

Muslim Leaders' Perspectives on Qur'anic *Wasathiyah* in Religious Education

*Hanif Mudhofar¹, Azka Sya'bana², Prosmala Hadisaputra³, Kamal Mukhtar⁴,
Noorazana Siti Maryam⁵

^{1,2,5}Institut Studi Al-Qur'an dan Ilmu Keislaman Sunan Pandanaran, Jl. Kaliurang Km 12,5
Sleman, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

³Institut Agama Islam Hamzanwadi NW Lombok Timur, Jl. Utama Mataram - Lb.
Lombok Km. 45, Lombok Timur, West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia

⁴Universitas Islam Malang, Jl. Mayjen Hariyono Jl. Tata Surya No.193, Malang,
East Java, Indonesia

*hanifdosenisqi@gmail.com

ABSTRACT: *This study explores the perspectives of Muslim leaders within the Interfaith Harmony Forum of Special Region of Yogyakarta (Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta [FKUB-DIY]), on integrating the Qur'anic concept of Wasathiyah (moderation) into religious education to promote religious moderation. It aims to understand their conceptual views and identify effective strategies for strengthening moderation education in a multi-cultural context. This study employed a qualitative case study design and collected data through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with three key Muslim leaders of FKUB-DIY. To triangulate the data, the researchers conducted participatory observations of FKUB workshops and analysed official FKUB documents. Thematic analysis following the Braun and Clarke model was used to identify, analyse, and report patterns within the data. The study reveals that Muslim leaders conceptualise Wasathiyah not as a static middle ground but as a dynamic and contextual principle of justice ('adl), requiring balanced responses tailored to specific situations. Key themes include a firm rejection of religious coercion (lā ikrāha fi al-dīn), criticism of literalist Qur'anic interpretations that fuel discrimination, and the strong relevance of moderation to Yogyakarta's multi-cultural society, aligning with local wisdom like Hamemayu Hayuning Bawono. Strategies for strengthening moderation education encompass a multi-channel approach (formal and non-formal institutions), multi-party collaboration (FKUB, government, educational institutions), capacity building for religious leaders, concrete programs, and the integration of local cultural values. This study contributes a novel Integrated Multidimensional Framework for Contextual Religious Moderation, which synthesises conceptual, strategic, and implementation dimensions. It moves beyond static notions of moderation by emphasising its dynamic nature and the critical integration of local wisdom with Qur'anic principles.*

⁴  orcid id: <http://orcid.org/0009-0009-7320-7962>

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi perspektif para tokoh Muslim dalam Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta (FKUB-DIY) mengenai integrasi konsep *Wasathiyah* (moderasi) dalam Al-Qur'an ke dalam pendidikan agama untuk mempromosikan moderasi beragama. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk memahami pandangan konseptual mereka serta mengidentifikasi strategi yang efektif dalam memperkuat pendidikan moderasi dalam konteks masyarakat multikultural. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain studi kasus kualitatif dengan pengumpulan data melalui wawancara mendalam semi-terstruktur terhadap tiga tokoh Muslim utama FKUB-DIY. Untuk melakukan triangulasi data, peneliti juga melakukan observasi partisipatif pada workshop FKUB dan menganalisis dokumen resmi FKUB. Analisis tematik menggunakan model Braun dan Clarke digunakan untuk mengidentifikasi, menganalisis, dan melaporkan pola-pola dalam data. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa para tokoh Muslim memaknai *Wasathiyah* bukan sebagai posisi tengah yang statis, melainkan sebagai prinsip keadilan ('*adl*) yang dinamis dan kontekstual, yang menuntut respons seimbang sesuai dengan situasi tertentu. Tema-tema utama yang ditemukan meliputi penolakan tegas terhadap pemaksaan agama (*lā ikrāha fi al-dīn*), kritik terhadap penafsiran Al-Qur'an yang literalistik dan memicu diskriminasi, serta relevansi kuat moderasi bagi masyarakat multikultural di Yogyakarta yang selaras dengan kearifan lokal seperti Hamemayu Hayuning Bawono. Strategi untuk memperkuat pendidikan moderasi mencakup pendekatan multi-saluran (lembaga formal dan nonformal), kolaborasi multipihak (FKUB, pemerintah, dan lembaga pendidikan), peningkatan kapasitas pemimpin agama, program-program konkret, serta integrasi nilai-nilai budaya lokal. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi baru berupa Kerangka Terpadu Multidimensional untuk Moderasi Beragama Kontekstual yang mensintesis dimensi konseptual, strategis, dan implementatif. Kerangka ini melampaui konsep moderasi yang statis dengan menekankan sifatnya yang dinamis serta pentingnya integrasi kearifan lokal dengan prinsip-prinsip Al-Qur'an.

