

IMPLEMENTATION OF RELIGIOUS MODERATION IN ISLAMIC HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN THE INDONESIA-MALAYSIA BORDER REGION

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Abstract

This research aims to analyze the forms of religious moderation practiced in the environment of the Islamic Institute of Sultan Muhammad Syafiuddin Sambas, West Kalimantan. As an Islamic higher education institution located in the Indonesia-Malaysia border region, IAIS Sambas is unique in the diversity of students who come from various religious and cultural backgrounds. This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study method, where data is collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis related to institutional policies and activities. The results showed that the implementation of religious moderation at IAIS Sambas is realized through various programs, such as the establishment of an interfaith dialogue forum, integrating the values of pluralism and diversity into the curriculum, organizing community activities on religious holidays, as well as research and scientific publications that support the dissemination of the concept of religious moderation. In addition, the institution actively collaborates with local communities and religious organizations to strengthen social harmony in society. The implications of this research show that the approach taken by IAIS Sambas can serve as a model for other higher education institutions, especially in areas with high religious and cultural pluralism, in creating an academic environment that is tolerant, inclusive and conducive to religious harmony. Thus, this research contributes to strengthening the concept of religious moderation as a tool to prevent conflict and build a harmonious society in the midst of diversity. This research contributes to enriching the literature on religious moderation in Islamic higher education in border areas, providing an implementation model that can be replicated by other institutions, and supporting inclusivity-based policies and programs to strengthen social harmony in the academic environment and society.

Keywords: Religious Moderation, Islamic universities, Indonesia-Malaysia border region

A. Introduction

Various aspects of life, including issues of religious and cultural diversity. As a country with high religious and ethnic pluralism, Indonesia faces the heavy task of maintaining social harmony amidst diversity. This is highly relevant considering the prevalence of identity-based conflicts that are often triggered by a lack of understanding and tolerance among religious communities (Hidayat, 2020). In this context, religious moderation becomes one of the strategic solutions to create a harmonious social life.

Religious moderation is a concept that emphasizes balance, tolerance, and appreciation for differences (Azra, 2004). This concept is relevant because it can serve as a middle ground that avoids extremism on one side and excessive permissiveness on the other (Fadli, 2019). As one of the universal values in Islamic teachings, religious moderation teaches the importance of respecting differences and building a peaceful and inclusive social life. This is important not only within the community but also in educational institutions, which are places for shaping the character of the younger generation (Putra et al., 2024).

In the context of education, religious moderation plays a very significant role. Islamic religious education, especially in higher education, not only serves as a means of transferring religious values but also as a medium for instilling attitudes of tolerance and appreciating diversity (Shihab, 2000). Higher education institutions have the responsibility to create an environment that supports interfaith dialogue, strengthens social solidarity, and prevents the spread of radical ideologies that can threaten national unity.

Sultan Muhammad Syafiuddin Sambas Islamic Institute (IAIS Sambas) has become one of the interesting examples of Islamic higher education institutions to study. Located in Sambas Regency, West Kalimantan, which borders Malaysia, IAIS Sambas has a unique diversity among its students. This institution accepts students from various religious backgrounds, including Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, and Confucianism, as well as diverse cultures (Susanto et al., 2022). This multicultural environment becomes fertile ground for implementing and testing the concept of religious moderation (Prasetiawati, 2017).

The diversity present at IAIS Sambas reflects the social reality in the border region, which often serves as a meeting point for various cultures and religions. This presents both a challenge and an opportunity for the institution to integrate the values of religious moderation into its curriculum (Rahman, 2021). With an inclusive educational approach, IAIS Sambas can become a model institution

capable of creating a generation of young people who are not only strong in their beliefs but also open to diversity.

However, the implementation of religious moderation is not without various challenges. One of the main challenges is internal resistance from students who have backgrounds in certain religious ideologies that are conservative or even extreme (Yusuf, 2020). This challenge is often exacerbated by external pressure from community groups that are less supportive of the concept of religious moderation. Therefore, it is important to understand the strategies implemented by IAIS Sambas in responding to this challenge.

