



Islamic Religious Education in Addressing Radicalism and Liberalism Through Moderate Islam

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Abstract

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Islamic Religious Education (Pendidikan Agama Islam/PAI) has an important role in addressing contemporary ideological challenges, particularly radicalism and liberalism among students in the digital era. The increasing exposure of young people to exclusive religious narratives, social media content, and transnational ideological influences has created challenges for educational institutions in developing moderate and contextual religious understanding. This study aims to analyze the role of Islamic Religious Education in addressing radicalism and liberalism through the development of moderate Islamic attitudes among students. The study employed a qualitative approach using a library research method. Data were collected from books, scientific journal articles, government reports, and relevant literature related to radicalism, liberalism, religious moderation, and Islamic education. The data were analyzed using content analysis techniques to identify key themes and relationships among concepts discussed in the study. The findings indicate that radicalism and excessive liberalism represent two extreme tendencies in religious understanding that may influence students' perspectives and social attitudes. Islamic Religious Education may contribute to preventing ideological extremism when implemented through contextual, dialogical, and humanistic learning approaches emphasizing tolerance (tasamuh), balance (tawazun), justice (i'tidal), and moderation (tawasuth). The study also highlights the importance of teacher competence, digital literacy, curriculum strengthening, and collaboration among schools, families, and communities in supporting moderate religious understanding among students. Therefore, strengthening inclusive and moderation-oriented Islamic Religious Education remains important in developing students who are religiously committed, tolerant, and socially responsible within multicultural societies.

Keywords:

Islamic Religious Education, radicalism, liberalism, religious moderation, students

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INTRODUCTION

Radicalism among students has become an increasingly concerning issue within the context of Indonesia's national education system. The rapid development of globalization and digital information flows has created new ideological challenges that influence the religious perspectives of young people. In this situation, Islamic Religious Education (Pendidikan Agama Islam/PAI) occupies a



strategic position in shaping students who are not only religiously committed, but also tolerant, inclusive, and capable of coexisting within a pluralistic society. Through its pedagogical function, PAI is expected to contribute to the development of balanced religious attitudes and strengthen moderate Islamic values among students.

In contemporary religious discourse, radicalism is often associated with narrow, exclusive, and rigid interpretations of religion that may legitimize intolerance and violence in the name of faith. Meanwhile, liberal approaches in religious interpretation may encourage excessively unrestricted understandings that potentially overlook the foundational principles of Islamic teachings. Both tendencies present challenges for Islamic education because they may influence the construction of students' religious identities during adolescence, a developmental stage characterized by the search for meaning, identity formation, and emotional vulnerability. Consequently, students are frequently exposed to ideological influences originating from social environments, peer groups, and digital media platforms.

The issue of radicalism among students has attracted growing attention in Indonesia due to its implications for social harmony, multiculturalism, and national cohesion. The infiltration of radical ideologies into educational spaces threatens educational environments and weakens the values of diversity and citizenship that constitute the foundation of Indonesian society. Several factors contribute to this phenomenon, including limited religious literacy, weak understanding of Pancasila values, uncontrolled exposure to social media content, and the absence of moderate spiritual guidance within educational institutions. In this context, PAI is expected to function beyond the transfer of religious knowledge by serving as an instrument for character building, moral development, and the cultivation of Islamic values that encourage peaceful coexistence and social responsibility.

According to a report issued by the BNPT (2025), students constitute one of the most vulnerable groups exposed to radical ideological narratives through digital media and online networks. The report identifies several contributing factors, including easy access to radical content, limited parental supervision, and insufficient pedagogical approaches that internalize moderate religious values within schools. These conditions demonstrate the urgency of strengthening Islamic Religious Education as a preventive educational framework capable of filtering ideological extremism and promoting contextual religious understanding among students.

Previous studies have emphasized the importance of dialogical and contextual religious education in strengthening students' critical awareness toward extremist narratives. Agustina et al. (2025), Nafsiyah and Wardan (2024), and Nugroho (2021) argue that Islamic Religious Education can enhance students' critical thinking capacities when learning processes encourage reflective and participatory engagement with religious issues. Similarly, Destriani (2022) explains that humanistic approaches in Islamic education enable students to understand religion not merely as ritual practice, but also as an ethical and social framework that supports humanity, tolerance, and coexistence. These findings indicate that educational approaches emphasizing moderation and inclusivity may contribute to preventing radical tendencies among young people.

Despite its strategic role, the implementation of PAI in many educational institutions still faces several challenges. Religious learning often remains textual, normative, and heavily focused on cognitive memorization without adequately connecting religious teachings to students' social realities and contemporary challenges (Mayer, 2011). As a result, students may possess formal religious knowledge while lacking critical and contextual understanding of religious diversity, tolerance, and citizenship. Hamid (2020) states that effective religious education should be capable of responding to contemporary social changes and providing relevant meaning within students' everyday experiences.

