

CONSTRUCTING RELIGIOUS MODERATION IN ISLAMIC EDUCATION: AN INTEGRATED MODEL OF TEACHER IDENTITY, RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY, AND PEDAGOGICAL AGENCY

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ABSTRACT

Religious moderation has become a central objective of Islamic education in many plural societies. However, existing studies predominantly conceptualize it as a normative policy agenda or educational outcome, which provides limited explanation of how teachers construct and enact moderation through their professional experiences. Therefore, this study investigates how Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers in Palopo City, Indonesia, develop and practice religious moderation. This investigation is carried out by examining the interplay between religious socialization, changing religious authority, teacher agency, and negotiated religious boundaries. To accomplish this, a qualitative multiple-case study design was employed. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, digital ethnography, and document analysis, involving 12 IRE teachers from one madrasah and seven senior high schools. Data were analyzed thematically using an integrated framework that combines Religious Socialization Theory, the Reconfiguration of Religious Authority, Critical Pedagogy, and Bounded Moderation. The findings reveal that teachers' religious orientations are shaped through lifelong socialization, which is continuously reconstructed through engagement with both traditional and digital religious authorities. This process is then translated into diverse pedagogical practices and negotiated within theological and civic boundaries when addressing issues such as religious diversity, Pancasila, local culture, and interfaith relations. Moreover, rather than representing a fixed personal characteristic or mere policy compliance, religious moderation emerges as a dynamic educational process. The study also contributes theoretically by proposing an integrated process model that conceptualizes religious moderation as the interaction of teacher identity formation, evolving religious authority, pedagogical agency, and contextual negotiation within Islamic educational settings.

Keywords: Bounded Moderation, Islamic Education, Moderation, Pedagogical Agency, Religious Authority, Religious, Teacher Identity

INTRODUCTION

Religious moderation has increasingly become a central concern in contemporary educational discourse, especially as societies worldwide face growing religious diversity, ideological polarization, and the expanding influence of digital religious networks. Educational institutions are expected not only to transmit religious knowledge but also to actively cultivate democratic citizenship, intercultural understanding, and peaceful coexistence within pluralistic societies. Consequently, teachers play a pivotal role in mediating the relationship between religious doctrine and social diversity, particularly in faith-based educational settings where theological commitments often intersect with civic responsibilities. Moreover, recent international scholarship has highlighted that religious education is progressively serving as a critical arena in which competing interpretations of identity, tolerance, and citizenship are actively negotiated rather than transmitted (Jackson, 2014; Gearon, 2013; Biesta, 2020). This

ongoing negotiation underscores the complex and dynamic nature of religious education in today's interconnected world. Within Islamic educational contexts, this challenge is further intensified by the coexistence of traditional religious authorities, transnational Islamic movements, and rapidly expanding digital religious platforms that continually reshape teachers' religious understandings and pedagogical practices (Roy, 2004; Hefner, 2019).

Indonesia offers a significant context for examining these issues, primarily because religious moderation has ascended to become a central focus in both educational and public policy agendas. This shift is a response to the country's rich tapestry of religious, cultural, and ethnic diversity, which necessitates approaches to promote harmony and mutual understanding. Furthermore, Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers hold a strategic and influential position in shaping this agenda, as they are not merely transmitters of religious knowledge but also play a vital role in fostering ethical understanding, social cohesion, and respect for pluralism. They are expected to seamlessly integrate Islamic values with principles of democratic citizenship, reinforce a sense of national identity, and cultivate respect for diversity within their classroom practices. This multifaceted role underscores the importance of IRE teachers in shaping a tolerant and inclusive society amidst Indonesia's complex social fabric.

Furthermore, previous studies have demonstrated that Islamic education can contribute positively to promoting tolerance, multicultural understanding, and peaceful coexistence when supported by inclusive pedagogical approaches and institutional commitment (Arifin, 2016; Latifa et al., 2022; Syahri et al., 2024). Nevertheless, emerging evidence also suggests that teachers' responses to religious diversity remain highly heterogeneous, reflecting differences in educational background, organizational affiliation, theological orientation, and exposure to diverse religious discourses (Hefner, 2019; Menchik, 2016). These variations indicate that religious moderation cannot be understood simply as compliance with state policy but rather as a complex educational process situated within broader socio-religious contexts.

Despite the growing body of scholarship on religious moderation in Indonesia, three important gaps remain. First, existing studies predominantly conceptualize religious moderation as a normative educational objective or policy framework, paying relatively limited attention to the processes through which teachers construct, negotiate, and enact moderation in their everyday professional practice. Second, previous research often examines teachers' attitudes or instructional strategies descriptively without sufficiently explaining the social and educational mechanisms that produce different forms of moderation among teachers. Third, the rapid transformation of religious authority through digital media and transnational Islamic networks has received comparatively little attention in studies of Islamic education, despite its increasing influence on teachers' religious interpretations and classroom practices (Roy, 2004). As such, there remains a limited theoretical understanding of how teachers simultaneously negotiate religious doctrine, shifting religious authority, educational responsibilities, and the realities of living in a pluralistic democratic society.