Keywords: *Religious Moderation, Wasathiyah, Religious Education, Interfaith Dialogue.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

The importance of religious moderation has become a highly relevant issue in the global context today. In various parts of the world, religion-based conflicts continue to rise (Majumdar, 2024). These conflicts create tensions that threaten social stability (Silayeva, 2017). Amid these conditions, religious moderation serves as a solution to foster peace among communities (Masykur et al., 2024). Moderation not only strengthens tolerance but also encourages healthy interfaith dialogue (Azisi et al., 2023). Through moderation, society can learn to respect differences in beliefs mutually. Furthermore, this approach can foster more harmonious international relations in the era of globalisation.

The phenomenon of religion-based extremism and radicalism remains a real threat to global society. Extremist actions are often carried out in the name of religion, even though religious teachings inherently emphasise peace (Bashir et al., 2022). In various countries, radicalism has led to polarisation that damages social cohesion (Alexander, 2024; Münkler, 2023). On the other hand, such actions are often triggered by misunderstandings of religious teachings (Keskin & Tuncer, 2019). Therefore, it is crucial to instil a moderate understanding within religious education. Moderate education can be key to countering the spread of radical ideologies.

Religious moderation aligns with universal values that uphold tolerance, justice, and togetherness (Azmi & Daulay, 2022). These principles of moderation are present in various religious teachings and ethical systems worldwide (Mulyana, 2023). By applying these values, societies can coexist peacefully despite differences in beliefs.

Indonesia is known as a country with remarkable diversity in ethnicity, religion, and culture (I. Ruslan et al., 2024). This diversity is both an asset and a challenge for national unity (Anton et al., 2025). In this context, religious moderation becomes essential to maintaining harmony within a pluralistic society (Doko, 2023). With a Muslim-majority population, Indonesia has the opportunity to demonstrate how moderation can be applied in daily life (R. Ruslan et al., 2023). Furthermore, harmonious relations among religious communities can serve as an example for the international community. Through religious moderation, Indonesia can strengthen its position as a country that promotes tolerance at the global level.

Religion plays a very important role in strengthening national unity. Religious teachings contain noble values that can guide the creation of a harmonious society (Hossain, 2023). A moderate approach is necessary to manage the role of religion and prevent it from becoming a source of conflict. Through religious moderation, individuals can understand differences as strengths rather than weaknesses. In this context, moderate religious education can build collective awareness of the importance of peaceful coexistence. Thus, religion can become a unifying tool, rather than a divisive one.

The Qur'an provides clear guidance on moderation in religious life. The concept of *Wasathiyah* or the middle path taught in the Qur'an highlights the importance of balance in life (Al Muhibbin et al., 2024). This teaching emphasises justice, tolerance, and compassion as core principles (Hutabalian et al., 2025). Additionally, the Qur'an also teaches the importance of respecting differences and avoiding extreme attitudes. By understanding this teaching, Muslims can play an active role in creating societal harmony. Moderation rooted in the Qur'an forms the foundation for harmonious relations among religious communities.

The term “moderation” originates from the Latin *moderatio*, meaning balance—avoiding excess and deficiency, and exercising self-control against extreme attitudes. In the Indonesian Dictionary (Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia, KBBI), moderation is defined as the reduction of violence and the avoidance of extremism. In English, the term is often translated as average, core, standard, or non-aligned. Generally, moderation refers to a balanced attitude in belief, morality, and behaviour, both in interpersonal relationships and in relations with state institutions (Kemenag RI, 2019).

In Arabic, moderation is known as *Wasathiyah*, which conveys the meanings of *tawassuṭ* (middle ground), *i'tidāl* (justice), and *tawāzun* (balance), and carries the sense of “the best choice”. The word *wasith*, adapted into “*wasīf*” in Indonesian, implies the

meaning of a mediator, reconciler, or leader in a situation, emphasising the concept of justice and balance (Kemenag RI, 2019).

The concept of moderation in Islam, or *Wasathiyah*, is clearly explained in the Qur'an, Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 143, which describes Muslims as a moderate community. This verse serves as the primary foundation for understanding the importance of a balanced attitude in Islamic teachings (Marhaban & Anzaikhan, 2024). Scholars such as Ibn 'Ashūr interpret the term *wasat* as a level of balance that remains consistent with traditional Islamic understanding, underlining the importance of moderation in religious practice and interpretation (Ma'sum, 2024). In Indonesia, the Ministry of Religious Affairs has adopted the concept of *Wasathiyah* in its translation of the Qur'an by using language that supports tolerance and strengthens harmonious relations among religious communities (An et al., 2024). *Wasathiyah* is not merely a neutral stance but a proactive approach to achieving the best balance in religious and social life. It is built upon theological constructions found in the Qur'an and supported by Islamic scholars (Suharto et al., 2023).