The role of Islamic Religious Education teachers is also crucial in developing inclusive and moderate learning environments (Mezirow, 2018). Teachers are expected not only to function as instructors but also as moral educators and spiritual role models who demonstrate tolerance, openness, and respect for differences. Hasanah (2023) highlights that pedagogical, social, and professional competencies among PAI teachers significantly influence the formation of inclusive classroom environments that encourage students to think critically and appreciate diversity. In addition, external factors such as school culture, family environment, and digital media exposure continue to shape students' religious perceptions and social behaviour.

The increasing influence of social media has intensified the circulation of misinformation and disinformation related to religious issues. Many students access religious content through online platforms without adequate digital literacy or religious literacy skills. Consequently, social media has become an important arena for disseminating ideological narratives, including radical interpretations of religion. Rachmawati and Fauzan (2024) emphasize the importance of collaboration among schools, families, and communities in creating educational ecosystems capable of protecting students from radical ideological influences. Furthermore, Wahyuni and Latif (2025) found that the systematic integration of religious moderation values into the PAI curriculum contributes to strengthening students' awareness of tolerance and multiculturalism.

From a theoretical perspective, the implementation of religious moderation in education aligns with Mezirow's concept of transformative education, which views learning as a process that transforms perspectives, attitudes, and patterns of behaviour. Within the Indonesian educational context, transformative Islamic education may contribute to the development of students who are intellectually capable, spiritually mature, and socially responsible. The Indonesian government has also emphasized the importance of religious moderation through national educational policies, including the integration of moderation values into educational programs and the promotion of peaceful school initiatives aimed at strengthening tolerance and preventing violence within schools.

Although previous studies have discussed radicalism, religious moderation, and Islamic education separately, studies examining Islamic Religious Education as a preventive pedagogical instrument against student radicalization in the digital era remain relatively limited. This article contributes to the growing discourse on preventive Islamic pedagogy by positioning PAI as a transformative educational framework for strengthening moderate religious attitudes and reducing students' vulnerability to ideological extremism in digital environments. Therefore, this

article aims to analyse the strategic role of Islamic Religious Education in strengthening moderate religious attitudes and preventing radical ideological influences among students through dialogical, contextual, and transformative educational approaches.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design using the library research method to develop a comprehensive conceptual understanding of the role of Islamic Religious Education (*Pendidikan Agama Islam* or PAI) in addressing the growing challenges of religious radicalism and liberalism through the promotion of moderate Islamic values. The qualitative library research approach was considered the most appropriate because the objective of the study was not to measure causal relationships statistically or to generate empirical findings from field observations, but rather to critically examine, interpret, and synthesize existing scholarly knowledge related to Islamic education, religious moderation, and ideological challenges in contemporary society. As explained by Miles (1994), qualitative research emphasizes the interpretation of meanings and the systematic analysis of textual data to generate a deeper understanding of complex social and educational phenomena. Accordingly, this study integrates theoretical perspectives, empirical evidence, and educational policies to construct a coherent conceptual framework explaining how Islamic Religious Education contributes to strengthening religious moderation among students.

Data Sources

The study relied exclusively on secondary data obtained from authoritative academic and institutional publications. The primary sources consisted of peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, conference proceedings, doctoral dissertations, government regulations, official reports issued by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, and publications produced by national and international organizations concerned with education, religious moderation, peacebuilding, and the prevention of violent extremism. To ensure the academic quality and reliability of the reviewed literature, the study primarily utilized publications indexed in internationally recognized databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, SpringerLink, ScienceDirect, Taylor & Francis Online, Wiley Online Library, and Emerald Insight. These sources provided comprehensive theoretical and empirical discussions regarding Islamic Religious Education, moderate Islam (*wasatiyyah*), radicalism, liberalism, multicultural education, character education, and digital religious literacy.

The selection of literature prioritized publications produced between 2015 and 2025 in order to capture recent scholarly developments concerning religious moderation and educational responses to ideological challenges. Nevertheless, several classical and seminal publications published before this period were also included because they constitute the theoretical foundations of Islamic educational

philosophy and moderation studies. The inclusion of both contemporary and foundational literature enabled the study to establish a balanced conceptual analysis while maintaining historical continuity in the development of Islamic educational thought.

Literature Selection Procedure

The literature selection process followed a systematic procedure designed to ensure the relevance, credibility, and academic quality of all sources included in the analysis. Initially, literature searches were conducted using electronic academic databases through combinations of keywords related to the research topic, including *Islamic Religious Education*, *religious moderation*, *moderate Islam*, *wasatiyyah*, *religious radicalism*, *religious extremism*, *liberalism in Islam*, *Islamic character education*, *counter-radicalization*, *students*, and *digital religious literacy*. These keywords were employed individually and in various combinations to identify publications addressing both theoretical and practical aspects of Islamic education in contemporary educational contexts.

