



The Role of Islamic Religious Education Teachers as Agents of Religious Moderation in Schools

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Abstract

Religious moderation is a strategic approach to building a tolerant, inclusive, and harmonious school environment amidst the diversity of religions, cultures, and social backgrounds of students. Schools not only function as spaces for transferring knowledge but also as important environments for shaping students' religious attitudes that are balanced, open, and respectful of differences. In this context, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers hold a strategic position as educators and agents who internalize the values of religious moderation through the learning process and school life. This study aims to analyze the role of PAI teachers as agents of religious moderation in schools and identify strategies used to instill the values of tolerance, justice, balance, respect for differences, and anti-violence attitudes in students. This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observations of the learning process and school activities, and documentation related to the implementation of religious moderation. Data were analyzed thematically through the stages of data condensation, theme grouping, data presentation, interpretation, and conclusion drawing. The results of the study indicate that Islamic Religious Education teachers act as value educators, role models for religious diversity, dialogue facilitators, mediators in dealing with differences, and drivers of an inclusive school culture. The implications of the study indicate that strengthening the capacity of Islamic Religious Education teachers, integrating the value of moderation into learning, and collaboration between schools, families, and the community are necessary to build an educational ecosystem capable of preventing intolerance and strengthening a peaceful and inclusive religious life.

INTRODUCTION

Diversity in religion, culture, ethnicity, and social background is an important characteristic of Indonesian society, and is also reflected in the educational environment. Schools serve as a meeting place for students with diverse identities, perspectives, and social experiences. This situation provides a significant opportunity

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for education to build mutual respect, tolerance, and a harmonious social life (Harianto & Abdurrahman, 2025). However, diversity can also be a challenge when students lack an adequate understanding of how to address differences. Differences in beliefs, religious practices, social perspectives, and cultural identities can develop into prejudice, exclusivism, discrimination, and even intolerance if not managed through appropriate educational processes (Alhafiz & Setiawan, 2025; Ningsih et al., 2025). Therefore, schools have a strategic responsibility to build an educational environment that fosters open, balanced religious attitudes and respect for the existence of other groups.

In this context, religious moderation is an important approach in developing religious perspectives and attitudes that avoid extremism and place respect for differences as part of communal life. Religious moderation is not intended to diminish one's faith in their religion, but rather to encourage a just, balanced, and tolerant understanding and practice of religion, as well as the ability to coexist with diverse groups (Abas et al., 2025; Sudirman & Amaluddin, 2025). The school environment is a strategic space for internalizing these values because the educational process takes place through learning, social interaction, habituation, role models, and institutional culture. Therefore, religious moderation needs to be understood not only as learning material, but as a value embodied in everyday school behavior and culture.

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers hold a very strategic position in this process. PAI teachers are not only tasked with imparting Islamic knowledge but also with the responsibility of shaping students' attitudes, character, and religious behavior. PAI materials offer ample scope for developing the values of tolerance, justice, balance, brotherhood, respect for differences, and rejection of violence. However, the success of internalizing the value of religious moderation is not solely determined by the material contained in the curriculum (Walad et al., 2024; Erfandi et al., 2025). The teacher's approach to delivering material, establishing communication with students, responding to differences of opinion, providing role models, and creating a dialogical learning environment also determine how students understand and practice these values. PAI teachers thus function not only as *knowledge transmitter*, but also as *role model*, dialogue facilitator, moral guide, and agent of change in building a moderate religious culture (Arifin & Huda, 2024).

The role of teachers as agents of religious moderation is becoming increasingly important as students live in a highly open information environment. The development of digital technology allows students to obtain a variety of religious information from social media, video platforms, online forums, and various other digital sources. This situation provides opportunities for students to broaden their religious horizons, but also presents the risk of exposure to religious information that is out of context, provocative, exclusive, or even contains narratives of hatred against other groups (Tobondo, 2025). In this situation, Islamic Religious Education teachers need to possess digital literacy and pedagogical skills to help students verify information, understand diverse interpretations, distinguish differences of opinion from intolerance, and develop critical thinking skills in responding to religious discourse in the digital space. Thus, the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers as agents of moderation is no longer limited to the classroom but also includes assisting students in navigating the dynamics of religious diversity in the digital environment (Sejati, 2023; Annisa et al., 2026).

Numerous studies on religious moderation in education demonstrate that religious learning has significant potential for building tolerance and inclusive religious attitudes. However, some studies still tend to position religious moderation as educational material or policy without deeply examining how teachers translate the concept into daily learning practices and interactions in schools (Fathoni, 2025).

Studies that position Islamic Religious Education teachers as active agents connecting religious learning, role models, habituation, diversity dialogue, and school culture also need to be strengthened. Yet, the success of religious moderation is greatly influenced by teachers' ability to transform normative values into concrete educational experiences that are relevant to students' lives.