To address these gaps, this study investigates how Islamic Religious Education teachers in Palopo City, South Sulawesi, construct and enact religious moderation across three interconnected domains: diversity, religion–state relations, and the interaction between religion and local culture. The study adopts an integrated theoretical framework combining Religious Socialization Theory (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), Reconfiguration of Religious Authority (Roy, 2004), Critical Pedagogy (Giroux, 2004), and Bounded Moderation (Menchik, 2016). Religious Socialization Theory explains how teachers' educational experiences, organizational affiliations, and socio-cultural environments shape their religious identities, while the concept of Reconfiguration of Religious Authority elucidates how contemporary religious interpretations are continuously reconstructed through traditional and digital sources of authority. Giroux's

Critical Pedagogy positions teachers as cultural and ideological brokers who actively interpret and translate religious values into pedagogical practice, whereas Menchik's concept of Bounded Moderation explains how teachers negotiate the boundaries between Islamic doctrine, national ideology, and plural social realities. By integrating these complementary perspectives, this study conceptualizes religious moderation as a socially constructed, pedagogically enacted, and contextually negotiated process rather than a fixed ideological position.

Finally, this study contributes to the international scholarship on Islamic education in three important ways. Empirically, it provides in-depth qualitative evidence of how Islamic Religious Education teachers construct and practice religious moderation across diverse educational settings. Theoretically, it advances a multidimensional explanation that integrates socialization, changing religious authority, teacher agency, and bounded moderation into a coherent analytical framework for understanding teachers' religious orientations. More broadly, the findings contribute to global discussions on religious education, teacher identity, and citizenship education by demonstrating how educators negotiate competing religious, cultural, and civic commitments within increasingly plural and interconnected societies.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative multiple-case study design to explore how Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers construct and enact religious moderation within diverse educational settings in Palopo City, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. A multiple-case study was selected because it enables an in-depth examination of complex socio-religious phenomena situated within authentic educational contexts, while also facilitating comparisons across different school environments (Yin, 2018). The study involved one Madrasah Aliyah and seven public and private senior high schools, which were selected purposively to represent institutional diversity. Twelve IRE teachers were recruited through purposive sampling based on three specific criteria: (1) actively teaching Islamic Religious Education, (2) having a minimum of three years of teaching experience, and (3) participating in religious or extracurricular activities related to Islamic education. Data were collected through various methods, including semi-structured in-depth interviews, non-participant classroom observations, digital ethnographic observations of teachers' religious engagements on social media, and document analysis of lesson plans, teaching materials, as well as school documents. The data collection process continued until thematic saturation was achieved, ensuring comprehensive coverage. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, multiple strategies were employed throughout the research process, including triangulation across data sources and methods, member checking with selected participants, and continuous researcher reflexivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Each of these steps, therefore, contributed to enhancing the reliability and validity of the study's results.

Data were then analyzed using the interactive qualitative analysis model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), involving iterative processes of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Interview transcripts, observation notes, digital ethnographic records, and documentary evidence were initially subjected to open coding, followed by axial coding to establish relationships among categories and selective coding to generate overarching themes. The interpretation of the findings was guided by an integrated theoretical framework combining Religious Socialization Theory (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), Reconfiguration of Religious Authority (Roy, 2004), Critical Pedagogy (Giroux, 2004), and Bounded Moderation (Menchik, 2016). Religious Socialization Theory informed the analysis of how teachers' educational experiences, organizational affiliations, and socio-cultural backgrounds shaped their religious identities. Furthermore, Roy's concept of the reconfiguration of religious authority was employed to examine the influence of traditional and digital religious authorities on teachers' interpretations of moderation. Giroux's Critical

Pedagogy provided the lens for understanding teachers as cultural and ideological brokers who translated religious values into pedagogical practice. Additionally, Menchik's concept of Bounded Moderation guided the interpretation of how teachers negotiated the boundaries between Islamic doctrine, national ideology, and cultural diversity. The integration of these complementary perspectives, therefore, enabled the study to explain religious moderation as a socially constructed, pedagogically enacted, and contextually negotiated process rather than a fixed ideological position.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Constructing Religious Identities through Religious Socialization

The findings indicate that Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers entered the teaching profession with diverse religious orientations, which were shaped by various factors such as their educational trajectories, organizational affiliations, family environments, and religious experiences prior to becoming teachers. Data collected through semi-structured interviews, participant profiles, classroom observations, and document analysis consistently showed that participants attributed their current religious perspectives primarily to long-term learning experiences rather than to formal government programs on religious moderation. Furthermore, across the twelve participants, three recurring themes emerged: first, the educational background served as the primary source of religious orientation; second, Islamic organizations acted as influential reference communities; and third, family and local religious communities were identified as the earliest sources of religious identity. These themes collectively highlight the complexity and multifaceted nature of religious socialization among IRE teachers.