The case that occurred in Sambas Regency, such as the spread of radical ideologies in school environments, demonstrates the need for proactive measures from higher education institutions to strengthen religious moderation (Rahayu & Sutama, 2023). In this context, IAIS Sambas has demonstrated its commitment through various programs that support tolerance and appreciate differences. These programs include interfaith discussions, extracurricular activities involving students from various backgrounds, and the integration of moderation values into religious courses.

Research on the implementation of religious moderation at IAIS Sambas is also relevant for providing insights into the supporting and inhibiting factors. Supporting factors can include institutional policies, an inclusive curriculum, and the commitment of educators to implement moderation values (Fauzi, 2021). On the other hand, inhibiting factors can stem from interfaith stereotypes, cultural resistance, or a lack of understanding of religious moderation. This research also has practical contributions to the development of religious education in Indonesia. By understanding how religious moderation is practiced at IAIS Sambas, the results of this research can be used as a model for other higher education institutions to develop similar programs. Moreover, this research is expected to provide solutions to strengthen social harmony in border areas, which often become conflict-prone regions (Zulkifli, 2023).

Through this research, it is hoped that it can make a significant contribution to strengthening religious moderation in the educational environment. With proper implementation, religious moderation not only becomes a value taught but also a culture practiced by students, lecturers, and the wider community (Nurcholis, 2022). Thus, IAIS Sambas can play an active role in building an inclusive, tolerant, and peaceful society.

B. Method

This research method uses a descriptive qualitative approach to explore the implementation of religious moderation at the Sultan Muhammad Syafiuddin Sambas Islamic Institute. This research aims to uncover the institution's policies related to religious moderation, the forms of its implementation within the campus environment, as well as the efforts and collaborations undertaken to strengthen the spirit of religious moderation both inside and outside the campus. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with institutional policymakers, participatory observations in academic and community activities, as well as the analysis of institutional documents related to the policies and implementation of religious moderation. Data analysis techniques involve data reduction, data presentation, and in-depth conclusion drawing to uncover relevant thematic patterns. Data validity is ensured through triangulation of sources, techniques, and time, so that the research results can represent the practice of religious moderation in a holistic and in-depth manner. With this approach, it is hoped that the research can provide a comprehensive picture of the role of higher education institutions in building a harmonious society through the values of religious moderation.

C. Finding and Discussion

1. Finding

This research found that the implementation of religious moderation at the Sultan Muhammad Syafiuddin Sambas Islamic Institute is realized through various strategic activities that encompass academic, social, and community dimensions. In the academic aspect, religious moderation is integrated into the curriculum through courses that encompass the values of pluralism, religious diversity, and religious moderation. In addition, interfaith dialogue forums serve as discussion spaces for students from various religious backgrounds to share experiences and strengthen tolerance. In the social aspect, community activities such as the inclusive celebration of religious holidays are carried out to build social cohesion within the campus environment. This research also identifies that scientific research and publications on religious moderation contribute to strengthening the dissemination of these values. These findings indicate that the holistic approach implemented by IAIS Sambas not only succeeded in creating an inclusive academic environment but also strengthened social harmony in the surrounding community, making it a model for other higher education institutions.

2. Discussion

The implementation of religious moderation practiced within the environment of the Sultan Muhammad Syafiuddin Sambas Islamic Institute

The implementation of religious moderation in the context of campus environments and the wider community can be realized through several approaches and specific activities that emphasize the development of awareness, respect, and understanding across religions. The first step could be through structured and sustainable interfaith dialogue. Through dialogue activities, individuals from various religious and belief backgrounds can gather to share their views, traditions, and values in a safe and respectful atmosphere. This is not just about theological discussions, but also about life experiences, hopes, and challenges, thereby strengthening social cohesion and tolerance (Zamathoriq, 2021).

Education about religious and cultural diversity is often neglected in the formal education curriculum (Hesti et al., 2022). Therefore, the integration of learning materials that focus on the study of religious pluralism and cultural diversity in schools and universities can be a step forward in building a foundation of understanding and appreciation for differences from an early age. Training programs for lecturers on how to teach sensitive topics related to religion and culture in the classroom are also important to encourage an inclusive and positive learning atmosphere. The organization of interfaith social activities is another form of promoting religious moderation. Programs such as joint community service, shared iftar events, and celebrations of major religious holidays are conducted together, not only reducing prejudice and misconceptions through constructive social interactions but also strengthening community bonds. A diverse environment becomes a fertile ground for practicing solidarity, empathy, and genuine cooperation based on humanity, beyond the boundaries of each religion (Naj'ma & Bakri, 2021).