This gap suggests that studies on religious moderation need to shift from a teaching-oriented approach to a greater focus on how these values are internalized and practiced in school life. From this perspective, Islamic Religious Education teachers are positioned as agents of moderation, performing multidimensional functions through teaching, role modeling, character development, facilitating dialogue, managing differences, and strengthening school culture (Irwansyah et al., 2024; Azizah et al., 2025). This approach allows religious moderation to extend beyond conceptual understanding to encompass students' attitudes and behaviors in addressing diversity. The novelty of this research lies in its integrative approach to examining the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers as bridges between the values of religious moderation in learning and the formation of a tolerant, inclusive, and non-violent school culture (Maulana & Wahyudi, 2024).

Based on these problems, this study aims to analyze the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers as agents of religious moderation in schools and identify strategies used in internalizing the values of tolerance, justice, balance, respect for differences, and anti-violence attitudes to students. This study is expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of Islamic education and religious moderation studies, particularly regarding the position of teachers as key actors in the process of internalizing values. Practically, this study is expected to serve as a reference for Islamic Religious Education teachers, schools, and educational policymakers in developing learning and school culture that can strengthen religious moderation and build a generation that has a religious commitment and is able to live peacefully in a pluralistic society.

METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to analyze the role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers as agents of religious moderation in schools. The qualitative approach was chosen because the research focuses on an in-depth understanding of the experiences, practices, strategies, and meanings teachers construct in internalizing the values of religious moderation to students. Research informants were selected purposively based on their direct involvement in PAI learning and religious moderation strengthening programs in schools. The primary informants were PAI teachers, while principals, other subject teachers, and students could be involved as supporting informants to gain a more comprehensive perspective on the practice of religious moderation in the school environment. Research data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observation, and documentation. Interviews were conducted to explore teachers' understanding of religious moderation, learning strategies, exemplary practices, managing differences, strengthening tolerance, and the challenges faced in internalizing the values of moderation to students (Engkizar et al., 2024; Asril et al., 2026; Hamid et al., 2026; Busmayaril et al., 2026; Mutathahirin et al., 2026). Observations were made of the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning process, teacher-student interactions, religious activities, and school activities related to the formation of tolerant and inclusive attitudes. Documentation was used to strengthen the data through analysis of learning tools, school programs, teaching materials, regulations, and relevant activity documents. Data were analyzed thematically through the stages of data condensation, coding, grouping themes, data presentation, interpretation, and drawing conclusions with a focus on the role patterns of Islamic

Religious Education (PAI) teachers as value educators, role models, dialogue facilitators, mediators of differences, and drivers of school culture. Data validity was ensured through triangulation of sources and techniques by comparing information from Islamic Religious Education teachers, principals, teachers, students, observation results, and documentation. Member checking was conducted by confirming important findings or interpretations with informants to ensure the alignment between the research data and the experiences conveyed. Analysis was conducted reflectively and continuously to minimize researcher bias and ensure the relationship between empirical data and research interpretations. The entire research process adhered to ethical principles, including informant consent, confidentiality of identity, protection of student data, and use of information for academic purposes only (Bian et al., 2026; Langputeh et al., 2026; Salamah et al., 2026; Mutathahirin et al., 2026). With these procedures, the research is expected to produce credible and contextual findings regarding the contribution of Islamic Religious Education teachers in building religious moderation through learning, role models, habituation, diversity dialogue, and strengthening school culture.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