Muslim religious leaders have been widely recognised in the literature as key actors in promoting religious moderation, often portrayed normatively as role models, mediators, and conveyors of moderate religious messages through sermons and religious activities (Amin et al., 2024; Amirulloh, 2022; Amtiran & Kriswibowo, 2024; Kazem, 2022; Umami, 2018). However, existing studies tend to emphasise their ideal roles rather than critically examining how Muslim leaders themselves conceptualise and interpret moderation principles within specific socio-educational contexts. In particular, there is limited empirical research exploring Muslim leaders' perspectives on the integration of Qur'anic *Wasathiyah* into formal and non-formal religious education, especially in plural and interfaith settings. Understanding their perspectives is crucial, as religious leaders not only shape theological interpretations of moderation but also influence educational practices and interfaith relations at the grassroots level. This gap highlights the need for studies that move beyond normative descriptions and investigate Muslim leaders' lived perspectives and contextual understandings of religious moderation.

The Interfaith Harmony Forum (*Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama/FKUB*) is an institution that plays a key role in creating constructive interfaith dialogue (Humaizi et al., 2024). As a discussion platform, FKUB enables religious leaders from various backgrounds to share views and seek joint solutions (Soffi, 2023). In this context, FKUB serves as a means to instil values of moderation in society. Activities carried out by FKUB, such as interfaith dialogues and training, have a positive impact on strengthening tolerance. Furthermore, FKUB also contributes to preventing religion-based conflicts. The existence of FKUB demonstrates the importance of dialogue in creating a peaceful society.

The perspectives of Muslim leaders on religious moderation provide important insights into efforts to create harmony in society. These figures are often referenced by the public in understanding religious teachings. In the context of the FKUB-DIY, their views reflect values of tolerance and togetherness. Moreover, Muslim leaders also play a role in conveying messages of moderation to their communities. These perspectives can serve as a basis for developing religious moderation education programmes. Thus, their contribution is highly relevant to strengthening social harmony.

Furthermore, the study of religious moderation in Yogyakarta has both local and global relevance. At the local level, this research can help strengthen harmony within

Yogyakarta's diverse society. At the global level, the findings of this study can serve as a reference for other countries facing similar challenges. This global contribution includes disseminating successful moderation practices implemented in Yogyakarta. Additionally, this research can also enrich the literature on religious moderation worldwide. Thus, this study holds significant value at various levels.

While religious moderation has gained strong policy attention and is currently prioritised by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, academic discussions on religious moderation remain largely normative and policy-oriented. Despite its prominence in official discourse, existing studies have paid limited attention to how the concept of religious moderation, particularly Qur'anic *Wasathiyah*, is theoretically understood, interpreted, and translated into educational practices by religious actors themselves. Much of the literature tends to focus on moderation as a governmental agenda or moral ideal, rather than examining the conceptual frameworks and lived perspectives of Muslim leaders who play a central role in shaping religious education and interfaith engagement at the grassroots level.

This study addresses this academic gap by exploring how Muslim leaders conceptualise Qur'anic *Wasathiyah* and how these interpretations inform strategies for strengthening religious moderation education within interfaith contexts. By foregrounding religious leaders' perspectives, the study contributes to theoretical discussions on religious moderation by moving beyond policy narratives towards a contextual and actor-centred understanding of moderation in religious education.

II. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore the perspectives of Muslim figures within the FKUB of the Special Region of Yogyakarta (DIY). The research focuses on the conceptual understanding and strategies for strengthening Qur'an-based religious moderation in Yogyakarta. Data were obtained through in-depth interviews with three key informants selected purposively. The informants were AM, KZ, and NJ. This study supplemented primary data with official FKUB-DIY documents, including activity reports, social media content, and FKUB publications. The researchers conducted semi-structured interviews using a focused, open-ended interview guide and produced verbatim transcripts from all recorded interviews to ensure data accuracy.

