



Towards a Generation of Religious Moderation Through Natural and Social Sciences in Primary Schools: Opportunities and Challenges

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Abstract: This research is based on the government's efforts to improve harmony between Indonesian communities through religious moderation. So, this research was conducted to identify the challenges and opportunities faced in implementing religious moderation through learning natural sciences and social studies in elementary schools. Elementary schools play a strategic role in fostering moderate character through the integration of tolerant values, especially in the natural sciences and social sciences learning curriculum. The preparation of this article uses a literature review. The results of the study show that learning natural and social sciences has an important role and is a forum in forming a moderate generation. The natural sciences develop critical and objective thinking to prevent fanaticism, while the social sciences teach social diversity and how to coexist with a pluralistic society. However, this is accompanied by challenges such as teachers' lack of understanding of religious moderation. In conclusion, religious moderation is important for Indonesian people to live in harmony, this can be realized through teaching from elementary school through collaborative learning in natural sciences and social sciences learning. Meanwhile, training with nuances of religious moderation for teachers is an option to add insight in carrying out learning practices with students.

Keywords: Moderation challenges; Moderation opportunities; Natural and social science; Primary school; Religious moderation

Introduction

Indonesia, with a population estimated to reach 280 million by 2024 and spread across 38 provinces (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2024). Has tremendous diversity. According to a Pew Research Center survey on "The Global God Divide," 96% of Indonesians indicate a belief in God as the basis for instilling morals and positive values (Tamir et al., 2020). The majority of the population is Muslim, reaching around 87.18% or around 244.9 million people. In addition, there are Christians as many as 7.40% (20.9 million people), Catholics 3.07% (8.67 million people), Hindus 1.68% (4.74 million people), Buddhists 0.71% (2.00 million

people), and Confucianism and Beliefs each around 0.03% (98,822 people). Beyond religious diversity, Indonesia is also known for its rich culture, customs, and more than 700 regional languages that are still actively spoken (Woo, 2013). This diversity reflects the strength of the nation's identity as well as evidence of tolerance and unity in a pluralistic society. Thus, religious and cultural diversity in Indonesia not only strengthens national identity, but also becomes a challenge and opportunity to strengthen unity in diversity.

Although the majority of Indonesia's population is Muslim, challenges related to extremism and intolerance remain a major concern. The presence of a small number of individuals exposed to radical ideologies can trigger

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social tensions and threaten interfaith harmony. This challenge is further complicated by the diversity of religions that exist in Indonesia, such as Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism and other local beliefs. Intolerance and discrimination against minority groups, which make up around 12.92% of the population, have the potential to worsen conditions and hinder the creation of a harmonious and inclusive society. These tensions can not only trigger social conflicts, but also hinder social and economic progress. Therefore, policies that emphasize equal rights and protection for all citizens regardless of religious background or beliefs are needed.

The diversity of ethnicity, nation, and religion in Indonesia is indeed a challenge in uniting these differences. The SARA case was found in SD Negeri 1 Cikampek in 2023 when the Islamic religious teacher did not agree to be given Christian religious activities to Christian students at school on the grounds that he was afraid that Muslim students would be carried away by Christian teachings (Maemunah & Darmiyanti, 2023). Furthermore, SARA cases also occur not only in Indonesian schools, but also occur in European countries such as the United Kingdom in Kent High School in 2023 in the Thomas Knyvett area and the Medway incident related to racially motivated attacks that resulted in the anxiety of parents of students. Therefore, schools should be the safest and most comfortable place to gain knowledge, sometimes it becomes an inhospitable place for students who are different. With the cooperation between schools, parents, and communities, it is hoped that cases of intolerance can be minimized and an inclusive school environment can be realized. In terms of realizing this, religious moderation is needed.

The importance of understanding the values of moderation is stated in Law No.3 of 2017 which states that the implementation of the book system must be based on diversity, nationality, togetherness, civility, justice, mutual cooperation and habits. Religious moderation is a step for Indonesian citizens, including in elementary schools, in affirming national and religious commitments (Yuliana et al., 2022). This can be done through learning that focuses on noble values, school activities that involve various religions, and student interactions that encourage mutual respect for different beliefs. The concept of freedom of religion in diversity is interpreted as an attitude that there should be no coercion in religious matters (Mandala et al., 2024). The existence of this interaction is a form of religious moderation that is well established, because in this school, in addition to students who have different religions, the teachers are also the same (Dewi et al., 2024).