The first theme concerns the influence of educational background. Participants consistently described their formal educational experiences as the foundation of their understanding of Islam and their approach to religious diversity. Teachers who graduated from universities or pesantren emphasizing comparative Islamic thought, multicultural education, and civic engagement reported that these learning experiences exposed them to diverse theological perspectives and strengthened their appreciation of religious plurality (Participant 3, personal communication, September, 2020; Participant 8, personal communication, September, 2020). In contrast, participants whose educational experiences were concentrated within institutions emphasizing textual approaches to Islamic jurisprudence reported receiving limited exposure to alternative interpretations and described their understanding of religious practice as being primarily guided by scriptural references (Participant 2, personal communication, September, 2020; Participant 10, personal communication, September, 2020). These educational differences were also reflected in participants' professional biographies and institutional records, which documented varied academic backgrounds across Islamic universities, pesantren, and general higher education institutions.

Interview data further revealed that organizational affiliation constituted another important component of participants' religious development. Most teachers identified their involvement in Islamic organizations as continuing sources of religious learning after completing formal education. Participants affiliated with *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU) described routine participation in religious gatherings, study circles, and community-based Islamic activities that incorporated local cultural traditions into religious practice (Participant 1, personal communication, September, 2020; Participant 6, personal communication, September, 2020). Conversely, participants associated with *Salafi*-oriented study groups reported regularly attending scriptural study sessions led by *ustad*, who emphasized the purification of religious practices and strict adherence to textual sources. For example, Participant 5 and Participant 11

personally communicated this in September 2020, respectively. Additionally, membership in *Muhammadiyah* was also identified by several participants as influencing their preference for educational reform, organizational discipline, and evidence-based religious instruction. These organizational affiliations were therefore consistently confirmed through participants' descriptions of their routine religious activities, and this was further supported by observations of school-based religious programs and community engagements.

Subsequently, the third theme highlights the continuing influence of family upbringing and local religious communities. Nearly all participants reported that their earliest understanding of Islam originated from parents, grandparents, village religious leaders, or local Qur'anic learning centers before entering formal education. Several teachers explained that regular participation in mosque activities, Qur'anic recitation groups (*majelis taklim*), and community religious celebrations during childhood shaped their religious identity and continued to influence their teaching practices as adults (Participant 7, personal communication, September, 2020; Participant 9, personal communication, September, 2020). Additionally, teachers raised in communities where local Islamic traditions such as *maulid*, communal prayers, and religious commemorations were routinely practiced described these activities as integral parts of their religious experience. On the other hand, participants from communities where local traditions were less prominent reported that religious learning was primarily centered on Qur'anic study, hadith, and scriptural instruction (Participant 5, personal communication, September, 2020). Classroom observations further indicated that teachers occasionally referred to childhood religious experiences when explaining moral values or religious practices during classroom instruction. At the same time, lesson plans reflected examples and illustrations drawn from participants' local religious environments.

Ultimately, cross-case comparison demonstrates that participants' religious biographies differed substantially across educational institutions, organizational memberships, and family environments. Furthermore, although all participants shared similar professional responsibilities as Islamic Religious Education teachers, their accounts consistently revealed different pathways through which their religious identities had developed prior to entering the teaching profession. Evidence from interviews, participant profiles, classroom observations, and institutional documents consistently indicates that teachers' religious orientations originated from diverse socialization experiences embedded within educational institutions, religious organizations, family environments, and local communities. These varied socialization experiences collectively contributed to the unique religious trajectories observed among participants.

Negotiating Religious Authority in Contemporary Islamic Education

The findings indicate that Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers continuously developed their religious understanding through engagement with multiple religious authorities beyond their formal educational experiences. Data collected from interviews, digital ethnographic observations, classroom observations, and participants' descriptions of their religious learning practices revealed that teachers no longer relied exclusively on traditional religious scholars but accessed diverse sources of Islamic knowledge through both conventional and digital platforms. Three interrelated themes emerged from the data: (1) the continuing influence of traditional *ulama* and local religious leaders, (2) the growing role of digital media in expanding religious authority, and (3) teachers' selective engagement with multiple and sometimes competing religious messages.

To begin with, the first theme concerns the continuing influence of traditional religious authorities. Across all participants, local *ulama*, *kyai*, and *ustad* remained important reference figures in interpreting religious issues and guiding educational practices. Participants reported regularly attending religious lectures (*pengajian*), mosque study circles, and organizational forums

led by respected scholars within their respective religious communities. Several teachers explained that when encountering controversial religious issues, they preferred to seek clarification directly from trusted local scholars before incorporating related topics into classroom instruction. This approach was cited by Participant 2 in a personal communication in September 2020 and by Participant 7 in September 2020. Teachers affiliated with *Nahdlatul Ulama* described their frequent participation in religious gatherings led by local kyai. Similarly, participants associated with *Muhammadiyah* and *Salafi* communities referred to scholars recognized within their respective organizational networks, as noted by Participant 4 in September 2020 and Participant 11 in September 2020. Moreover, observations of school religious activities further documented the regular involvement of invited local religious leaders in delivering sermons, leading religious commemorations, and providing guidance during Islamic education programs. These various practices underscore the active role of local religious authorities in shaping religious education within the schools.