Data were analysed using thematic analysis following the model of Braun & Clarke (2006). The first phase involved familiarisation with the data through repeated reading. The second phase generated initial codes from the interview transcripts and documents. The third phase identified potential themes from the collated codes. The fourth phase involved reviewing the themes to ensure coherence. The fifth phase defined and named the resulting themes. The sixth phase produced a comprehensive thematic report. The researchers manually coded the data using tables and identified patterns through iterative reading. They then reviewed the resulting themes in two stages and analysed the relationships between themes to understand the thematic structure. Validity was ensured through triangulation of data sources and methods. Member checking was conducted by confirming data interpretations with the informants. The researcher's prolonged engagement in FKUB activities deepened contextual understanding. The study adhered to academic ethics principles by anonymising informant identities. Confidentiality of sensitive data was guaranteed through secure data storage.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Strengthening Religious Moderation in the Qur'an According to Muslim Figures of the FKUB-DIY

1. Moderation as a dynamic and contextual middle path

In this study, the term dynamic indicates that moderation is not conceived as a rigid stance or as occupying a mathematically defined “middle” position, but rather as a flexible principle of justice (*‘adl*) that responds to changing moral and social circumstances. An individual may therefore adopt a gentle, firm, or even stern attitude as required by the situation, since what must be maintained is not a fixed midpoint but the balance and proportionality of one’s actions. At the same time, contextual signifies that the enactment of moderation is inseparable from social, cultural, and situational considerations. Within the setting of *Forum Komunikasi Umat Beragama Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta (FKUB-DIY)*, for example, moderation is practised with careful attention to Yogyakarta’s plural social reality. Accordingly, the principles of justice and equilibrium are interpreted and applied in ways that correspond to the needs and complexities of a diverse society.

This study elucidates the perspective of Muslim figures from FKUB-DIY on religious moderation in the Qur'an, identifying four principal themes: moderation as a dynamic and contextual middle path, the rejection of coercion in religious matters, its relevance to Yogyakarta’s multi-cultural context, and a critique of literalist interpretations and discriminatory practices.

Muslim figures within the FKUB-DIY understand the concept of *Wasathiyah* (moderation) not as a static position between two extremes, but as a dynamic and contextual principle of justice (*‘adl*). This concept requires Muslims to adapt their attitudes according to the situation—whether gentle, firm, or even stern—depending on the circumstances. This understanding avoids simplifying moderation as merely “taking a middle position,” instead emphasising the ability to place everything in its proper proportion, as exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad.

In an interview, KZ explained his understanding of Qur’anic *Wasathiyah* as follows:

“*Wasathan* does not refer to a location or position, but to a community that acts justly by placing everything in its proper place. Muslims are expected to be gentle and tolerant, while also being firm and resolute when necessary.” (KZ, Interview, 2025)

This interpretation resonates with Qur’anic exegesis of Q.S. al-Baqarah (2:143), which conceptualises Muslims as *ummatah wasathan* (a moderate community) entrusted with the moral responsibility of bearing witness to humanity through just and balanced conduct.

2. Rejection of coercion in religion

FKUB-DIY figures reject all forms of coercion in religion based on the principle of *la ikrāha fi al-dīn* (there is no compulsion in religion). They argue that coercion only breeds hatred and inauthentic religiosity. True faith must arise from heartfelt conviction, not external pressure. This approach aligns with the Islamic vision that respects human

freedom and emphasises the importance of internalising religious values through understanding, not force.

Abdul Mustaqim stated: “In religion, there should indeed be no coercion. Coercion in religion will only foster hatred.” Meanwhile, NJ added: “Authentic religiosity is that which emerges from a sincere heart, not from coercion.” Both statements reflect a firm rejection of intolerance and the imposition of beliefs (NJ, Interview, 2025).

3. Relevance to the multi-cultural context of Yogyakarta

Religious moderation is considered highly relevant in the context of Yogyakarta's multi-cultural society. FKUB-DIY figures view local values such as *Hamemayu Hayuning Bawono* (beautifying the beauty of the world) as being in harmony with the spirit of Islamic moderation. Yogyakarta, known as the “city of tolerance,” is regarded as a miniature Indonesia that requires an inclusive and balanced approach to maintain harmony among religious communities.

AM explained: “Yogyakarta is known as The City of Tolerance... Moderation is a primary requirement for maintaining diversity in this city.” (AM, Interview, 2025) FKUB-DIY documents also mention that the nine pillars of religious moderation (such as tolerance, justice, and non-violence) align with the value of *Hamemayu Hayuning Bawono* and the spirit of Yogyakarta as a city of tolerance.