Thus, religious moderation in elementary schools can help build tolerance, strengthen nationalism, and prevent the growth of radicalism and extremism among children, thus forming a young generation that is tolerant, appreciates differences, and has noble character, which is a strong foundation for the progress of the nation. religious moderation in an elementary school environment that has religious diversity can make significant theoretical and practical contributions (Saefuddin et al., 2023).

On the other hand, there are still many people who do not understand the importance of religious moderation. With such a large and diverse population, this challenge is even more urgent. Increased education and socialization about the values of tolerance and religious moderation are needed, both in the school environment and in the general public. Through inclusive education and interfaith dialog, it is hoped that the younger generation can be equipped with a better understanding of the importance of peaceful coexistence and respect for differences. The challenges faced by Indonesia related to extremism and intolerance can be addressed through collaborative efforts to increase understanding and appreciation of religious moderation, so that Indonesia can continue to be an example of a country rich in diversity and tolerance.

Indonesia's ethnic, cultural and religious diversity is not only a distinguishing feature of the country, but also creates a great opportunity to build tolerance and mutual respect among religious communities. The primary school period is a vulnerable period for children, where they tend to engage in deviant behavior without realizing the risks, as they imitate negative behaviors that can radicalize them as adults (Ali Ahmad, 2023). Therefore, prevention needs to start at an early age through the internalization of character education. One of the best ways to empower religious moderation is through the learning process in education, and this can start from basic education (Muslih et al., 2024). Pendidikan Education in elementary schools is the most basic education that plays an important role as a place to teach values and form a quality person (Marmoah et al., 2021). The childhood period is in dire need of attention because it is more likely to experience increased conflict and personal crisis (Woo, 2013).

Natural and social science learning is one of the platforms to develop the character of religious moderation in students (Karimova et al., 2024). Multicultural education taught in social science subjects can teach children the principles of social justice for all people without prioritizing their identity background (Jayadi et al., 2022). Thus, it is expected that students can develop a moderate attitude, a sense of tolerance, and compassion for others.

The concept of religious moderation launched by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs aims to improve interfaith harmony in Indonesia. The Ministry of Religious Affairs defines religious moderation as a religious attitude that is balanced between practicing one's own religion (exclusive) and respecting the religious practices of others with different beliefs (inclusive). Religious moderation encourages balance and justice in religion, emphasizes openness, adaptation, and integration so that it can be in line with the principle of Unity in Diversity (Abidin & Fitriana, 2021; Hanafi et al., 2022). The concept of religious moderation has become an interesting topic in recent years. Research by Abidin et al. (2021) is the cultivation of religious moderation values in order to ward off radicalism. Furthermore, research by Hanafi et al. (2022) which investigates students' religious literacy principles as a process of constructing meaning about religious moderation from Qur'anic verses. The traditional game engklek which can facilitate understanding and application related to religious moderation in students. Therefore, the research to be conducted has the novelty of identifying the challenges and opportunities of religious moderation focused on basic education.

This research focuses on religious moderation through social science learning in elementary schools, both opportunities and challenges. A topic that is increasingly relevant given the increasing challenges and opportunities in the context of religious diversity in Indonesia. This research aims to identify the challenges and opportunities faced in the implementation of religious moderation through social science learning in elementary schools, focusing on how to create an inclusive and tolerant school environment, as well as developing effective strategies to build moderate, tolerant, and respectful student characters. This research is expected to make theoretical and practical contributions to improve the understanding and implementation of religious moderation in elementary schools, so as to create a young generation that is tolerant, respectful of differences, and has noble character.

Method

This research uses a qualitative approach based on a literature review. A literature review is a secondary study used to map, locate, critically evaluate, consolidate and combine the results of relevant primary studies (Kraus et al., 2022; Paliktzoglou & Vlachopoulou, 2025). Primary data sources included journal articles accessed through Scopus and Google Scholar databases, as well as official documents such as regulations issued by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Ministry of

Education, Culture, Research and Technology. Data analysis used an interactive qualitative data analysis model, which was conducted by identifying the concept, policy and implementation of religious moderation in natural and social science learning in primary schools.

Planning the Review

The first step in conducting a literature review is to plan the review process by refining the research objectives into more specific research questions. When conducting a literature review, it is important to create a planning stage that must be followed thoroughly. The aim is to reduce bias in the research and explain how the literature review is conducted as shown in Figure 1.

