we dissect each of the values of religious moderation, these values are similar to the teachings of Nahdlatul Ulama; they are simply consolidated into a framework called religious moderation. The positive aspect of promoting religious moderation on campus is to remind lecturers to set an example of how to practice religion politely, courteously, and gracefully to students amid the prevalence of radical and extremist ideologies in Indonesia. With the foundation of religious moderation on campus, it is hoped that students will become exemplary figures in society, demonstrating good, polite, courteous, and graceful religious behavior, thus realizing the transformation of Private Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTKIS) towards quality education with a religious moderation approach.

As for the current students' perception of religious moderation, since this term is relatively new to everyone, there is still a need for socialization to students about religious moderation in each class by lecturers, even though some students already understand it, especially those in student organizations.

To enhance the understanding of religious moderation on campus, further socialization through seminars will be conducted. (Sumpadang, 2022).

In conclusion, the perceptions and behaviors of the academic community regarding religious moderation are diverse. Religious moderation is viewed as a solution to religious issues in Indonesia, combating the rise of extremist and radical ideologies. It is seen as a reflection of good religious practice in the midst of the sensitive religious situation and as a unifying force for the nation, regardless of ethnicity, race, skin color, or culture in Indonesia. Religious moderation serves to remind the campus community to set an example for students in conveying religious practices that are polite, courteous, and graceful, ultimately aiming for students to apply these behaviors in society (Yulianto, 2020).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that internalizing moderate religious values in universities helps shape students with balanced and inclusive religious beliefs. The Ministry of Religious Affairs of Indonesia outlines indicators of religious moderation, including national commitment, tolerance, anti-radicalism, and accommodation of local culture. These indicators guide students to respect differences, reject radicalism, and embrace local traditions without compromising core religious principles. The study found that students at STAI Nurul Falah and STAI Madinnatunnajah Rengat developed inclusive religious attitudes, recognizing their own religious truths while coexisting peacefully with others. This inclusiveness is nurtured through academic discussions, religious learning, and a hidden curriculum. Consequently, students embody tolerance, anti-radicalism, and cultural accommodation, serving as role models in society and advancing the transformation of Private Islamic Higher Education Institutions towards quality education grounded in religious moderation. However, the research is limited by its focus on only two institutions, which may not represent all universities. Future research should include a broader range of institutions and explore additional methods for promoting religious moderation.

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**Conflicts of Interest:** We, Juni Erfida Nasution, Novri Susanti Suparman, Bela Nuryahati, the authors of the paper entitled "Inclusive Islamic Education: The Role of Religious Moderation in Transformation of Islamic Education Institutions in Riau" state that this manuscript is an original scientific work and tis manuscript has not been published in another journal or submitted (transferred) to another journal for publication. manuscript is submitted only to Al-Ishlah: Jurnal Pendidikan". It will not be submitted elsewhere for publication until accepted/rejected by Al-Ishlah. We also declare that this paper is our entire contribution and original and has not been copied from elsewhere.

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