Following the initial search, all identified publications were screened by examining their titles, abstracts, keywords, and research objectives. Only publications directly discussing the relationship between Islamic Religious Education, religious moderation, ideological extremism, and educational practice were retained for further analysis. Studies focusing exclusively on political security issues without educational implications or publications lacking academic credibility were excluded. The remaining literature was then subjected to comprehensive full-text reading to identify theoretical concepts, empirical findings, educational strategies, and policy recommendations relevant to the objectives of this study. This systematic selection process ensured that every source contributed meaningfully to the development of the study's conceptual framework.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted through a systematic review of selected academic literature. The process began by identifying publications that met the predetermined inclusion criteria and were considered relevant to the objectives of the study. Each selected publication was examined comprehensively to extract information concerning theoretical perspectives, conceptual definitions, educational models, curriculum development, pedagogical strategies, empirical findings, and policy recommendations related to Islamic Religious Education and religious moderation.

Throughout the review process, important concepts and findings were carefully documented and organized according to their thematic similarities. Special attention was given to literature discussing the implementation of moderate Islamic values within educational institutions, the development of students' religious character, the prevention of ideological extremism, and the challenges faced by Islamic education in the digital era. This systematic organization facilitated the subsequent analytical process and enabled the identification of recurring patterns across different scholarly perspectives.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis, a method widely employed in qualitative research to interpret textual information systematically through classification, comparison, and thematic interpretation. Content analysis enables researchers to identify recurring concepts, emerging themes, and relationships among different bodies of literature while maintaining the contextual meaning of each source.

The analytical process began with data reduction, during which all relevant information concerning Islamic Religious Education, moderate Islamic values, radicalism, liberalism, and educational strategies was identified and extracted from the selected publications. Irrelevant information unrelated to the objectives of the study was excluded to maintain analytical focus. The remaining data were subsequently organized into thematic categories representing the major dimensions of the study, including the philosophical foundations of moderate Islam (*wasatiyyah*), Islamic Religious Education curriculum, character education, religious tolerance, counter-radicalization strategies, prevention of religious liberalism, digital religious literacy, and teacher competencies in promoting moderate Islamic values.

Following thematic categorization, comparative thematic analysis was conducted by comparing findings from different studies to identify similarities, differences, and emerging patterns regarding the effectiveness of Islamic Religious Education in addressing ideological challenges. Particular attention was devoted to educational practices promoting Islamic principles such as *al-'adl* (justice), *tawazun* (balance), *tasamuh* (tolerance), *shura* (consultation), and *wasatiyyah* (moderation). These principles were analyzed as educational values capable of strengthening students' religious understanding while simultaneously preventing both radical and excessively liberal interpretations of Islam.

The final stage involved interpretative synthesis, in which all identified themes were integrated into a coherent conceptual framework explaining the strategic role of Islamic Religious Education in fostering religious moderation. Through this synthesis, the study demonstrates how Islamic education contributes to developing students' critical thinking, religious literacy, peaceful coexistence, and resilience against ideological extremism within increasingly complex social and digital environments.

Trustworthiness of the Study

The credibility and trustworthiness of the study were enhanced through source triangulation, which involved comparing information obtained from various categories of scholarly literature, including theoretical works, empirical research, government regulations, institutional reports, and policy documents. The use of multiple sources enabled the researcher to validate concepts and identify consistent findings across different academic perspectives. Cross-referencing among publications also minimized subjective interpretation and strengthened the reliability of the conceptual analysis.

Furthermore, the interpretation of findings was continuously aligned with established theories of Islamic education, religious moderation, character education, multicultural education, and peace education. This theoretical

consistency ensured that the conceptual framework developed in this study was grounded in well-established scholarly traditions while remaining responsive to contemporary educational challenges. Consequently, the study provides a comprehensive and academically rigorous explanation of how Islamic Religious Education can serve as a strategic instrument for promoting moderate Islamic values and preventing the spread of radical and liberal ideologies among students in the digital era.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Religious Radicalism and Liberalism in Contemporary Islamic Discourse

Radicalism in the religious context refers to an ideology that seeks fundamental and rapid change through extreme approaches and, in some cases, the use of violence in the name of religion. Etymologically, the term radicalism originates from the word *radix*, meaning “root,” which reflects the desire to return completely to the fundamental teachings of religion. However, in practice, radicalism often develops into rigid, textual, and exclusive forms of religious understanding that pay limited attention to social and historical contexts (Nurhakiky & Mubarak, 2019). Radicalism is not limited to Islamic communities, as similar tendencies may also emerge within political, social, economic, and other religious contexts.