Furthermore, the second theme highlights the increasing role of digital media in participants' religious learning. Nearly all teachers reported using online platforms as complementary sources of religious knowledge alongside traditional face-to-face learning. Participants described routinely accessing lectures through YouTube, following Islamic educational content on Instagram, joining WhatsApp religious discussion groups, and listening to sermons distributed through various digital channels (Participant 1, personal communication, September, 2020; Participant 8, personal communication, September, 2020). Digital ethnographic observations confirmed that participants followed multiple Islamic scholars and educational accounts representing diverse theological orientations. Some participants reported subscribing to official channels run by nationally recognized Islamic organizations, whereas others followed independent preachers whose lectures were widely shared on social media platforms. Similarly important, classroom observations documented several instances in which teachers referred students to publicly available online lectures or digital learning resources to supplement classroom discussions of Islamic teachings.

The findings further show that teachers did not rely on a single source of religious authority but instead described comparing religious explanations obtained from different scholars before accepting particular interpretations. Participants explained that they frequently encountered differing opinions regarding issues such as interfaith relations, local religious traditions, and contemporary social practices through both offline and online learning activities (Participant 3, personal communication, September, 2020; Participant 10, personal communication, September, 2020). Several teachers reported discussing these differences with colleagues during school meetings, religious forums, or professional teacher associations before determining how particular issues should be presented in classroom instruction. Observation data showed teachers sometimes presented multiple religious opinions and informed students about differences among Muslim scholars. Analysis of teaching materials revealed that teachers used various sources, including textbooks, publications, and digital resources from different institutions.

In this regard, the cross-case comparison demonstrates considerable variation in the combinations of religious authorities consulted by participants. While all teachers acknowledged the importance of local religious leaders, the extent of engagement with digital religious platforms differed according to individual learning habits, organizational affiliation, and professional experience. Some participants described digital media primarily as supplementary resources that supported established religious learning, whereas others reported regularly using online lectures to broaden their understanding of contemporary Islamic issues. Evidence from interviews, digital ethnographic observations, classroom observations, and teaching documents

consistently shows that, throughout their professional lives, participants accessed and utilized multiple religious authorities. They drew upon both traditional and digital sources in their continuing religious learning experiences, thereby highlighting the diverse ways in which religious knowledge is acquired and integrated.

Enacting Religious Moderation through Teacher Agency

The findings indicate that teachers expressed their understandings of religious moderation through diverse pedagogical practices implemented during classroom instruction and school religious activities. Evidence collected from classroom observations, lesson plans, interviews, and school documents demonstrates that participants incorporated issues of religious diversity, citizenship, and cultural differences into Islamic Religious Education through various instructional approaches. Moreover, across the participating schools, three recurring themes emerged: (1) teachers facilitated learning by connecting religious teachings with students' social realities, (2) teachers integrated Islamic values with national educational objectives, and (3) teachers employed different pedagogical strategies when addressing issues related to religious diversity and contemporary social life. These themes collectively highlight the multidimensional ways in which religious moderation is conveyed and understood within the educational context, emphasizing the importance of adaptable and nuanced pedagogical strategies to foster understanding of religious diversity.

The first theme addresses teachers' roles in fostering students' understanding of religious diversity in the classroom. Observations revealed that educators often utilized real-life situations, local community experiences, and current social issues to illustrate Islamic principles of tolerance, mutual respect, and peaceful coexistence. Rather than limiting instruction to textbook explanations, teachers encouraged students to relate Qur'anic teachings to situations they encountered in their schools and communities. Several participants explained that classroom discussions were intentionally designed to encourage students to express different opinions while maintaining respectful communication with their peers (Participant 3, personal communication, September, 2020; Participant 8, personal communication, September, 2020). In addition, observation records documented teachers inviting students to discuss examples of religious diversity within Palopo City. At the same time, lesson plans included learning objectives emphasizing cooperation, respect for differences, and ethical interaction among members of different religious communities. School documents further indicated that these themes were reinforced through extracurricular activities and religious celebrations promoting social harmony among students.

Furthermore, the participants viewed Islamic Religious Education and civic values as mutually supportive aspects of student development. They consistently linked Islamic teachings with national educational principles, especially Pancasila, citizenship, and national unity, as evidenced by interview data (Participant 2, personal communication, September, 2020; Participant 7, personal communication, September, 2020). During classroom observations, teachers regularly referred to Pancasila when discussing justice, social responsibility, national commitment, and peaceful coexistence. Lesson plans examined during the document analysis similarly incorporated competency indicators that required students to understand Islamic ethical principles alongside constitutional values and respect for Indonesia's plural society. School documents also recorded collaborative activities involving Islamic Religious Education teachers and Civic Education teachers during national commemorations, religious celebrations, and character education programs.

Subsequently, teachers' pedagogical approaches to addressing sensitive religious issues vary, as highlighted by the third theme. Although participants shared similar curriculum objectives, classroom observations identified different instructional strategies across schools.