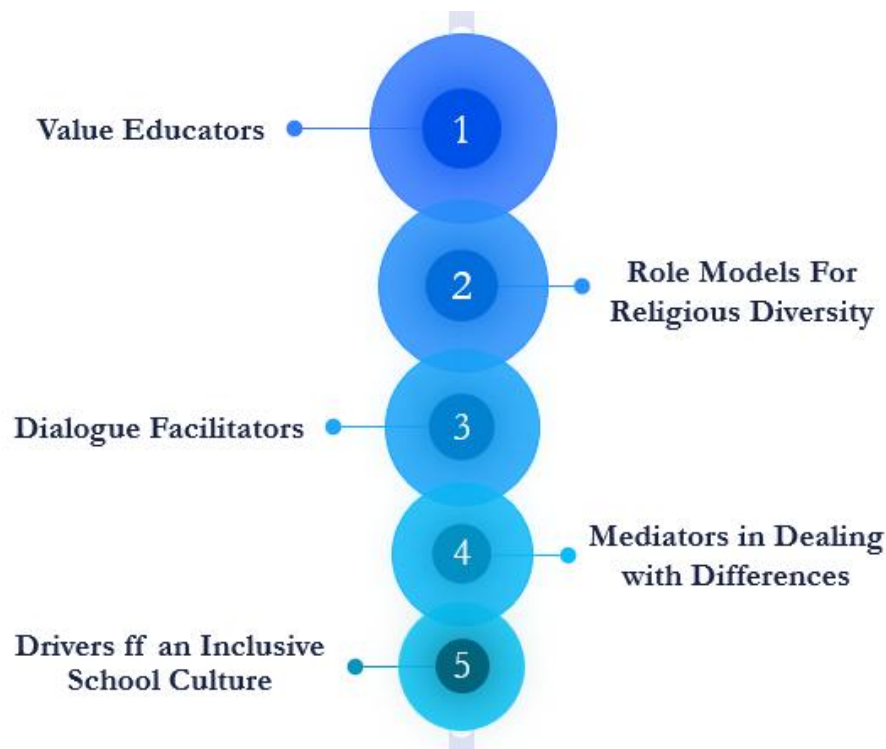


Fig 1. The Five Roles of Islamic Religious Education Teachers as Agents of Religious Moderation in Schools

Islamic Religious Education Teachers as Educators of the Values of Religious Moderation

The research findings indicate that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers play a fundamental role as value educators in the internalization of religious moderation in schools. This role extends beyond delivering Islamic material to transforming religious values into attitudes and behaviors that students can apply in their daily lives. The values of religious moderation developed include tolerance, justice, balance, a middle stance, respect for differences, brotherhood, and a rejection of violence and discrimination (Awalita, 2024; Khusniyah et al., 2025). PAI teachers integrate these values into learning materials, discussions, case studies, reflections,

and real-life examples so that students not only understand moderation as a concept but also see its relevance in social life. These findings demonstrate that PAI learning plays a strategic role in developing a non-exclusive understanding of religion and remains oriented toward a harmonious life together (Lie, 2024).

The process of values education is carried out through a contextual and dialogical learning approach. Teachers connect Islamic material with issues faced by students in social life, such as differences of opinion, diversity of religious practices, interpersonal relationships, tolerance, social conflict, and the use of digital media. Students are given the opportunity to express opinions, ask questions, and analyze issues from various perspectives (Patih et al., 2023; Dabutar et al., 2025;). In this process, teachers do not simply provide normative answers, but guide students to understand the reasons, context, and consequences of an attitude. This approach is important because internalizing the value of religious moderation requires a process of thinking and reflection, not just receiving information. Students gradually learn that differences are part of the reality of life and must be faced with a proportional, critical, and responsible attitude (Mulyana, 2023).

The research also shows that religious moderation education is closely related to how teachers build students' understanding of the relationship between religious commitment and respect for others. Islamic Religious Education teachers provide an understanding that being religious does not equate to being exclusive or rejecting the existence of different groups (Andika et al., 2026). Instead, religious belief can be the foundation for developing attitudes of compassion, justice, care, and respect for human dignity. This perspective is important to prevent the emergence of religious understandings that view differences as threats. By instilling a balanced understanding, teachers help students build a strong religious identity while fostering social openness to diversity.

Values education is also carried out by accustoming students to applying the principle of moderation in daily interactions. Teachers encourage students to use polite language, respect the opinions of their peers, refrain from discrimination, help friends in difficulty, and resolve conflicts without violence. This habituation is important because the value of moderation will not achieve its goal if it stops at the level of knowledge (Afifatun et al., 2026). Values must be given space to be practiced so they develop into attitudes and character. In this context, Islamic Religious Education teachers act as a liaison between the cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of religious education. Students not only learn what tolerance means, but also learn to feel the importance of respecting others and practicing it in social relationships (Hadinata et al., 2025).

The role of teachers as values educators is also increasingly complex in facing the development of students' digital environments. Religious information obtained through social media and various digital platforms can present diverse perspectives, including provocative, exclusive, or intolerant content (Wazdy, 2024). Islamic Religious Education teachers need to equip students with the ability to read and critically evaluate religious information. Students are guided to consider the source of information, the context of a statement, and the social impact of the information they receive and disseminate. Moderation education in the digital context also includes the development of communication ethics, such as avoiding insults against other groups, not spreading hate speech, respecting differences of opinion, and not being easily provoked by content that challenges religious identity (Hidayat & Parhan, 2025; Putri, 2025). Thus, education in religious moderation values is evolving from the classroom into the digital space, becoming an essential part of students' lives.

Thus, Islamic Religious Education teachers, as educators of the value of religious moderation, hold a strategic position in shaping students who are committed to religious values and capable of living peacefully in a pluralistic society. This role takes place through three main processes: value transformation through learning, internalization through habituation, and actualization through social practice. These three processes demonstrate that religious moderation is not merely material that students need to know, but rather a value that must be understood, internalized, and embodied in behavior. These findings strengthen the position of Islamic Religious Education teachers as key actors in building a foundation of tolerant, just, balanced, and inclusive religious diversity in the school environment.