4. Critique of literalist interpretation and discrimination

Some FKUB DIY figures, particularly NJ, criticise the practice of literal interpretation of Qur'anic verses that may incite violence and discrimination. She emphasises the importance of a contextual approach and a non-literal understanding of terms that appear harsh. For example, the word “kill” could be interpreted as “stopping erroneous ways of thinking,” rather than physical killing. Furthermore, terms such as “*kāfir*” (disbeliever) and “*mu'mīn*” (believer) should be understood as traits, not religious labels, to prevent stigmatisation (NJ, Interview, 2023).

NJ stated: “This error stems from interpreting the Qur'an relying solely on a word-for-word dictionary approach, without understanding its essential meaning.” NJ also emphasised: “*Kāfir* is not a religious label, but a negative trait of a person... *Mu'mīn* is a positive trait that anyone, including non-Muslims, can possess.” (NJ, Interview, 2025) This critique highlights the urgency of revising interpretations that may be discriminatory.

Strategies for Strengthening Religious Moderation Education According to Muslim Figures in the FKUB-DIY

The strategies for fortifying education on religious moderation, as advanced by Muslim scholars of FKUB-DIY, encompass the following: education through formal and non-formal institutions, multi-party collaboration, capacity building for religious figures and scholars, concrete programmes led by FKUB-DIY, a cultural approach utilising local wisdom, and the strengthening of networks and synergy.

1. Education through formal and non-formal institutions

Muslim figures within the FKUB-DIY emphasise the importance of a multi-channel approach in religious moderation education, through both formal institutions such as schools and non-formal settings like families and places of worship. This strategy aims to reach various segments of society and create an environment conducive to the

internalisation of moderate values. Through the integration of moderation materials in new student orientations and the dissemination of inspirational content in public spaces, FKUB seeks to build an inclusive and balanced understanding from an early age.

In an interview, KZ mentioned: “The material is distilled in the form of quotes or beautiful words of wisdom that can be inserted in various places/published through social media.” (KZ, Interview, 2025) Meanwhile, NJ confirmed the implementation of the FKUB Goes to School programme: “FKUB enters schools to deliver moderation materials to new students and has designated pilot schools such as Sekolah Tumbuh.” (NJ, Interview, 2025)

2. Multi-party collaboration

Collaboration between FKUB-DIY, the government, and educational institutions is seen as key to the success of strengthening religious moderation. FKUB acts as a mediator, facilitating synergy among stakeholders to develop integrated policies and programmes. A formal Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is proposed as a strategic instrument to ensure shared commitment and adequate resource allocation, including budget and policy support.

KZ emphasised: “If everyone already agrees that religious moderation is important, then it is just a matter of carrying out their respective duties through synergistic cooperation, by creating an MoU.” (KZ, Interview, 2025) In line with this, the government also supports multi-party collaboration, with the Deputy Governor of DIY committing to allocate a budget for FKUB (Doc. 7).

3. Capacity building for religious figures and scholars

FKUB-DIY figures recognise that religious leaders and scholars have significant influence in shaping public views. Therefore, training and workshops are designed to strengthen their understanding of contextual and inclusive *Wasathiyah* concepts. The aim is to reduce literal interpretations that may trigger stereotypes and discrimination.

NJ suggested: “Moderation education should start with preachers and scholars so that they understand that ‘*kāfir*’ is a trait, not a religious identity.” (NJ, Interview, 2025) Similar programmes are also supported by workshops on strengthening religious moderation featuring academic and religious figures as speakers (Doc. 4).

4. Concrete programmes by FKUB-DIY

FKUB-DIY has initiated various concrete programmes to promote religious moderation, such as roadshows to regencies/cities and the development of educational materials. These programmes are designed to raise public awareness about the importance of harmony and tolerance, while also building the capacity of FKUB at the regional level.

Concrete programmes are further supported by workshops with themes such as “Beware of the Potential for Religious Intolerance in the Regions by Weaving Harmony” (Doc. 6). Additionally, FKUB-DIY has developed a book on Religious Moderation (Doc. 7).

5. Cultural approach and local wisdom

A cultural approach and local wisdom are used to make moderation materials more relevant and acceptable to the people of Yogyakarta. Values such as tolerance and *Hamemayu Hayuning Bawono* are integrated into messaging to strengthen an inclusive and harmonious local identity. KZ stated in an interview: “The nine keywords in religious moderation correspond with the spirit of *Hamemayu Hayuning Bawono*.” (KZ,

Interview, 2025) FKUB-DIY also emphasises the importance of building harmony based on local values at the village level (Doc. 2).

6. Strengthening networks and synergy

Strengthening networks among FKUBs and other institutions is essential for sharing best practices and expanding the impact of religious moderation programmes. This also includes closer cooperation among various social and religious organisations to build understanding and tolerance. In this context, synergy with local government is a crucial element to ensure the sustainability of such programmes, both in terms of budget and supportive policies. Support from the local government plays a vital role in realising effective and sustainable policies.