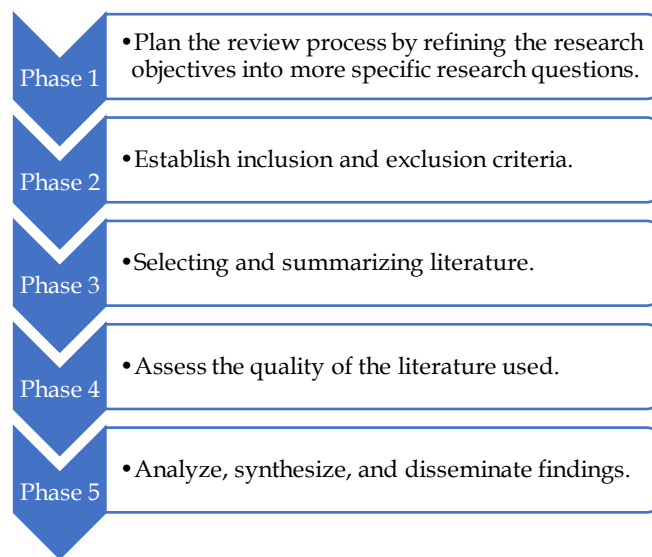


Figure 1. Flow of literature review research

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Table 1 shows the inclusion and exclusion criteria used to determine whether an article should be included in the systematic literature review.

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Relevant to the research question	Articles that do not investigate religious moderation and IPAS learning.
Peer-reviewed publications	Articles that do not have full text
Trusted referral	References that have no clear source

Result and Discussion

Based on a literature review that reveals that religious moderation is important for the nation's generation. This is in accordance with presidential regulation number 58 of 2023 concerning strengthening religious moderation. In addition, the Minister of

Religion's regulation on the procedures for coordinating, monitoring, evaluating and reporting on the implementation of strengthening religious moderation. Several key concepts related to strengthening religious moderation are defined in Article 1 of this Ministerial Regulation.

Religious perspectives, attitudes and practices that uphold the core of religious teachings and beliefs in daily life are known as religious moderation. This is done by upholding human dignity, fostering the public good, and operating under the principles of justice, equality, and loyalty to Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, which serve as the foundation of the state. The methodical effort to improve understanding and application of the principles of religious moderation is known as "Strengthening Religious Moderation," or PMB for short. In this context, local government refers to the head of the region who oversees the implementation of government affairs in accordance with the jurisdiction of the autonomous region. A coordination forum that includes ministries or agencies, the Joint Secretariat for Religious Moderation - hereafter referred to as the Joint Secretariat - supports the coordinated implementation of PMB. The ministry in question is the ministry in charge of religion and government affairs. The minister is the official responsible for overseeing and implementing the Ministry's religious policies. Based on data from the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the religious harmony index increases every year. This proves that religious moderation has received important attention from the government.

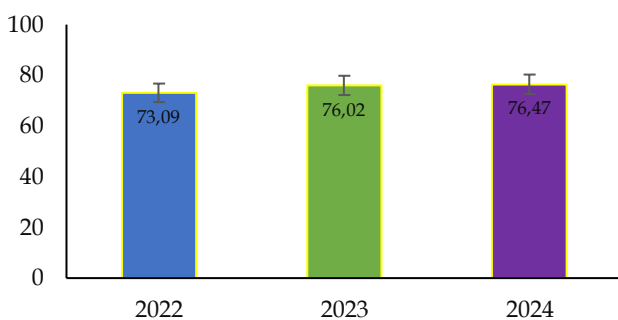


Figure 2. Index of religious harmony

It can be seen that there is an increase in religious harmony in Indonesia, 2022 amounting to 73.09, 2023 76.02, and 2024 76.47. The government's efforts to strengthen the character of religious moderation cannot be separated from education that is instilled from an early age. One of them is through learning natural science and social science in elementary schools, which has the potential to instill the character of the next generation to have an attitude of humanizing humans

with various backgrounds. Character strengthening at the basic education level is regulated learning must adjust to the objectives of Indonesian education in order to develop the character and competence of students referring to the profile of Pancasila students (Melindawati et al., 2024). Therefore, strengthening character to foster religious moderation in elementary schools has opportunities along with challenges.

Opportunities for Religious Moderation in Elementary Schools

Given that primary school is a critical period in the development of moral and social values, primary schools play an important role in promoting the moderate character of learners. This level of teaching religious moderation can be the foundation for a generation that is inclusive, accepting and able to appreciate differences. Often referred to as the "golden years", primary school is a pivotal time in a child's development, when the foundations of moral, social and emotional values are laid. As learners' brains are at the peak of development in terms of information processing, mentality formation and empathy development, children at this age usually have a great capacity to assimilate new values. In addition, since learners are at the perfect stage of cognitive and affective development to be introduced to principles such as tolerance, inclusiveness, and respect for differences, this period is crucial for teaching religious moderation. Children in primary school are at the concrete operational stage, as defined by Piaget (1973) where they begin to understand abstract ideas through direct experience and observation.