Some teachers organized open classroom discussions in which students examined multiple viewpoints concerning diversity, local traditions, and social interaction before reaching conclusions based on Islamic sources (Participant 5, personal communication, September, 2020). Others preferred structured lectures followed by guided question-and-answer sessions when discussing potentially controversial topics such as interfaith relations, local religious customs, and contemporary social issues (Participant 10, personal communication, September, 2020). Meanwhile, several participants reported intentionally presenting differing scholarly opinions when responding to students' questions, while emphasizing the importance of respectful disagreement within Islamic scholarship (Participant 1, personal communication, September, 2020). Observation notes also documented differences in classroom interaction, with some teachers encouraging collaborative group discussions and problem-solving activities. In contrast, others adopted more teacher-centered instructional approaches while still allowing opportunities for student reflection.

Document analysis further demonstrated variation in instructional planning across participating schools. While all lesson plans addressed the national Islamic Religious Education curriculum, teachers differed in the examples, learning activities, and instructional resources selected to explain religious moderation. Some teachers incorporated local cultural practices, community case studies, and contextual learning materials into classroom activities, whereas others relied more extensively on Qur'anic exegesis, *hadith*, and classical Islamic references. School documents similarly recorded differences in extracurricular religious programs, including interfaith visits, community service activities, student discussions on multicultural issues, and religious seminars involving external speakers. These variations were consistent with classroom observations, which showed different expressions of religious moderation across instructional settings while remaining aligned with the overall curriculum objectives.

The evidence from interviews, classroom observations, lesson plans, and school documents consistently indicates that religious moderation was expressed through everyday teaching activities, classroom interactions, learning materials, and school-based educational programs, rather than solely through teachers' stated beliefs. Cross-case comparisons reveal that teachers incorporated their religious understandings into classroom practices via a variety of pedagogical decisions influenced by the school context, instructional preferences, and available learning resources. Despite differences in instructional approaches among participants, this integration demonstrates a common pattern of embedding religious moderation within various facets of teaching and learning.

Negotiating the Boundaries of Religious Moderation

The findings indicate that, while participants generally expressed support for religious moderation, they differed in determining the extent to which moderation should be practiced in particular religious and social situations. Evidence from interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis demonstrates that teachers consistently distinguished between principles they considered compatible with Islamic teachings and practices they believed should remain outside the acceptable boundaries of religious moderation. Moreover, five recurring themes emerged from the data: (1) acceptance of religious diversity, (2) conditional expressions of tolerance, (3) differing views regarding religion–state relations, (4) contrasting perspectives on religion and local culture, and (5) differing responses toward sensitive religious practices. These themes collectively highlight the complexity of attitudes toward religious moderation and underscore the nuanced ways in which various factors influence perceptions and behaviors related to this issue.

Throughout all participating schools, teachers recognized Indonesia's rich religious and

cultural diversity as an inherent social reality. They stressed the importance of fostering peaceful relationships among members of different religious communities. Interview data indicate that participants consistently encouraged students to respect individuals of different religious backgrounds and to avoid discrimination or hostility in everyday social interactions (Participant 2, personal communication, September, 2020; Participant 8, personal communication, September, 2020). Classroom observations similarly recorded teachers presenting Qur'anic passages related to justice, peaceful coexistence, and mutual respect when discussing social relations in plural communities. School documents further showed that values such as tolerance, cooperation, and respect for diversity were incorporated into character education programs and Islamic Religious Education learning objectives.

Although participants generally supported harmonious social relationships, interview data reveal that expressions of tolerance were frequently accompanied by limitations concerning particular religious practices. Several teachers distinguished between respecting followers of other religions and participating in activities that they considered to involve theological implications (Participant 5, personal communication, September, 2020; Participant 10, personal communication, September, 2020). Participants explained that maintaining good social relations did not necessarily require involvement in every religious celebration or ceremonial activity organized by other religious communities. Furthermore, other participants reported greater flexibility; they explained that certain forms of participation, particularly those intended to strengthen social harmony without involving acts of worship, were considered acceptable within their personal understanding of Islam (Participant 1, personal communication, September, 2020; Participant 6, personal communication, September, 2020). These differing positions appeared in classroom observations, where teachers responded variably to students' questions about interfaith greetings, holiday visits, and community activities with diverse faiths. These perspectives highlight the nuanced approaches teachers take toward interfaith interactions and religious participation.

The third theme addresses participants' perspectives on how religion relates to the Indonesian state. The interview results show that all participants identify Pancasila as Indonesia's constitutional foundation and recognize its importance in preserving national unity in a diverse society. Most teachers described Islamic Religious Education as compatible with national educational goals and reported regularly introducing discussions of citizenship, constitutional values, and social responsibility during classroom instruction (Participant 3, personal communication, September, 2020; Participant 9, personal communication, September, 2020). At the same time, participants differed in their descriptions of the appropriate role of Islamic values in public life. Some teachers emphasized that religious principles should primarily guide individual moral conduct, whereas others stated that Islamic values should also influence broader social and public affairs, provided that they remained consistent with the constitutional framework of Indonesia (Participant 4, personal communication, September, 2020; Participant 11, personal communication, September, 2020). School documents and classroom observations consistently confirmed that discussions concerning Pancasila, national identity, and citizenship formed part of the Islamic Religious Education curriculum across participating schools.