The involvement of digital media in promoting positive narratives about tolerance and diversity cannot be overlooked. By leveraging the wide reach and significant influence of social media, the creation of educational campaigns featuring inspiring stories about harmonious religious life, as well as the dissemination of accurate information about various religions, can enhance awareness and foster positive attitudes in society (Poorani et al., 2021). The implementation of these digital strategies, accompanied by content control and moderation to counter the spread of hate speech and false information, has become

one of the key aspects in the struggle to maintain and enhance religious moderation in the current digital era (Jasminto, 2022).

Furthermore, the active role of civil society in garnering support for religious moderation is critically important. Non-governmental organizations, religious groups, and local communities can collaborate in building a broad support network for religious moderation initiatives (Mustaghfiroh, 2022). This collaboration can include the organization of workshops, seminars, and conferences aimed at strengthening the capacity of religious leaders and community figures to bridge differences and resolve conflicts. Through this support network, various programs and activities are carried out not only at the local level but can also be expanded to a larger scale, creating a much broader impact.

It is also important to look back into educational institutions and community organizations to identify and address biases or exclusive practices that may be unconsciously occurring. This includes ensuring equality in the representation of all religious groups in teaching materials, policies, and institutional practices, as well as ensuring that places of worship, discussion, and social activities are open to all. These efforts must be supported by strong anti-discrimination policies and effective problem-solving mechanisms, ensuring that every member of the community feels safe and valued.

Finally, to achieve sustainable progress in religious moderation, a long-term commitment from all parties involved is necessary. This is not just about improving responses after incidents of intolerance occur, but more about building a strong foundation for sustainable interfaith understanding, respect, and cooperation. As part of this effort, regular evaluations of existing programs and initiatives, as well as adjustments to strategies based on feedback and changes in social conditions, are very important. With adaptive and responsive strategies, society can better formulate effective and inclusive solutions to address the challenges of religious moderation in the future (Mubin et al., 2022).

The development of religious moderation requires extensive cooperation involving individuals, community groups, educational institutions, civil society, and the government. Through this collaborative and comprehensive approach, an environment conducive to tolerance, respect, and deep understanding among diverse religious adherents can be created, leading to a more harmonious and peaceful society. In the environment of the Sultan Muhammad Syafiuddin Sambas Islamic Institute, the practice of religious moderation can be realized through several forms of implementation that are integrated into daily campus life.

Religious-based educational institutions like this have a special role in fostering deep tolerance and interfaith understanding among their students. First, the establishment of an active interfaith and intercultural dialogue forum on campus. This forum can serve as a platform for the exchange of ideas, discussions on religious and social issues, as well as a deep understanding of other religious traditions and cultures. The existence of such a forum at the Sultan Muhammad Syafiuddin Sambas Islamic Institute can enrich the perspectives of students and lecturers on diversity and instill values of moderation in religious practice.

The dialogue forum on religious moderation has been established by IAIS through the religious moderation unit, which carries out its programs through moderation discussion forums, as an interview has been conducted with the head of the Religious Moderation Unit. Could you explain the basic concept behind this interfaith moderation discussion forum model?

Essentially, the basic concept is to create a safe and inclusive space for all participants to express their thoughts and beliefs. We believe that understanding and respect can grow from open and honest dialogue. This forum is designed to encourage constructive discussions, without judgment or exclusion.

How do you ensure that every voice, regardless of its belief background, is heard and valued in this forum?

That is an important part of our model. We implement several basic rules – for example, each participant must be given equal time to speak, and they are required to listen without interrupting the conversation. We also prioritize trained facilitators to guide the discussion, ensuring that the flow of communication remains healthy and productive.

What are the main challenges you face in running this forum, and how do you overcome them?

The challenge that often arises is the participants' fear of speaking openly, especially regarding their beliefs, due to concerns about conflict or disputes. We address this by creating a supportive environment, where diversity is seen as an asset, not a threat. In addition, ice-breaking sessions and activities are often used to build trust.

In its implementation, what kind of forum model has proven to be the most effective in bridging differences?