Meanwhile, liberalism in religious discourse refers to perspectives emphasizing individual freedom in understanding and interpreting religious teachings. Liberalism emerged from the spirit of rationality and freedom of thought, particularly as a response to authoritarian tendencies in religious interpretation. Within certain limits, liberal approaches may encourage openness, dialogue, and critical engagement with religious texts. However, interpretations that are not supported by strong methodological foundations may lead to excessively unrestricted understandings of religion and potentially weaken adherence to the fundamental principles of Islam.

The findings show that radicalism and liberalism are often positioned as two opposing tendencies in religious understanding. Radicalism tends to promote rigid and exclusive interpretations, whereas liberalism may encourage unrestricted interpretative freedom. Both tendencies require educational approaches capable of directing students toward balanced, contextual, and moderate religious understanding.

The study also found that radical religious movements are frequently characterized by limited willingness to engage in dialogue with differing perspectives. Usman et al. (2014) explains that radical movements often attempt to impose their views without providing sufficient space for negotiation or discussion. In several cases, concepts such as *takfir* are used to label opposing groups as deviant or outside the boundaries of religion. Such conditions may contribute to intolerance, social conflict, and justification of violence. Therefore, radicalism should be understood not only as a theological issue, but also as a social and educational challenge.

Challenges of Islamic Religious Education in Addressing Radicalism and Liberalism

Although Islamic Religious Education is considered to have a strategic role in preventing radical ideological influences, its implementation continues to face several challenges. One important challenge involves the limited preparedness of teachers in dealing with issues related to radicalism and ideological extremism among students. Many teachers have not received intensive training regarding early identification of radicalization tendencies or appropriate pedagogical approaches for addressing sensitive religious issues within educational settings.

The findings further indicate that Islamic Religious Education materials are often delivered through normative and textual approaches emphasizing memorization and cognitive mastery. Such approaches may limit opportunities for students to develop reflective and contextual understandings of religion. Hamid (2020) argues that effective religious education should be capable of responding to contemporary social changes and providing relevant meaning within students' everyday lives.

Another challenge concerns students who have already been exposed to exclusive religious narratives through social media or informal religious environments outside schools. In some cases, these students demonstrate skepticism toward moderate and dialogical approaches promoted within formal educational institutions. Therefore, teachers require empathetic communication skills and inclusive pedagogical approaches capable of encouraging students to engage constructively with differences and diversity. Hasanah (2023) emphasizes that pedagogical, social, and professional competencies among PAI teachers contribute significantly to the creation of inclusive and tolerant learning environments.

Institutional limitations also remain an important issue. Many schools have not yet developed specific programs related to religious moderation, radicalism prevention, or digital religious literacy. In addition, collaboration among schools, families, and communities in supporting early prevention efforts remains relatively limited. These findings indicate that strengthening moderate religious understanding requires broader educational support systems beyond classroom instruction alone.

Factors Contributing to Radicalism and Liberalism Among Students

The findings reveal that radicalism among young people emerges through various interconnected factors. One important factor is limited religious literacy, which may encourage simplistic and rigid interpretations of religious teachings. Radicalism is also influenced by social inequality, transnational ideological influences, and the widespread use of digital media without adequate literacy skills.

The study further found that identity-searching processes among adolescents contribute to their vulnerability toward extremist narratives. Young people often seek certainty, belonging, and recognition during periods of identity formation, making them more susceptible to ideological groups offering strong and exclusive narratives. Exposure to radical propaganda through social media, internet platforms, and extremist religious content also contributes to the spread of radical ideas among students.

Social and economic conditions may also increase vulnerability to radicalization. Young people experiencing marginalization, social isolation, discrimination, or economic insecurity may become more easily influenced by radical groups promising solidarity and collective identity. In multicultural societies such as Indonesia, some students may also experience religious identity crises that encourage them to seek more rigid forms of religious understanding.

The findings are consistent with a survey conducted by the Institute for Islamic Studies and Peace (LAKIF), which identified indications of radical tendencies among junior and senior high school students in the Jakarta metropolitan area. Kholik (2017) notes that a considerable proportion of respondents supported the implementation of Islamic law and questioned the relevance of Pancasila as the ideological foundation of the Indonesian state. These findings indicate that radicalization among students has become an important concern within Indonesian educational contexts.

In addition to radicalism, the findings also indicate several factors contributing to liberal religious tendencies. These factors include globalization, modernization, excessive emphasis on rational interpretation, limited understanding of Islamic interpretative methodologies, and the influence of Western secular and liberal thought. In some cases, liberal religious interpretations emerge as responses to rigid and exclusive forms of religiosity. However, interpretations lacking clear methodological foundations may lead to excessively flexible understandings of religion and weaken adherence to fundamental Islamic principles.

Overall, the findings suggest that both radicalism and excessive liberalism should be understood within broader social, cultural, and educational transformations. Therefore, educational approaches emphasizing moderation, contextual understanding, critical thinking, and balanced religious literacy remain important in shaping students' religious perspectives.