In addition, participants' responses to local cultural traditions reveal varied evaluations of practices commonly observed within Muslim communities. Several participants regarded local traditions, including *maulid* commemorations, communal prayers, and other community religious gatherings, as longstanding expressions of Islamic life that contributed to social cohesion (Participant 1, personal communication, September, 2020; Participant 7, personal communication, September, 2020). Other participants expressed reservations about certain cultural practices and explained that acceptance depended on their consistency with Qur'anic teachings and authentic prophetic traditions (Participant 5, personal communication,

September, 2020; Participant 10, personal communication, September, 2020). Classroom observations similarly recorded differences in the examples teachers selected when discussing Islamic traditions, while school documents showed variation in the organization of religious and cultural activities across participating schools.

Moreover, the subsequent theme underscores the varied reactions of participants to sensitive religious practices that often came up during classroom discussions and interviews. Issues such as exchanging Christmas greetings, participating in local religious rituals, engaging in practices regarded as *bid'ah*, and engaging in interfaith activities elicited differing opinions among the participants. Several teachers explained that they avoided extending Christmas greetings because they believed such expressions should remain within the religious practices of Christians, while maintaining that respectful social relationships with non-Muslims should continue in everyday life (Participant 2, personal communication, September, 2020; Participant 11, personal communication, September, 2020). Other participants stated that extending greetings for the purpose of maintaining social harmony could be distinguished from participation in religious worship and therefore should be considered separately (Participant 6, personal communication, September, 2020; Participant 8, personal communication, September, 2020). Similar differences appeared regarding local religious rituals and practices identified by some participants as *bid'ah*, with interview data showing varying judgments concerning their acceptability. Observation data further documented that teachers responded differently when students raised questions regarding controversial religious issues, often presenting explanations consistent with their respective religious learning experiences and organizational backgrounds.

Finally, the data collected from interviews, classroom observations, and school documents consistently reveal diverse viewpoints among participants on religious practices, civic engagement, local traditions, and interfaith activities. While they generally shared a commitment to peaceful coexistence and respect for diversity, their boundaries in these areas varied, influenced by different educational backgrounds, organizational ties, and teaching environments. The results indicate that participants conceptualize religious moderation along a spectrum of positions, highlighting different boundaries across religious and social settings, rather than adhering to a single, uniform perspective.

The findings demonstrate that Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers' understandings of religious moderation are deeply rooted in lifelong processes of religious socialization, rather than solely shaped by contemporary educational policies or professional training. Furthermore, differences in educational background, family upbringing, organizational affiliation, and local religious communities help explain why teachers entered the classroom with diverse religious orientations and interpretive traditions. This variation aligns with Religious Socialization Theory, which argues that individuals internalize values, beliefs, and systems of meaning through continuous interaction with significant social institutions and communities, thereby emphasizing the ongoing nature of socialization processes (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Rather than functioning as neutral transmitters of religious knowledge, teachers carry socially constructed religious identities that shape how they perceive diversity, interpret Islamic teachings, and respond to contemporary educational issues. These findings also reinforce scholarship on teacher identity, which emphasizes that teachers' professional beliefs are cumulative products of prior educational experiences, apprenticeship of observation, institutional cultures, and personal biographies that continue to influence classroom decision-making throughout their careers (Lortie, 1975; Schaefer & Clandinin, 2019; Zeichner & Gore, 1990). Within Islamic educational contexts, this suggests that religious moderation should not be understood simply as an instructional competency acquired through policy implementation, but as an educational disposition developed through prolonged engagement with multiple

religious and social environments.

This perspective extends previous studies on religious moderation in Indonesia, which have primarily examined moderation as a normative educational agenda or institutional objective (Hefner, 2019; Latifa et al., 2022; Syahri et al., 2024). The present findings indicate that teachers' responses to religious diversity originate long before they participate in professional development programs, reflecting accumulated experiences within families, pesantren, universities, Islamic organizations, and local religious communities. Consequently, variations in teachers' understandings of moderation are better explained by differences in religious identity formation than by individual preferences or policy compliance alone. Conceptually, this study contributes to the literature by repositioning religious moderation from a predominantly policy-driven construct toward a socially constructed dimension of teacher identity. By integrating Religious Socialization Theory into the study of Islamic education, the findings demonstrate that moderation emerges through long-term processes of identity formation that shape how teachers subsequently interpret religious authority, exercise pedagogical agency, and negotiate the boundaries of religious practice within plural educational settings. This provides a broader conceptual foundation for understanding why teachers with similar professional responsibilities may nevertheless enact markedly different expressions of religious moderation.