We found that the mixed model of small group discussions and plenary sessions was very effective. This allows for in-depth discussions among individuals in small groups, while also providing an opportunity for all participants to share their experiences and perspectives in a larger forum.

The conclusion of the interview underscores the importance of interfaith moderation discussion forums in creating an inclusive and safe space for individuals from various belief backgrounds to share their views and ideas. Through healthy communication practices, governed by clear rules and guided by skilled facilitators, this forum demonstrates how understanding and respect can develop, minimizing conflict and strengthening diversity as a communal wealth. More than just discussions, activities in this forum also facilitate real actions such as community service projects, where participants collaborate across religions, demonstrating the concrete impact of effective dialogue. This emphasizes that, through an inclusive and respectful approach to differences, interfaith moderation discussion forums have significant potential in strengthening community bonds and supporting social harmony.

Thus, the results of this interview are also closely related to several in-depth communication and sociology theories. Two of them are "Intercultural Communication Theory" and "Conflict and Social Functionalism Theory."

First, the Intercultural Communication theory emphasizes the importance of awareness, knowledge, and skills in communicating between individuals from different cultural backgrounds. In the context of a religious moderation discussion forum, the application of this theory is evident through efforts to create a safe and inclusive space where each participant can share and receive diverse perspectives with respect. The rules for listening with empathy and taking turns speaking reflect best practices in intercultural communication that facilitate mutual understanding and respect for diversity.

Second, Conflict Theory and Social Functionalism offer different lenses for interpreting the forum for religious moderation discussions. Conflict Theory acknowledges that society consists of various groups with different interests, which often leads to tension. Conversely, Social Functionalism views diversity and differences as aspects that strengthen society and create social cohesion. In the context of this forum, the principles of Functionalism seem to dominate; by approaching differences as a source of strength, the forum seeks conflict resolution and the promotion of harmony among religious communities. Joint community service projects demonstrate how interfaith cooperation can yield broader social benefits, in line with the Functionalist perspective.

Then, secondly, the implementation of religious moderation through the integration of a curriculum that includes material on pluralism, religious diversity, and religious moderation. This includes teaching the theory and practice of

religious moderation, interfaith comparative studies, as well as interfaith dialogue and communication skills. Through holistic education, students can develop analytical and empathetic abilities in viewing differences as a wealth, not a division.

Based on observations conducted on the lecturer teaching the introductory course on Islamic studies. When teaching with material related to religious moderation. At the beginning of the lesson, the instructor presented the definition and importance of religious moderation in the context of social plurality. The teaching method applied involves a combination of brief lectures, group discussions, and case studies. One of the standout aspects of the teaching methodology is the implementation of the "flipped classroom," where students are encouraged to read related materials before class, allowing class time to be used more for active discussions and in-depth analysis.

This observation also notes how the lecturer effectively used facilitation techniques to ensure that every voice was heard and values such as empathy and respect for differences were emphasized throughout the discussion. In the case study, students were asked to analyze real scenarios characterized by religious diversity issues, and then propose solutions based on a religious moderation approach.

The students' response to this teaching methodology is very positive. Many actively participate in discussions, reflecting a high level of engagement and serious interest in the material. The application of learning techniques such as "thinking pairs share" and discussion forums encourages them to share thoughts and reflect on different perspectives.

Thus, the teaching of religious moderation by the supervising lecturer demonstrates an effective way to educate students about the values of tolerance, empathy, and appreciation for religious diversity. Through a combination of active teaching methodologies, the use of relevant materials, and the utilization of learning technology, this session successfully created a supportive learning environment where students could constructively explore and discuss complex issues related to religious moderation. This observation reaffirms the importance of an inclusive and dialogical educational approach in preparing future leaders to contribute to a more cooperative and harmonious society.

Third, the implementation of community activities on religious holidays such as the commemoration of Isra' Mi'raj. During the commemoration of Islamic holidays, the Rector of IAIS invited K.H. Nasrulloh, who is also the leader of Pondok Pesantren Basuni Imran Sambas. The purpose of the Rector

commemorating Islamic holidays by inviting speakers, not only K.H. Nasrulloh but also other speakers, attended by the IAIS leadership, faculty, and staff, as well as students, is to enliven the IAIS mosque.