To strengthen networks, FKUB-DIY requested the Deputy Governor, via the Head of the Mental Development Bureau, to allocate a budget for FKUB, demonstrating government commitment to the programme (Doc. 7). On the other hand, National Unity Agency of DIY also organised workshops involving Provincial and Regency FKUBs, as an effort to strengthen synergy among institutions in promoting religious moderation at the local level (Doc. 1).

Discussion

This study reveals that Muslim figures within the FKUB of DIY perceive religious moderation (*Wasathiyah*) as a dynamic principle grounded in justice (*'adl*) and contextuality, rather than merely a static middle position. This concept is reflected in the interpretation of Q.S. al-Baqarah (2:143), which emphasises Muslims as *ummatan wasatan*—a community tasked with bearing witness to humanity through just conduct. Furthermore, FKUB figures reject all forms of coercion in religion (*lā ikrāha fī al-dīn*) and criticise literalist interpretations that may incite discrimination. Religious moderation is also considered highly relevant to the multi-cultural context of Yogyakarta, aligning with local cultural values such as *Hamemayu Hayuning Bawono*.

Recent scholarship increasingly recognises that religious moderation has evolved from an abstract ideal into a tangible educational mandate aimed at countering intolerance and strengthening pluralism (Suwendi et al., 2024). Integrating moderation values into school and university curricula has proven effective in fostering open-mindedness, empathy, and social harmony among learners (Fauyan et al., 2026; Mukhibat et al., 2024; Riyawi & Febriansyah, 2022). Moreover, educational models grounded in pluralist and inclusive Islamic teaching are shaping democratic and tolerant student identities in diverse societies (Hasanah & Abbas, 2023). Ultimately, the growing body of research underscores that education serves as the most effective arena for nurturing intercultural competence and sustaining peaceful coexistence in plural societies (Hasan & Juhannis, 2024).

In practice, strategies for strengthening religious moderation education are carried out through a multi-channel and collaborative approach that integrates both formal and non-formal settings. In formal education, FKUB-DIY collaborates with schools such as Sekolah Tumbuh to deliver moderation materials during new student orientations. At the same time, in non-formal contexts, messages of tolerance are disseminated through social media, community forums, and public displays of inspirational wisdom. These efforts are supported by multi-party cooperation formalised through Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) and budget allocations from the Deputy Governor of DIY, ensuring institutional and financial sustainability. FKUB-DIY also strengthens capacity

building among religious figures and scholars through workshops and training designed to promote contextual and inclusive understandings of *Wasathiyah* and to discourage literalist interpretations of scripture. Altogether, these strategies demonstrate how FKUB-DIY operationalises religious moderation through education, collaboration, and cultural adaptation to sustain harmony in a diverse society.

These findings reinforce earlier scholarship asserting that religious moderation education is more effective when implemented through collaborative and cross-sectoral approaches spanning both formal and non-formal settings (Firdaus et al., 2026; Takdir, 2025). The collaboration between FKUB-DIY and Sekolah Tumbuh during new student orientation demonstrates that the internalisation of tolerance values from the earliest stages of schooling aligns with studies highlighting the importance of school culture as a medium for transmitting moderation values (Muhammad et al., 2025; Nirmayani et al., 2024). Meanwhile, the utilisation of social media and community forums corroborates the view that digital ecosystems and public spaces constitute strategic arenas for constructing inclusive religious narratives within plural societies (Haq & Kwok, 2024). The formalisation of cooperation through Memoranda of Understanding and budget allocations from the local government further reflects a governance dimension which several studies identify as a key factor in ensuring the sustainability of moderation programmes (Nanuru et al., 2025; Takdir, 2025). Thus, the strategy of FKUB-DIY is not merely operational but also conceptual, as it integrates education, capacity-building among religious actors, and cultural adaptation within a sustainable institutional framework.

Research on religious education and moderation indicates that such multi-faceted interventions, particularly those integrating formal curriculum reform, teacher training, and community engagement, are crucial for fostering tolerance and peaceful coexistence (Jamaluddin, 2024; Setiawan & Maryam, 2024). Empirical evidence further demonstrates that embedding religious moderation into school management and teacher development programmes enhances anti-discrimination practices and nurtures social harmony in diverse educational settings (Hutagaol et al., 2025). Additionally, international evidence from religious education research suggests that promoting inter-religious dialogue through teacher development and cross-community engagement supports warmer inter-community relations in educational settings (Blackmer & Akila, 2024; Orchard & Bowen, 2024; Ugo et al., 2025). Such approaches are consistent with broader peace education frameworks that highlight the role of inclusive curricula, intercultural competence, and community partnerships in building cohesive and tolerant societies (Mukhlisin et al., 2025; Pahrudin et al., 2025).