Strategies for Strengthening Moderate Islamic Attitudes Through Islamic Religious Education

The findings demonstrate that Islamic Religious Education may contribute to strengthening moderate religious attitudes when implemented systematically, contextually, and continuously. Efforts to develop moderate Islamic attitudes should not focus solely on the transfer of religious knowledge, but also on the development of students' perspectives, attitudes, and social behavior (Nurhakiky & Mubarak, 2019).

One important strategy involves integrating moderation values such as tolerance (*tasamuh*), balance (*tawazun*), justice (*i'tidal*), and moderation (*tawasuth*) into Islamic Religious Education curricula. Through this approach, students are encouraged to understand religion not only through legal and doctrinal dimensions, but also through ethical, humanitarian, and social perspectives.

Dialogical and critical learning methods also play an important role in promoting moderate religious understanding. Students should be encouraged to participate actively in discussions, ask questions, and critically examine contemporary religious issues. Such approaches may help students avoid accepting

religious information uncritically, particularly information circulating through social media and digital platforms.

The findings further highlight the importance of strengthening digital and religious literacy among students. In the digital era, students require the ability to distinguish credible religious sources from misleading or extremist content. Teachers therefore hold an important role in guiding students to engage critically and responsibly with online religious information.

Teacher role modeling also represents an important component in shaping students' moderate attitudes. Teachers who demonstrate openness, respect for differences, and inclusive communication practices may contribute positively to students' understanding of diversity and coexistence. In addition, inclusive school cultures developed through collaborative activities, extracurricular programs, and social engagement may strengthen tolerance and multicultural awareness among students.

Finally, the findings indicate that strengthening moderate Islamic attitudes requires collaboration among schools, families, communities, and religious institutions. Wahyuni and Latif (2025) found that schools implementing religious moderation values systematically within educational programs demonstrated stronger tolerance awareness among students. Therefore, preventive educational efforts should involve broader social participation in order to support balanced and moderate religious understanding among young people.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that radicalism and liberalism represent two opposing tendencies in contemporary religious understanding. Radicalism is characterized by rigid, textual, and exclusive interpretations of religion, while liberalism emphasizes unrestricted freedom in interpreting religious teachings. Both tendencies may influence students' religious perspectives and create challenges for Islamic Religious Education in developing balanced and moderate religious understanding. As explained in the original study, radicalism often develops into attitudes that reject dialogue, encourage exclusivism, and justify coercive actions in the name of religion, whereas excessive liberalism may weaken adherence to the foundational principles of Islamic teachings.

The study also demonstrates that radicalism among students should not be viewed solely as a theological issue, since social, political, educational, and digital factors contribute significantly to the emergence of radical tendencies. The findings are consistent with the argument that shallow religious understanding, social inequality, transnational ideological influences, and uncontrolled digital media exposure may increase students' vulnerability toward extremist narratives. In addition, the identity-searching process experienced by adolescents' places young people in a vulnerable position when confronted with ideological groups offering certainty, solidarity, and strong collective identity. This condition becomes increasingly relevant within digital environments where radical propaganda can spread rapidly through social media and online platforms.

Another important issue identified in this study concerns the implementation of Islamic Religious Education within schools. Although PAI is expected to

function as a preventive instrument against ideological extremism, the findings reveal that learning processes often remain normative, textual, and heavily oriented toward cognitive mastery. Such approaches may limit students' opportunities to develop critical and contextual understandings of religion. Hamid (2020) argues that religious education should remain relevant to contemporary social realities and students' daily experiences. Therefore, educational approaches emphasizing reflection, dialogue, and contextual understanding become increasingly important in addressing ideological challenges among students (Wessler et al., 2022).

The role of teachers also emerges as a central aspect in strengthening moderate religious understanding. The study explains that teachers are required not only to transfer religious knowledge, but also to function as educators, mentors, and role models capable of demonstrating inclusive and tolerant attitudes. Agustina et al. (2025), Hasanah (2023), Romadlona and Permatasari (2026) similarly emphasizes that pedagogical, social, and professional competencies among PAI teachers contribute significantly to the creation of inclusive learning environments. In situations where students have already been exposed to exclusive religious narratives outside schools, teachers require empathetic communication skills and dialogical pedagogical approaches capable of rebuilding students' trust toward moderate Islamic understanding (Vosoughi et al., 2018).

The findings further indicate that efforts to prevent radicalism cannot rely solely on classroom instruction. Collaboration among schools, families, communities, and religious institutions remains necessary in creating educational ecosystems that support moderate religious development among students. Arli (2025) and Rachmawati and Fauzan (2024) also emphasize the importance of social collaboration in preventing radical ideological influences among young people. Within this context, schools are expected to function not only as academic institutions, but also as social environments capable of fostering tolerance, multicultural awareness, and constructive social interaction. (Roth, 2018)

In addition, the findings demonstrate that strengthening moderation values within Islamic Religious Education may contribute to the development of inclusive religious attitudes among students. Values such as *tasamuh* (tolerance), *tawazun* (balance), *i'tidal* (justice), and *tawasuth* (moderation) are positioned as important foundations for developing harmonious social relations within plural societies. The integration of these values into the curriculum, classroom interaction, extracurricular activities, and school culture may help students understand religion in a more contextual, humane, and socially responsible manner (Prezant, 2017).