Particularly important, the findings demonstrate that teachers' understandings of religious moderation continue to evolve after completing formal education through ongoing engagement with multiple sources of religious authority. While traditional *ulama*, *kyai*, and religious organizations remain influential in shaping teachers' religious perspectives, digital platforms have substantially expanded the range of authorities available for consultation. Rather than relying exclusively on scholars within their local religious communities, participants reported routinely accessing religious lectures, online discussions, and educational resources through YouTube, Instagram, WhatsApp groups, and other digital media. This finding supports Roy's (2004) argument that contemporary religious authority has become increasingly decentralized, allowing individuals to construct religious understanding through interactions with multiple and geographically dispersed sources rather than through a single institutional authority. Similar observations have been reported by Campbell (2013), who argues that digital technologies have transformed the ways religious knowledge is produced, disseminated, and negotiated, while Bunt (2018) demonstrates that online Islamic networks have created new spaces where competing interpretations of Islam circulate across national and organizational boundaries. Therefore, teachers' religious orientations are continuously reconstructed through interactions among traditional scholars, organizational networks, and digital religious environments rather than remaining fixed after their initial educational experiences.

The coexistence of these diverse sources of authority also explains why teachers selectively negotiated religious messages instead of adopting them uncritically. Participants compared differing scholarly opinions, discussed controversial issues with colleagues, and reconciled organizational guidance with information obtained through digital media before incorporating particular perspectives into classroom instruction. This pattern reflects Hoover's (2021) observation that religious authority in contemporary societies increasingly operates through processes of individual interpretation and mediated communication rather than hierarchical transmission alone. Within the Indonesian context, Hefner (2019) similarly argues that Islamic authority has become increasingly pluralized through the interaction of state institutions, mass organizations, educational institutions, and expanding public religious discourse. Building upon these perspectives, the present study suggests that religious moderation should be understood as a dynamic, continuously negotiated orientation rather than a stable personal attribute established solely through formal education. This finding extends

scholarship by showing teachers' understandings of moderation are continually reconstructed through interaction with conflicting religious authorities across institutional, organizational, and digital spheres. This explains why teachers with similar backgrounds may develop different views of religious moderation as they navigate evolving discourses during their careers.

Likewise, the findings demonstrate that religious moderation becomes meaningful within Islamic education when teachers actively translate religious beliefs into pedagogical practice rather than merely transmitting religious knowledge to students. Moreover, participants adapted Islamic teachings to classroom realities by connecting scriptural principles with issues of diversity, citizenship, local culture, and students' everyday experiences. The differences in instructional approaches, classroom discussions, learning activities, and the use of contextual examples all indicate that teachers exercised professional judgment in determining how religious moderation should be communicated within their respective educational settings. This, in turn, aligns with Giroux's (2004) conception of teachers as transformative intellectuals who mediate cultural values rather than simply delivering prescribed curricula. Similarly, Freire (1970) argues that education is fundamentally a dialogical process in which teachers and learners collaboratively construct meaning through critical engagement with social realities, while Biesta (2020) emphasizes that education extends beyond knowledge transmission to include the formation of responsible and democratic subjects. The present findings therefore suggest that religious moderation is not automatically embedded in curricular documents but emerges through teachers' pedagogical decisions as they interpret religious knowledge in relation to students' lived experiences and the social contexts in which learning occurs.

This active pedagogical role also reflects broader understandings of teacher professionalism in which instructional practice requires continuous negotiation between disciplinary knowledge, curriculum expectations, learner characteristics, and societal needs. Shulman's (1987) concept of pedagogical content knowledge highlights that effective teaching depends not only on mastery of subject matter but also on the ability to transform knowledge into forms that are meaningful and accessible for learners. Likewise, Cochran-Smith (2004) argues that teachers function as curriculum makers whose instructional decisions are shaped by professional judgment, contextual understanding, and ethical responsibility. The present study extends these perspectives by demonstrating that, within Islamic educational contexts, teachers simultaneously negotiate religious doctrine, national curriculum objectives, students' diverse backgrounds, and the realities of plural social life when designing and implementing classroom learning. Thus, religious moderation should be understood not merely as an individual religious conviction but as an educational practice that is continuously enacted through teachers' professional agency. This conceptualization broadens existing scholarship on religious moderation by shifting attention from teachers' personal beliefs toward the pedagogical processes through which moderation is interpreted, contextualized, and translated into everyday educational practice.

In subsequent responses, participants generally recognized religious diversity as a social reality. However, they also delineated clear boundaries concerning specific religious beliefs and practices. Although teachers consistently emphasized peaceful coexistence, mutual respect, and national unity, they differed in their responses to issues such as extending Christmas greetings, participating in local religious rituals, practices perceived as *bid'ah*, and involvement in interfaith activities. These findings galvanize Menchik's (2016) concept of **bounded moderation**, which argues that religious tolerance in Indonesia is not unlimited but operates within boundaries defined by theological commitments and communal religious identities. Rather than viewing moderation as unrestricted openness, teachers distinguished between social interaction and religious participation, accepting cooperation among religious communities while remaining

cautious about practices they perceived as involving theological endorsement. This interpretation also resonates with Hefner's (2019) argument that Indonesian Islam has historically promoted democratic coexistence while preserving normative religious commitments, illustrating that accommodation and doctrinal fidelity often coexist rather than contradict one another. Consequently, the variation observed in teachers' responses reflects different ways of defining the acceptable boundaries between religious identity and plural social engagement rather than differences in commitment to peaceful coexistence.