The early childhood education has a lasting effect on children's worldview, especially their understanding of cultural and religious diversity. At this age, quality education can help children develop a more accepting, respectful and non-violent worldview. Given the many religions, cultures and ethnic groups that make up Indonesian society, the principles of religious moderation are particularly relevant to teach in Indonesian primary schools. In addition to creating a tolerant society, fostering an attitude of religious moderation in elementary school learners also helps to create a peaceful society in the future. This is in line with the Pancasila Learner Profile, which highlights global diversity and gotong royong as important components of character education in Indonesia.

Several tactics intended to develop children's tolerance and respect for diversity can be used to strengthen religious moderation in primary schools. Incorporating moderation values in the curriculum is one tactical step. Natural and social sciences, religious education, and Pancasila education are some of the subjects that can be used to teach religious moderation.

Through stories, group discussions or projects that emphasize the value of cooperation and mutual respect, teachers can introduce these concepts. This helps learners apply the principles of moderation in their daily lives while improving their cognitive knowledge.

In addition, one of the best ways to instill the ideals of moderation is through experiential learning. Hands-on activities help children better understand abstract ideas such as inclusiveness and tolerance. Learners' understanding of the value of peaceful coexistence can be strengthened, for example, by interactive conversations, visits to other houses of worship, or simulations. The experiential learning facilitates deeper and more meaningful internalization of values for learners.

As role models, teachers are crucial in fostering the principles of religious moderation. According to research Bergamaschi et al. (2022) learners often emulate their professors' attitudes and actions, especially when it comes to accepting differences. Teachers can be strong role models for children by demonstrating an inclusive mindset and valuing diversity. As primary school students often look up to teachers as their primary role models in addition to their parents, this function becomes even more important. For religious moderation education to be successful, cooperation between communities, parents and schools is also essential. If the family and community context upholds the values taught at school, character education-including religious moderation-will be more successful. The community involvement in education can create a standardized learning environment that provides learners with a common understanding across different contexts. For example, cooperative initiatives such as interfaith meetings involving communities and parents can support tolerance lessons taught in schools.

Peaceful and inclusive societies can be enhanced by teaching the principles of religious moderation to primary school students during the golden age. The term "golden age" describes an important stage in children's development when they are most receptive to moral and social lessons. In this regard, religious moderation education seeks to develop a tolerant attitude as well as a solid foundation for recognizing and respecting a diversity of values, cultures and religions. Galtung (1985) asserts that early childhood education that emphasizes the development of the principles of tolerance can significantly reduce the likelihood of future religiously or culturally motivated conflict and violence. Children who receive this kind of education are better able to understand that diversity is an important aspect of life that needs to be valued and appreciated. Children who are taught the values of

religious moderation are usually better able to get along with others from different backgrounds.

Primary schools can strategically contribute to instilling the principles of religious moderation by capitalizing on the golden age. This can be achieved through a curriculum that incorporates ideas of justice and tolerance as well as through various educational activities such as debates, role plays and practical experiences. These methods foster attitudes that value diversity in addition to enhancing learners' cognitive understanding. The ultimate goal of promoting religious moderation in primary schools is to produce the next generation of the nation who can actively uphold social harmony and live in harmony with differences. This is relevant to current global issues, as identity-based disputes often turn into significant problems. Early childhood education has a significant impact in shaping children's mindset to be inclusive and respect universal human values. Promoting religious moderation in primary school-aged children through methodical and planned teaching is a long-term investment to create a peaceful and well-mannered future society.

Challenges of Religious Moderation in Elementary Schools

The challenges of religious moderation in Indonesia include various aspects, one of which is the spread of inaccurate information through social media. This inaccurate information often triggers conflict and strengthens polarization and intolerance between individuals and groups (Mubarok & Sunarto, 2024). Ideally, diversity should be the foundation for strengthening unity through tolerance (Mu'ti, 2019). However, the lack of multicultural understanding and awareness is a big homework for the wider community (Akhmadi, 2019). In this case, educational institutions, especially at the elementary school level, have an important role in instilling character as an effort to prevent interfaith conflict is vital.