The findings of this study indicate that radicalism and liberalism represent two opposing tendencies in contemporary religious understanding that may challenge the development of balanced and moderate religious perspectives among students. Radicalism is characterized by rigid, textual, and exclusive interpretations of religion, whereas excessive liberalism emphasizes unrestricted freedom in interpreting religious teachings and may weaken students' connection to the foundational principles of religion. Both tendencies require educational responses that go beyond the transmission of religious knowledge. In this regard, the findings can be interpreted through the lens of *Transformative Learning Theory* developed by Mezirow, which emphasizes the importance of critical reflection in enabling learners to examine, question, and reconstruct previously held assumptions.

Students who have been exposed to exclusive or extreme religious narratives may therefore require learning experiences that encourage them to critically reflect on the sources, assumptions, and consequences of their beliefs. Islamic Religious Education can facilitate this transformative process by creating opportunities for dialogue, self-reflection, and engagement with diverse perspectives, thereby helping students develop more reflective, balanced, and moderate religious understandings (Pfefferbaum & North, 2008).

The study also demonstrates that radicalism among students should not be viewed solely as a theological issue, since social, political, educational, and digital factors contribute significantly to the emergence of radical tendencies. This finding is particularly relevant to *Social Learning Theory*, which emphasizes that attitudes and behaviors can be acquired through observation, imitation, and interaction with significant social models. Students may learn exclusive attitudes not only through formal religious instruction but also through peers, family members, religious figures, and increasingly through digital influencers and online communities. During adolescence, the search for identity may make young people particularly receptive to groups that offer certainty, solidarity, and a strong collective identity. Consequently, schools need to ensure that students are exposed to positive models of religious moderation. Teachers, peers, school leaders, and community figures can function as constructive role models whose inclusive attitudes and peaceful behaviors are observed and gradually internalized by students (Pantucci, 2018).

Another important issue identified in this study concerns the implementation of Islamic Religious Education within schools. Although PAI is expected to function as a preventive instrument against ideological extremism, the findings reveal that learning processes often remain normative, textual, and heavily oriented toward cognitive mastery. Such approaches may limit students' opportunities to critically examine religious issues within their social and contemporary contexts. Hamid (2020) argues that religious education should remain relevant to contemporary social realities and students' daily experiences. From the perspective of Transformative Learning Theory, this condition suggests the need to shift from a predominantly knowledge-transmission model toward learning that promotes critical reflection and perspective transformation. Classroom discussions of religious diversity, ideological conflict, social justice, and contemporary digital narratives can help students recognize that religious understanding requires not only textual knowledge but also contextual interpretation and moral responsibility (North et al., 2011).

The role of teachers also emerges as a central aspect in strengthening moderate religious understanding. The study explains that teachers are required not only to transfer religious knowledge but also to function as educators, mentors, and role models capable of demonstrating inclusive and tolerant attitudes. This finding strongly corresponds with the principles of Social Learning Theory because students learn not only from what teachers explicitly teach but also from how teachers behave, communicate, and respond to differences. Agustina et al. (2025), Hasanah (2023), and Romadlona and Permatasari (2026) similarly emphasize that pedagogical, social, and professional competencies among PAI teachers contribute significantly to the creation of inclusive learning environments. When students have already been exposed to exclusive religious narratives outside schools, teachers

need empathetic communication skills and dialogical pedagogical approaches that can rebuild trust and encourage students to reconsider previously accepted assumptions without feeling threatened or marginalized (Norris et al., 2002).

The findings further indicate that strengthening religious moderation should also be understood as a process of Character Education. Values such as tolerance, responsibility, empathy, justice, respect, and self-control are not merely additional moral concepts but constitute essential personal dispositions that can protect students from intolerance and ideological extremism. Within this perspective, Islamic Religious Education should support the internalization of values through consistent classroom practices, teacher modeling, collaborative activities, and the broader culture of the school. Character formation is particularly important because students may possess adequate religious knowledge while still lacking the emotional and social capacities necessary to engage constructively with people holding different beliefs or perspectives. Therefore, the prevention of radicalism requires not only strengthening students' cognitive understanding of moderate religious principles but also cultivating virtuous character that encourages respect for human dignity and peaceful social relationships (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017).