These negotiated boundaries also illustrate the complex relationship between Islamic education, civic responsibility, and religious identity in plural societies. Burhani (2019) argues that moderation within Indonesian Islam develops through continuous interaction between religious commitment and broader social responsibilities, while Jackson (2014) similarly emphasizes that religious education should prepare learners to engage constructively with diversity without requiring the abandonment of their own religious convictions. Likewise, Waghid (2014) contends that democratic citizenship within Islamic education is strengthened through dialogue, mutual respect, and critical engagement with differences rather than through the elimination of theological distinctions. The present findings extend these perspectives by demonstrating that teachers simultaneously negotiated constitutional values represented by Pancasila, organizational religious teachings, local cultural traditions, and classroom realities when determining the limits of acceptable religious practice. Sensitive issues such as Christmas greetings, local rituals, practices identified as *bid'ah*, and interfaith activities became practical contexts in which these negotiations were most visible. This study contributes to the literature by showing that religious moderation is not a simple dichotomy between "moderate" and "non-moderate" positions, but rather a negotiated process in which teachers balance Islamic doctrine with the educational demands of living in a religiously and culturally diverse society.

The preceding discussions collectively demonstrate that religious moderation among Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers is best understood as a dynamic developmental process rather than a fixed ideological category or a predetermined personal characteristic. The findings indicate that teachers' understandings of moderation emerge through the interaction of multiple social, educational, and religious experiences accumulated throughout their professional lives. Religious socialization provides the initial foundation through which teachers acquire religious identities shaped by family, educational institutions, Islamic organizations, and local religious communities. These identities are subsequently refined through continuous engagement with traditional scholars, organizational networks, and expanding digital religious authorities, resulting in ongoing reinterpretation of religious knowledge. Rather than passively adopting these influences, teachers exercise professional agency by translating their religious understandings into pedagogical decisions that address curriculum requirements, students' needs, and the realities of pluralistic educational environments. These educational practices ultimately become the arena in which teachers negotiate the acceptable boundaries between Islamic doctrine, civic responsibility, and social diversity. Accordingly, the findings suggest that religious moderation develops through a sequential yet interconnected process: religious socialization → teacher identity → changing religious authority → teacher agency → negotiated religious moderation. This integrated process explains why teachers with comparable professional roles may nevertheless demonstrate different expressions of moderation in educational practice.

This integrated model constitutes the principal theoretical contribution of the present study by synthesizing four complementary theoretical perspectives into a single explanatory framework for understanding religious moderation within Islamic education. Previous studies have frequently conceptualized religious moderation as a normative policy agenda, an institutional objective, or an individual attitude (Hefner, 2019; Menchik, 2016). In contrast,

the present study demonstrates that moderation is continuously constructed, reconstructed, enacted, and negotiated through the interaction of identity formation, evolving religious authority, pedagogical practice, and contextual decision-making. As a result, religious moderation should be conceptualized as an evolving educational process rather than as a static classification of teachers as either “moderate” or “non-moderate.” This process-oriented perspective advances international scholarship by integrating Religious Socialization Theory (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), the Reconfiguration of Religious Authority (Roy, 2004), Critical Pedagogy (Giroux, 2004), and Bounded Moderation (Menchik, 2016) into a coherent model of religious moderation’s formation and enactment. Beyond Indonesia, the framework provides a transferable lens for analyzing how teachers in diverse religious educational settings negotiate religious identity, educational responsibility, and plural social realities, thereby extending theory on teacher identity, religious education, and moderation in interconnected societies.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that religious moderation among Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers is neither a fixed personal disposition nor merely the implementation of a government policy. Instead, it represents a dynamic educational process that is continuously constructed through religious socialization, which is reshaped by changing religious authorities. Moreover, it is enacted through teachers’ pedagogical agency and negotiated within the boundaries of religious doctrine and plural social realities. The integrated findings reveal that teachers’ educational backgrounds, family environments, organizational affiliations, and religious learning experiences establish their initial religious identities, which, in turn, continue to evolve through interactions with traditional scholars, digital religious networks, and professional educational contexts. These evolving understandings are subsequently translated into diverse classroom practices that reflect teachers’ ongoing negotiations between Islamic teachings, national educational objectives, students’ needs, and the demands of living in a multicultural society. By integrating Religious Socialization Theory, the Reconfiguration of Religious Authority, Critical Pedagogy, and Bounded Moderation into a unified explanatory framework, this study advances a process-oriented conceptual model of religious moderation. Importantly, this model extends beyond normative or policy-centered perspectives. Consequently, the proposed framework contributes to international scholarship on Islamic education by demonstrating that religious moderation should be understood as an evolving pedagogical and social process. Through this process, teachers continually balance religious identity, professional responsibility, and civic engagement within increasingly diverse educational environments, highlighting its complex and adaptive nature.

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