



Internalizing the Value of Religious Moderation for Generation Z in Facing the Challenges of Plurality

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Abstract

Generation Z lives in a social space characterized by openness of information, cross-cultural interactions, and high intensity of digital media use. These conditions present both opportunities and challenges, especially in relation to their ability to respond to religious, cultural, and identity plurality. This study aims to analyze the process of internalizing religious moderation values among Generation Z and effective strategies that can be applied in the context of education, particularly Islamic Religious Education. The research method used is a descriptive qualitative approach through literature study and limited interviews with students to explore perceptions, attitudes, and practices of religious moderation. The results of the study indicate that the internalization of religious moderation values can be optimized through three aspects: strengthening digital religious literacy, collaborative learning that emphasizes dialogue across differences, and the exemplary role of educators in applying the principles of tawassuth, tasamuh, tawazun, and itidal. The conclusion of this study confirms that religious moderation is an important competency for Generation Z in building inclusive attitudes and adaptive abilities to face socio-religious diversity in the contemporary era.

Keywords: Generation Z, Plurality, Religious Moderation.

PRELIMINARY

The development of information technology in the 21st century has created a new social space that is very different from previous generations (Faiza & Wardhani, 2024). Generation Z, generally born between 1997 and 2012, is a digital native generation that grew up in a digital environment filled with rapid information flows, global interactions, and highly fluid social dynamics. Their lives are influenced by social media, global popular culture, artificial intelligence, and cross-identity communication that occurs almost without geographical or ideological boundaries. This reality creates significant opportunities for learning processes, the exchange of ideas, and cross-cultural collaboration. However, at the same time, these developments create new challenges in terms of religiosity, perspectives on differences, and the ability to respond to issues of plurality in a mature and proportional manner.

One of the main challenges that has emerged is increasing social polarization and fragmentation. Although Generation Z is known to be adaptive, open, and creative, they are also the group most vulnerable to exposure to extreme ideologies, religious disinformation, hate speech, and cancel culture in the digital space. This is because this generation has easy access to various religious views, both moderate

and radical. Various studies have shown that social media is a factor accelerating the spread of narratives of intolerance and radicalism, because platform algorithms tend to amplify provocative and emotional content (Hadisi et al., 2024; Nasar et al., 2025). In this context, Generation Z is often faced with the complexity of differences in religion, culture, and political views that are not accompanied by adequate critical thinking skills and religious literacy. As a result, the digital space, which should be a forum for dialogue, has instead become an arena for identity conflict.

This situation also influences the dynamics of religious diversity among adolescents and university students. The diversity that constitutes a national treasure becomes a challenge when it is not balanced with an awareness of the importance of harmonious coexistence. Cases of intolerance emerging in educational settings, identity-based discrimination, and the tendency to judge others in the name of religion demonstrate that developing inclusive religious attitudes still requires serious attention (Basri, 2023). This situation demands an educational approach that is not solely oriented toward cognitive aspects but also internalizes values that can shape moderate, empathetic, and wise characters in dealing with diversity.

Religious moderation emerges as a key concept relevant amid these challenges. Religious moderation emphasizes four main principles: *tawassuth* (the middle path), *tasamuh* (tolerance), *tawazun* (balance), and *i'tidal* (justice) (Sirojuddin & Hairunnisa, 2025). These four values are not only part of Islamic tradition but also universal principles that can strengthen social harmony in a pluralistic society. Religious moderation is important not because of external threats, but rather because of the internal need to create a calming and humanizing religious understanding, in line with the Islamic value of *rahmatan lil 'alamin*.

Generation Z faces the process of internalizing the values of religious moderation in a very different context than previous generations. Religious learning is no longer confined to the classroom but is acquired through various digital sources such as the internet, content creators, influencers, and online discussion forums. Therefore, the internalization process cannot be supported solely by conventional methods. A more adaptive, dialogical, and experience-oriented approach is needed to connect religious teachings with the realities of their daily lives. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in higher education plays a strategic role in this effort, not only as a conveyor of religious material but also as a shaper of students' character and religious attitudes, enabling them to respond to plurality with maturity and a sense of responsibility (Patih et al., 2023).

Various studies show that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning is still dominated by theoretical and textual teaching patterns (Candira et al., 2025). In many classrooms, space for critical discussion on socio-religious diversity is not adequately facilitated. Students generally receive material passively and do not have sufficient opportunities to develop a reflective awareness of the pluralistic realities they encounter in everyday life. Internalizing the value of moderation actually requires a more comprehensive process, including habituation, role modeling, and ongoing dialogue. The value of moderation cannot be understood simply at the conceptual level but needs to be internalized and realized through real experiences and direct practice in students' daily interactions.

Generation Z also has psychological characteristics that need to be considered. They are a highly visual generation, quickly absorbing information, but are prone to boredom when faced with non-interactive learning approaches (Laka et al., 2024). They also have high social sensitivity, so their responses to diversity issues are often influenced by their social media and peer groups. This is where the urgency of creative and interactive learning in instilling the value of religious moderation becomes crucial. Educators must be able to utilize technology, collaborative methods, and contextual approaches so that internalization of values does not feel forced, but rather grows as an inner need to maintain social harmony.