The findings also support the relevance of Peace Education as an important complementary framework. Peace Education emphasizes the development of skills and values related to dialogue, nonviolence, conflict resolution, mutual respect, and coexistence within diverse communities. In the context of this study, the values of *tasamuh* (tolerance), *tawazun* (balance), *i'tidal* (justice), and *tawasuth* (moderation) can be connected directly to peace-oriented educational practices. Students should not only be encouraged to accept diversity in principle but also be provided with practical opportunities to engage in dialogue, resolve disagreements peacefully, and collaborate with individuals from different social, cultural, and religious backgrounds. This approach enables religious moderation to move beyond an abstract concept and become a set of lived competencies that students practice in their everyday interactions (Makarenko, 2004).

Furthermore, the increasing influence of digital environments highlights the importance of Critical Digital Literacy. The findings show that uncontrolled exposure to digital media may increase students' vulnerability to extremist narratives, particularly when radical content is presented through persuasive, emotionally engaging, and apparently credible messages. Therefore, students require the ability to evaluate information critically, verify sources, identify manipulation, recognize ideological bias, and understand how digital algorithms and online communities may reinforce particular beliefs. Critical digital literacy should thus become an integral component of Islamic Religious Education and broader school-based prevention strategies. Rather than simply restricting students' access to digital platforms, educational institutions should equip them with the intellectual capacity to question and critically evaluate the religious content they encounter online (Lotka, 1926).

The findings further indicate that efforts to prevent radicalism cannot rely solely on classroom instruction. Collaboration among schools, families, communities, and religious institutions remains necessary in creating educational ecosystems that support moderate religious development among students. Arli

(2025) and Rachmawati and Fauzan (2024) also emphasize the importance of social collaboration in preventing radical ideological influences among young people. This broader ecosystem is consistent with the principles of Social Learning Theory because students are continuously influenced by multiple social environments. When moderate values are consistently reinforced across schools, families, peer groups, and communities, students are more likely to develop stable and resilient attitudes toward ideological manipulation (Horgan & Braddock, 2010).

Overall, the findings suggest that Islamic Religious Education should be reconstructed as a transformative, socially situated, character-oriented, peace-promoting, and digitally critical educational process. The integration of Transformative Learning Theory enables students to critically reassess rigid assumptions; Social Learning Theory highlights the importance of positive role models and learning environments; Character Education supports the internalization of moral dispositions; Peace Education develops competencies for dialogue and nonviolent coexistence; and Critical Digital Literacy equips students to navigate ideological narratives in online environments. Through this integrated theoretical approach, Islamic Religious Education can play a more comprehensive role in preventing radicalism and excessive ideological polarization while fostering students who are religiously committed, intellectually critical, socially responsible, and capable of living peacefully within plural societies (Horgan, 2008).

Conceptual Framework of Islamic Religious Education for Strengthening Religious Moderation

From a theoretical perspective, the findings of this study are closely related to Mezirow's concept of transformative education, which emphasizes that education should not only focus on knowledge acquisition, but also contribute to changes in perspectives, attitudes, and social behavior. In the context of Islamic Religious Education, transformative learning may support the development of students who are intellectually capable, spiritually mature, and socially responsible. Therefore, strengthening contextual, dialogical, and moderate Islamic education remains important in responding to contemporary ideological challenges within multicultural societies (Hobfoll et al., 2007).

From a theoretical perspective, the findings of this study support the development of a conceptual framework in which Islamic Religious Education (PAI) functions as a multidimensional educational system for fostering religious moderation and reducing students' vulnerability to ideological extremism (Galea et al., 2002). This framework is closely related to Mezirow's concept of transformative learning, which emphasizes that education should not only focus on knowledge acquisition but should also encourage changes in perspectives, attitudes, and social behavior through critical reflection and meaningful learning experiences (Galea et al., 2002). In the context of Islamic Religious Education, transformative learning can help students critically examine rigid, exclusive, or excessively unrestricted interpretations of religion and develop a more balanced, reflective, and socially responsible religious perspective (Freitag, 2010).

The proposed framework identifies teacher competence as the primary enabling factor in the process of fostering religious moderation. Teachers are expected to possess not only pedagogical and professional competencies but also

social, ethical, and digital competencies that enable them to address ideological differences constructively (Fredrickson, 2001). Competent teachers can function as facilitators and role models who demonstrate tolerance, fairness, dialogue, and respect for diversity. Their capacity to identify students' exposure to extreme narratives and respond through empathetic and dialogical approaches is particularly important in preventing the development of radical attitudes or excessively liberal interpretations that disregard the essential principles of religious teachings (Enders et al., 2011).

The second component is contextual pedagogy, which transforms Islamic Religious Education from a predominantly normative and textual learning process into an approach that connects religious values with students' contemporary social realities. Contextual and dialogical learning encourages students to engage with real-life issues, diversity, social conflict, and ideological challenges through critical reflection and discussion (Echelmeyer et al., 2023). This pedagogical process is consistent with transformative learning because students are encouraged to reconsider assumptions, evaluate different perspectives, and construct a more mature understanding of religion. Through such learning experiences, religious moderation can become an internalized perspective rather than merely a concept that students are required to memorize (Eatwell, 2006).