The main challenge in fostering characters that support religious moderation in elementary schools is the lack of tolerance. Tolerance is an important skill that must be possessed by the younger generation to view diversity as something natural. People who have a high level of tolerance tend to have a better view of diversity without triggering conflicts of intolerance. However, currently tolerance is still a weak aspect in social life, especially in the religious context (Linda, 2021).

The Merdeka Curriculum currently implemented in elementary schools provides a great opportunity to instill Pancasila values in students' profiles, thus producing students who reflect Pancasila values-based behavior (Kahfi, 2022). However, the challenges faced are the low skills of teachers in managing diverse classes and the lack of ability to integrate multicultural values

in learning lessons (Hartono et al., 2024). Teachers have a strategic role as role models in instilling tolerance in students, through moral development and avoiding fanatical thinking in religion (Syauqi, 2022). The pedagogical ability of teachers to present contextual, interesting, and meaningful learning is also an important aspect in developing tolerance values.

In addition, multicultural understanding and awareness in elementary schools is an important challenge in religious moderation. The complexity of individual interactions in diverse socio-cultural contexts, psychological interventions both intra-personal and cross-cultural, and the development of assessments to measure multicultural understanding are the main obstacles (Happyanie & Wiryosutomo, 2020). So to avoid interfaith conflict, information literacy is also an aspect that must be emphasized in elementary schools. Literacy helps students recognize, understand, interpret, create and communicate information, which ultimately supports religious moderation for the next generation.

The challenges of religious moderation in Indonesia include aspects of tolerance, multicultural understanding, and weak information literacy. Educational institutions, especially elementary schools, play an important role in shaping a moderate generation through integrating the values of Pancasila, tolerance, and multiculturalism in learning. Teachers as role models and agents of change must improve their competence to create meaningful, contextual, and interesting learning, so that students can appreciate diversity and avoid religious fanaticism. Information literacy must also be strengthened to counteract unfavorable social media rhetoric, so that future generations can become wise agents of religious moderation.

Religious Moderation through IPAS Learning

The Merdeka curriculum combines natural science and social science lessons into one unit into IPAS, containing learning about science and society, including studies of landscapes, technology, environment, geography, history and multiculturalism (Suhelayanti et al., 2023). According to the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) Social Studies is the study of individuals, communities, systems and their interactions across time and place to prepare students to become citizens both at the local, national and global scope, so that the field integrates social sciences and humanities to understand various aspects of human life in society. There is an emphasis on individual participation and responsibility in the life of the nation (Cuenca et al., 2018).

IPAS is one of the subjects that teaches about multicultural education. IPAS (natural science and sisal) is a subject that has an important role in solving community problems such as religious moderation (Aulia & Wandini, 2023; Syafruddin et al., 2024). This aims to create harmony within the community (Nicosia, 2020). In addition, social science has the aim of building human resources who have a sense of pride in the country or nationalism and actively contribute to society through instilling the values of cooperation, dedication, and friendship, in this case closely related to tolerance (Nyamongo & Aagaard-Hanse, 2006).

The work of IPAS learning in fostering religious moderation through contextual learning by emphasizing tolerance in religion in every lesson. In elementary schools IPAS is taught in phase B and phase C which contains grades 3 to grade 6. The cultivation of religious tolerance is taught by the coverage of certain materials in each chapter in the IPAS book from grade 3 to grade 6. One of them is material that studies the diversity that exists in Indonesia such as traditions, religions, and so on. In addition, IPAS learning also discusses how to behave in the midst of diversity in Indonesia. Religion is a sensitive issue in Indonesia, there are often conflicts between religions that are feared to cause division. So it requires special attention from teachers so that IPAS learning becomes one of the alternatives to form a moderate generation in religion, especially in elementary schools (DeMink-Carthew et al., 2023).

Conclusion

This research reveals that religious moderation education in elementary schools is an important strategy in instilling values of tolerance, inclusiveness, and respect for diversity from an early age. The golden age of children in elementary school is a crucial moment to shape children's moderate character. One way to strengthen religious moderation is through natural and social science learning in elementary schools. Natural and social science learning in it teaches about multicultural education, so that it can form a moderate generation. However, there are challenges in strengthening religious moderation such as low tolerance, limited teacher competence in managing diversity, lack of information literacy, and the negative impact of spreading inaccurate information on social media. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen teachers' competencies, develop a curriculum that focuses more on moderation values, and collaborate between schools, families and communities to create a learning environment that supports religious moderation. For future research, it is expected to develop an innovative

religious moderation learning model and measure its impact on student behavior.

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The authors have no conflict of interest in writing this article.

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