The role of role models from educators and the campus environment is also crucial. Students need role models who can demonstrate how the value of moderation is practiced in real life, how to be fair in judging differences of opinion, how to manage conflict in a non-destructive manner, and how to respect the diversity of religious traditions that exist in Indonesia. This role model is key because the internalization of values is shaped not only by what is taught, but also by what they see, feel, and experience in their social environment (Maulida & Ratnasari, 2024).

The study of the internalization of religious moderation values among Generation Z is highly relevant and urgent. Research on this topic not only contributes to the development of Islamic Religious Education but also provides insights into effective strategies for strengthening moderate character amidst the increasingly complex challenges of plurality. Furthermore, this research is expected to provide practical recommendations for educators, educational institutions, and policymakers in designing development programs capable of fostering a harmonious atmosphere of diversity on campus and in the wider community. Internalizing religious moderation values for Generation Z is not merely an educational endeavor, but a long-term social investment to maintain national integrity, strengthen national character, and shape a future generation capable of coexisting with differences in a peaceful, just, and humane manner.

METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach aimed at deeply understanding the internalization process of religious moderation values among Generation Z within the context of socio-religious plurality. This approach was chosen because it allows for a comprehensive exploration of students' meanings, experiences, and perceptions of religious moderation values.

Research Subjects and Locations

The research subjects were Generation Z students in the Islamic Religious Education Study Program and several other study programs aged 18–24. Informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, selecting students deemed to have experience, understanding, or involvement in religious activities on campus. The research location was within the UIN/IAIN/PTKI campus environment, specifically academic spaces that host Islamic Religious Education learning activities.

Data collection technique

The research data were collected through three main techniques, namely semi-structured interviews to explore students' perceptions of plurality, religious experiences, and the process of internalizing the values of *tawassuth*, *tasamuh*, *tawazun*, and *i'tidal*; non-participant observation of Islamic Religious Education learning activities, group discussions, and various student religious activities to see how the practice of religious moderation is present in real situations; and documentation studies that include analysis of the Islamic Religious Education curriculum, teaching materials, religious moderation modules, and campus policies related to student development.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldana model, which includes three main stages: data reduction by sorting and organizing important information from interviews, observations, and documentation; data display by arranging the reduced data in narrative, matrix, or thematic categories to facilitate interpretation; and conclusion drawing/verification by formulating findings regarding the internalization patterns of religious moderation values in Generation Z along with the supporting and inhibiting factors that influence them.

Data Validity (Trustworthiness)

The research employed source and method triangulation techniques, member checking with several informants, and peer debriefing (Assingkiy, 2021). These techniques helped verify data consistency and minimize subjectivity in interpretation.

Research Ethics

The entire research process was conducted with ethical principles in mind: informant consent, confidentiality of identity, and use of data for academic purposes only. Researchers ensured that participants participated voluntarily and understood the research objectives.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The research results indicate that the internalization of religious moderation values among Generation Z occurs through complex mechanisms, influenced by the dynamics of the digital space, social

interactions on campus, and the pedagogical approaches applied in Islamic Religious Education learning. The research's main findings can be explained through the following broad themes:

Generation Z's Perceptions of Religious Plurality and Moderation

The majority of informants interpreted plurality as an unavoidable social reality and a key characteristic of Indonesian society. Diversity of religions, cultures, and identities was understood as normal and even part of everyday interactions on campus. These experiences fostered an awareness that coexisting with differences is an inherent condition of student social spaces.

This understanding has not been fully accompanied by a reflective ability to respond to existing differences. Interview results indicate that some students still view plurality as merely basic knowledge, namely knowing that differences exist, but are unable to connect it to the principles of religious moderation such as *tawassuth* (middle stance), *tasamuh* (tolerance), *tawazun* (balance), and *i'tidal* (justice). This condition emphasizes the gap between cognitive awareness of diversity and the ability to operationalize reflective values in attitudes and actions.

Students simultaneously demonstrated high enthusiasm for the concept of religious moderation. Moderation is not understood as a reduction in religious identity, but rather as a more mature and thoughtful approach to establishing social relationships with those with differing views. This positive attitude demonstrates that conceptually, the younger generation is ready to become a moderate and inclusive group.

The process of internalizing the value of moderation into concrete actions still requires reinforcement, even though basic attitudes and theoretical understanding have been established. This reinforcement can be achieved through habituation, role modeling, dialogic experiences, and a supportive learning environment (Dabutar et al., 2025). Thus, religious moderation has the potential to extend beyond ideas and develop into daily practices that reflect religious maturity.

The Influence of Digital Media in Shaping Religious Attitudes

Digital space is a dominant factor in shaping the religious views of Generation Z (Jannah & Nurmila, 2025). Informants stated that they learn about religion more often from social media, podcasts, short videos, and religious influencers than from formal studies.