As a speaker, you are also reminded to give a good lecture without placing blame on one side. As per the results of the interview with the speaker in commemorating the Isra' Mi'raj day. We would like to know more about the purpose of inviting the Ustadz to the upcoming Isra' Mi'raj event. Could you explain the purpose and expectations of this invitation, Ustadz?

Of course. Isra' Mi'raj is a very important event in Islamic history. This is the moment when Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) undertook a night journey from Masjid al-Haram to Masjid al-Aqsa, and then ascended to the heavens to receive the command of prayer from Allah (SWT). Through this event, we learn important lessons about spirituality, courage, and the significance of prayer in a Muslim's life. The main purpose of my invitation to this event is to remind the community of the meaning and importance of Isra' Mi'raj. I hope that through the lecture I will deliver, the community will gain a deeper understanding of this historical event and draw lessons from the spiritual journey of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

What are the main messages that the Ustadz will convey in the sermon later?

There are several key messages I want to convey. First, the importance of prayer as the pillar of religion and a direct command from Allah SWT conveyed to Prophet Muhammad SAW during Isra' Mi'raj. Second, the spirit and motivation from this journey to strengthen our faith and piety towards Allah SWT. And third, the relevance of this event in our daily lives, especially regarding how we can draw closer to Allah SWT through worship and overcome various life challenges with patience and faith.

What are the Ustadz's hopes for the congregation attending the Isra' Mi'raj event?

My hope is that the congregation present will not only listen to the sermon but also reflect on and practice the messages conveyed. I hope that after this event, the congregation will feel more motivated to improve the quality of their worship, especially prayer, and always strive to strengthen their relationship with Allah SWT. I hope this event becomes a moment that brings positive changes in their lives.

Thus, the Relationship between the Content of Sermons and Religious Moderation, where Religious Moderation emphasizes a balanced understanding and practice of religion, neither excessive nor too lax, among others;

- 1) Development of Worship Quality: By emphasizing the importance of prayer, which is one of the pillars of Islam, it is part of a moderate attitude in religion—not neglecting it, but also not being excessive in an unproportional manner.
- 2) Strengthening Spirituality without Extremism: A sermon that inspires the congregation to strengthen their faith without falling into forms of extremism. Religious moderation emphasizes the principle of caution in understanding and practicing religious teachings so that they remain rooted in the authentic Quran and Sunnah.
- 3) Application of Values in Daily Life: The discussion on the relevance of Isra' Mi'raj in daily life emphasizes that religion should have a positive impact on a person's behavior and morality. This is in line with the concept of moderation, which invites the community to practice religion adaptively and contextually while maintaining the essence of religious teachings.

From the results of this sermon, it is also evident that religious moderation is achieved through the principles of balance, justice, tolerance, wisdom, and deep understanding. The lecture not only enhances the religious understanding of the congregation but also encourages them to practice their faith in a moderate and proportional manner, in accordance with universal values that serve to create harmony in community life. Fourth, support for research and scientific publications related to the themes of religious moderation, social cohesion, and conflict resolution. The Sultan Muhammad Syafiuddin Sambas Islamic Institute, in terms of research organized by LP2M, always prioritizes current issues, one of which is religious moderation. The results of the research conducted must be published in non-accredited national journals, accredited journals, and international journals so that these research findings can be read by the general public.

Thus, the implementation of religious moderation through this multidimensional approach, the Sultan Muhammad Syafiuddin Sambas Islamic Institute actively contributes to building a foundation for a more tolerant, harmonious society that appreciates diversity. Overall, this effort reflects the commitment of the Sultan Muhammad Syafiuddin Sambas Islamic Institute to inclusive and diverse education, which not only instills a deep understanding of religion but also values and promotes harmony and tolerance among religious communities.

E. Conclusion

This research shows that the implementation of religious moderation at Institut Agama Islam Sultan Muhammad Syafiuddin Sambas is realized through interfaith dialogue forums, integration of pluralism values in the curriculum, interfaith community activities, as well as research and scientific publications that support the dissemination of the concept of moderation. This approach not only strengthens social harmony in the academic environment but also contributes to building tolerance and preventing religious-based conflict in a multicultural society. The model applied at IAIS Sambas can be a reference for other universities in creating an inclusive and peace-oriented environment. In the future, further research can explore the long-term effectiveness of this strategy as well as its potential development on a broader scale.

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