The working mechanism of this collaboration is characterised by a multi-stakeholder model, in which FKUB functions as a coordinating platform facilitating dialogue, aligning programme objectives, and distributing roles among stakeholders. Government institutions provide policy support and logistical resources, and educational institutions integrate moderation values into curricula and extracurricular activities. At the same time, religious leaders act as key knowledge brokers who translate theological principles into pedagogical practices. This collaborative mechanism enables the dissemination of moderation values beyond formal classrooms and fosters shared ownership of interfaith harmony at the community level.

Recent research highlights the importance of stakeholder collaboration and community engagement in promoting religious moderation and mutual understanding, emphasising

that inter-institutional cooperation enhances the sustainability of moderation initiatives (Sulvinajayanti et al., 2024). Sustained cooperation between religious institutions, communities, and government bodies strengthens social cohesion and prevents sectarian conflict (Abas & Ghofur, 2021). Educational institutions that integrate interfaith collaboration and community participation into their programmes demonstrate greater institutional resilience and long-term impact (Aruman et al., 2024). Digital platforms further enhance this collaboration by facilitating inclusive dialogue and preventing misinformation in plural societies (Sulvinajayanti et al., 2024). Overall, inter-institutional and cross-sectoral cooperation—linking religious, educational, and civic actors—has been shown to embed moderation initiatives within sustainable frameworks that reinforce peace and social harmony (Abdullah et al., 2025; Dziminska & Krzewinska, 2025).

These findings align with studies by Maulana & Aziz (2023) and Mildawati et al. (2024), which emphasise the importance of balance (*tawassuṭ*) and tolerance (*tasāmuḥ*) in religious moderation education. However, this study strengthens previous findings by highlighting aspects of contextuality and the dynamic nature of moderation, which have been underexplored. While earlier studies tended to position moderation as a static middle path, these findings demonstrate that moderation is dynamic and adaptive to social conditions. Recent bibliometric analysis shows that although religious education and moderation studies have grown in recent years, key topics such as the role of educational institutions and intolerance remain underdeveloped, highlighting the novelty of contextual and dynamic perspectives such as those presented here (Hasan & Juhannis, 2024).

On the other hand, the findings regarding the role of FKUB in religious moderation education enrich prior work that focused more on conflict mediation (Humaizi et al., 2024; Soffi, 2023). This study shows that FKUB-DIY not only contributes to conflict resolution but also actively builds educational infrastructure for moderation through programmes such as FKUB Goes to School and the development of educational materials. This expansion of FKUB's role resonates with global research on interfaith and religious leadership roles, which indicates that effective inter-religious collaboration often requires moving beyond conflict mitigation to proactive educational and community-building activities that promote mutual respect and understanding (Aune et al., 2025).

This study proposes a novel framework, namely the Integrated Multidimensional Framework for Contextual Religious Moderation, which conceptualises religious moderation through three interrelated dimensions. First, the Conceptual Dimension understands religious moderation as dynamic and contextual justice rather than merely a middle path. Second, the Strategic Dimension emphasises a multi-channel and multi-stakeholder approach that integrates formal education, non-formal educational settings, local cultural values, and institutional collaboration. Third, the Implementation Dimension highlights the role of FKUB as an agent of change that not only mediates interreligious conflicts but also initiates educational programmes and engages in policy advocacy (see Figure 1). This framework extends conventional perspectives on religious moderation by incorporating local wisdom and adopting a bottom-up approach through the active involvement of religious leaders and community actors. The multidimensional nature of this framework parallels recent empirical studies that advocate for integrated, contextually anchored models of religious moderation that address socio-cultural and educational dynamics (Zaluchu et al., 2025).

The theoretical implications of this study reinforce the paradigm shift from a static concept of moderation towards a dynamic-contextual understanding. The proposed Integrated Multidimensional Framework offers a holistic perspective that integrates conceptual, strategic, and implementation dimensions. This framework not only enriches academic discourse on religious moderation but also provides a new perspective on how Qur’anic values can be dialogued with local wisdom without losing contextual relevance. This integration of moderation theory with cultural practices opens opportunities for developing grounded theories based on Indonesia’s socio-cultural realities.