The research findings show two important tendencies: first, positive impacts, including; (1) Digital space expands access to religious information. (2) Students can participate in various discussions across schools of thought and schools of thought. (3) They are exposed to peaceful narratives introduced by various organizations and moderate figures. Second, negative impacts, including (1) Students are vulnerable to being trapped by provocative religious content. (2) Social media algorithms reinforce intolerant narratives that cause polarization. (3) Several informants admitted to having been confused or doubtful due to the differences of opinion of extreme religious influencers. (4) Immature religious digital literacy skills cause students to have difficulty distinguishing which religious teachings are principles, which are *ijthadi*, and which are ideological biases. These findings reinforce the urgency of internalizing the value of moderation through formal education that is able to keep pace with the rapid flow of digital information.

The Practice of Internalizing the Values of Religious Moderation in the Campus Environment

1. Islamic Education Learning

Based on observations of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) classes, it appears that the process of internalizing the value of moderation is more effective when lecturers use group discussions, case studies on intolerance, simulations of interfaith dialogue, and reflective approaches to social phenomena. Students demonstrate increased critical awareness when given the space to express opinions, question assumptions, and reexamine their religious views through dialogue.

2. Exemplary Lecturers

Many informants stated that the lecturer's attitude significantly influenced their assessment of moderation. Lecturers who were open to differing opinions, non-judgmental, and able to present balanced arguments were seen as true role models of the values of *tawazun* and *i'tidal* (Masturaini, 2021). When lecturers unwittingly displayed exclusive tendencies, students became uncertain about the

meaning of religious moderation. This finding confirms that role models play a powerful role in internalizing the value of moderation in the learning process.

3. Student activities

Intra-campus organizations and religious activities also play a role. Several student communities actively engage in interfaith dialogue, public discussions on diversity issues, and cross-community service activities. These activities create a real-world experience for students to practice the value of moderation.

Supporting Factors for Internalization of Religious Moderation Values

There are eight supporting factors, namely: (1) Wider and more varied access to religious information, (2) Generation Z tends to be more open to new ideas that support diversity, (3) Multicultural interactions on campus, (4) Cross-cultural interactions make students accustomed to accepting differences, (5) The Islamic Religious Education curriculum is starting to integrate religious moderation, (6) Changes in the curriculum towards dialogic learning accelerate the internalization of values, (7) Campus policies that encourage religious harmony, and (8) The existence of mandatory activities such as public lectures on religious moderation helps strengthen insight.

Factors Inhibiting the Internalization of Religious Moderation

In addition to supporting factors, there are also eight aspects of inhibiting factors, namely: (1) Massive exposure to intolerant digital content, (2) Some students are easily influenced due to a lack of critical literacy skills, (3) Lack of in-depth understanding of the principles of moderation, (4) Many students consider moderation to be limited to "being neutral" or "not extreme", without understanding its theological basis, (5) Variations in the quality of Islamic Religious Education learning, (6) Not all lecturers use an interactive approach; some still teach textually so that students are less emotionally involved, (7) The influence of the social environment that strengthens polarization, and (8) National socio-political changes also influence the way students view differences.

Internalization Patterns of Religious Moderation Values in Generation Z

Based on data analysis, the internalization of moderation values occurs through three layers: first, cognitive. Students understand the concepts of moderation, plurality, and the basic humanist values of Islam. This process occurs through formal learning and digital content. Second, affective. Students develop empathy, tolerance, and sensitivity to differences after engaging in classroom dialogue and social experiences on campus. Third, practical. Moderation values are practiced through the ability to manage differences of opinion, use polite language in digital spaces, and participate in cross-community activities. This three-layered pattern emphasizes that the internalization of moderation values does not occur instantly, but requires a combination of knowledge, experience, and social habituation.

CONCLUSION

This research shows that the internalization of religious moderation values among Generation Z is a multidimensional process and is heavily influenced by the dynamics of the digital space, the campus social environment, and the pedagogical approach to Islamic Religious Education. Generation Z inherently has a high acceptance of plurality and demonstrates a readiness to adopt moderate attitudes, but their understanding still requires strengthening in the reflective and applicative aspects so that the values of moderation are truly realized in everyday behavior.

The digital space is a dominant factor in shaping students' religious perspectives. Widespread access to information provides opportunities for the development of inclusive religious literacy, but also poses the risk of spreading intolerant narratives that can undermine moderate attitudes. This situation emphasizes the importance of critical and focused digital religious literacy. Meanwhile, dialogic, experience-based Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning, complemented by lecturers' role models, has proven to be an effective means of strengthening the internalization of the values of *tawassuth* (religious tolerance), *tasamuh* (compassion), *tawazun* (religious tolerance), and *i'tidal* (religious tolerance).

A multicultural campus environment also plays a crucial role in providing students with a practical space to develop moderate attitudes through cross-identity interactions and student activities. However, several inhibiting factors, such as exposure to extreme digital content, shallow conceptual understanding, and variations in the quality of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) instruction, require attention in efforts to strengthen the internalization of the value of moderation.

Overall, internalizing the value of religious moderation among Generation Z requires a holistic approach that integrates knowledge, social conditioning, reflective experience, digital technology, and the role models of educators. This effort not only serves to shape students' religious character but also serves as a strategic step in maintaining social harmony and strengthening national cohesion amidst the increasingly complex challenges of pluralism.

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