Digital literacy represents another important component of the framework because contemporary ideological influences increasingly circulate through social media and other digital platforms (Donthu et al., 2021). Critical digital literacy enables students to evaluate information, verify religious sources, recognize manipulation and ideological bias, and respond critically to online narratives. Rather than limiting digital engagement, Islamic Religious Education should equip students with the capacity to distinguish credible religious knowledge from radical propaganda, misinformation, or excessively liberal interpretations presented without appropriate scholarly and contextual foundations. Digital literacy therefore strengthens students' resilience against ideological influence while supporting responsible and critical participation in digital environments (Conway et al., 2019).

The framework also emphasizes the importance of curriculum integration and school culture. Religious moderation should not be positioned exclusively as a topic within a single lesson but should be integrated into learning objectives, teaching materials, classroom activities, extracurricular programs, and the wider educational environment (Conway, 2017). A school culture characterized by dialogue, mutual respect, tolerance, justice, and peaceful interaction provides students with repeated opportunities to experience moderation in practice. Through this process, the values of *tasamuh*, *tawazun*, *i'tidal*, and *tawasuth* can be reinforced not only through formal instruction but also through everyday social interactions and institutional practices (Chen, 2006).

Finally, the effectiveness of Islamic Religious Education depends on family and community collaboration (Carley et al., 2016). Students' religious identities and attitudes are continuously shaped by experiences beyond the classroom. Families, religious leaders, peer groups, and community institutions can either reinforce or challenge the values promoted at school (Campedelli et al., 2021). Therefore, collaborative relationships among schools, families, and communities are necessary to create consistent social environments that support moderate

religious development. Such collaboration can strengthen communication, provide early responses to ideological vulnerability, and ensure that students receive coherent guidance across different social settings (Callon et al., 1991).

Based on these relationships, the proposed conceptual framework positions Islamic Religious Education as the central transformative process, supported by teacher competence, contextual pedagogy, critical digital literacy, curriculum integration, a moderate school culture, and family and community collaboration. These interconnected components collectively strengthen students' critical reflection, religious knowledge, moral character, tolerance, and capacity for peaceful social interaction. The expected outcome is the development of religious moderation and ideological resilience, which ultimately reduces students' vulnerability to both radicalism and excessive liberalism. Thus, the prevention of ideological polarization should not be understood merely as the rejection of particular ideas but as a comprehensive educational process that develops students who are intellectually critical, spiritually grounded, socially responsible, and capable of engaging constructively with diversity (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017).

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. As a qualitative library-based study, the discussion relies primarily on conceptual analysis and secondary sources rather than direct empirical investigation. Consequently, this study does not provide direct measurement regarding the effectiveness of specific educational programs in preventing radicalism among students. Future studies may therefore expand the discussion through empirical research involving teachers, students, schools, and digital learning environments in order to provide broader understanding regarding the implementation of moderate Islamic education within contemporary educational settings (Bradford, 1985).

CONCLUSION

Islamic Religious Education (Pendidikan Agama Islam/PAI) has an important and strategic role in responding to contemporary ideological challenges, particularly radicalism and liberalism among students. Radicalism, which is characterized by rigid, exclusive, and extreme religious understanding, as well as excessive liberalism that tends to promote unrestricted interpretation of religion, may both lead to deviations from balanced Islamic values. In this context, Islamic Religious Education is expected to function not only as a medium for transferring religious knowledge, but also as a means of developing moderate, contextual, and responsible religious understanding among students.

The findings of this study indicate that the emergence of radical and liberal tendencies among young people is influenced by various interconnected factors, including limited religious literacy, identity-searching processes, social and economic conditions, digital media exposure, and the influence of globalization and transnational ideologies. These conditions demonstrate that ideological extremism among students cannot be understood solely as a theological issue, but also as a social, cultural, and educational challenge requiring comprehensive educational responses.

The study also demonstrates that Islamic Religious Education may contribute to strengthening moderate Islamic attitudes when implemented through contextual, dialogical, and humanistic approaches. The integration of moderation values such as *tasamuh* (tolerance), *tawazun* (balance), *i'tidal* (justice), and *tawasuth* (moderation) within learning processes may support the development of inclusive religious perspectives and peaceful social interaction among students. In addition, the role of teachers, school culture, digital literacy, and collaboration among schools, families, and communities remains important in supporting efforts to prevent ideological extremism within educational environments.

Therefore, strengthening Islamic Religious Education that is inclusive, reflective, and oriented toward religious moderation remains necessary in order to develop students who are not only religiously committed, but also tolerant, critical, and capable of living harmoniously within multicultural societies. Future educational efforts should continue to encourage pedagogical approaches that are relevant to contemporary social realities while maintaining the fundamental principles of Islamic teachings.

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