On a practical level, the findings offer an implementation model that can be adapted for strengthening religious moderation across various cultural contexts. The multi-channel strategy through formal and non-formal education demonstrates effectiveness in broadly disseminating moderate values. The multi-party collaboration demonstrated by FKUB-DIY serves as a prototype for participatory and inclusive governance of religious moderation. This model offers an alternative to the dominant top-down approach, showing that a bottom-up approach involving all stakeholders can create better sustainability in religious moderation programmes.

The limitations of this study open opportunities for more comprehensive follow-up research. Comparative studies involving perspectives from leaders of various religions could provide a more holistic understanding of religious moderation. Longitudinal studies are also needed to measure the long-term impact of various moderation programmes that have been implemented. Furthermore, the development of quantitative instruments based on these qualitative findings could help create a more measurable evaluation system for religious moderation programmes. Research in different cultural contexts is also necessary to test the adaptability of the model proposed in this study.

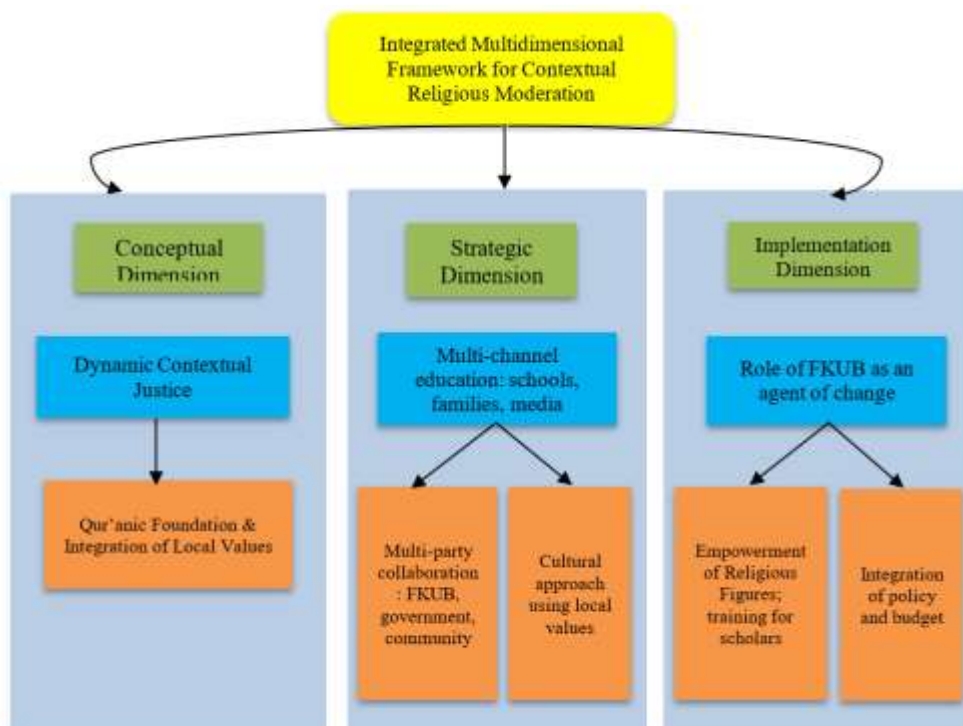


Figure 1. *Integrated multidimensional framework*

IV. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Muslim leaders within the Interfaith Harmony Forum of the Special Region of Yogyakarta conceptualise religious moderation (*Wasathiyah*) as a form of dynamic and contextual justice (*'adl*), rather than merely a static middle path, emphasising the rejection of religious coercion (*lā ikrāha fī al-dīn*), critical engagement with discriminatory literalist interpretations, and the integration of local values such as *Hamemayu Hayuning Bawono*. The findings further show that strategies for strengthening religious moderation education rely on a multi-channel approach encompassing schools, families, and media, alongside multi-stakeholder collaboration involving FKUB, government agencies, and educational institutions, capacity building for religious leaders, and the incorporation of local wisdom. These findings contribute theoretically by enriching scholarship on religious moderation through a contextual and actor-centred perspective that integrates local cultural values. At the same time, they highlight the importance of optimising collaborative programmes, strategic resource allocation, and curriculum development for moderation-based education. From a policy perspective, the study recommends the adoption of an Integrated Multidimensional Framework for Contextual Religious Moderation to enhance coordination and sustainability across stakeholders. Nevertheless, this research is limited to the perspectives of Muslim leaders within FKUB in Yogyakarta and does not include voices from other religious communities, while its qualitative design and contextual focus may constrain the generalisability of the findings; therefore, future research could adopt comparative and mixed-method approaches to examine the long-term impacts of religious moderation initiatives across diverse regional and religious contexts.

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