Islamic Education Teachers as Role Models of Religiousness

Research results show that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers not only act as value educators but also as religious role models who serve as behavioral references for students in understanding and practicing religious moderation. Teachers' exemplary behavior is seen through the consistency between the values conveyed in learning and the attitudes and behaviors displayed in school life (Sebastian & Alkaff, 2024). Teachers demonstrate politeness in communication, fairness in treating students, openness to differences of opinion, and avoid actions that could lead to discrimination or conflict. These conditions provide concrete experiences for students that religious moderation is not merely a concept learned through books or learning materials, but a value that can be realized in everyday behavior (Mala & Hunaida, 2023; Yata, 2026). Thus, the teacher's position as a role model has pedagogical power because students obtain a real-life model of balanced and inclusive religious practice.

A teacher's exemplary behavior is particularly evident in how they handle differences among students. In both the learning process and informal interactions, teachers provide space for students to express their views without fear of negative judgment. Differences of opinion are directed to be part of the learning process and are not immediately positioned as errors or deviations (Warsah & Istan, 2025). Teachers strive to distinguish between differences of understanding that can still be discussed and attitudes that lead to insults, discrimination, or violence. This approach provides students with social learning that maintaining one's beliefs does not have to be done by demeaning others' views. Teachers' attitudes in dealing with differences ultimately serve as examples of how the principle of *tolerance*, justice, and balance can be applied in real life.

Role modelling is also demonstrated through teachers' ability to manage emotions and conflict constructively. When confronted with student behavior that does not comply with regulations, teachers do not use a shaming or demeaning approach, but rather provide proportionate reprimands and explain the consequences of such actions. Teachers strive to maintain calm communication and guide students to understand and correct their mistakes (Shawmi et al., 2025). This practice conveys an important message that authority does not have to be exercised through violence or intimidation. Instead, authority can be built through fairness, consistency, communication, and respect for students' dignity. From the perspective of religious moderation, this interaction pattern reflects the application of the principle of balance between firmness in upholding values and respect for individuals.

Research also shows that teachers' religious role models are not only related to the teacher-student relationship, but also to how teachers build relationships with fellow educators and the school community. Teachers who demonstrate mutual respect, cooperation, assistance to colleagues, and acceptance of differing perspectives provide a broader social model for students (Mahrus & Afandi, 2024).

This is important because religious moderation education occurs throughout the school ecosystem. Students can observe how teachers collaborate, resolve differences, and treat others in various situations. Therefore, teacher role models are part of the *hidden curriculum* which indirectly forms the religious attitudes and social character of students.

In the context of technological development, religious role models also need to be extended to the digital space. Islamic Religious Education teachers are required to demonstrate digital communication ethics that reflect the value of moderation, such as using polite language, not spreading unverified information, respecting differing views, and avoiding content containing insults or hate speech (Misa et al., 2025; Husnah et al., 2025). Teachers' behavior in using digital media can serve as models for students in building a healthy communication culture. When teachers teach the importance of respecting differences but simultaneously display aggressive or discriminatory digital communication, there is a mismatch between educational messages and practice. Therefore, consistent role models between physical and digital spaces are an essential part of religious moderation education in the contemporary era.

Based on these findings, Islamic Religious Education teachers, as role models for religiousness, play a crucial role in bridging the gap between knowledge and practice of religious moderation. Role models transform abstract values into behaviors that can be observed, experienced, and imitated by students. Teachers' consistency in demonstrating fairness, courtesy, openness, tolerance, and non-violence strengthens the internalization of values previously acquired through learning. Thus, the effectiveness of religious moderation education is determined not only by the quality of the material and learning methods, but also by the personal qualities and religious practices of teachers as figures who interact directly with students. Ultimately, Islamic Religious Education teachers not only teach religious moderation but also demonstrate how it is practiced in everyday life.

Islamic Education Teachers as Facilitators of Diversity Dialogue

Research results show that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers act as facilitators of diversity dialogue by creating an open, safe, and constructive learning space for students to express questions, views, and experiences related to religious issues. This role is crucial because diversity in schools is not only related to differences in social and cultural backgrounds, but also includes differences in religious understanding, experience, and practice (Syahrini & Jannah, 2025). PAI teachers do not view differences as something to be eliminated, but as a reality that needs to be understood and managed wisely. Through dialogue, students are encouraged to listen to others' views, present arguments politely, and understand that an issue can be viewed from different perspectives. Thus, dialogue becomes a pedagogical tool for developing an open attitude without eliminating students' religious identities and beliefs (Mutathahirin et al., 2026).

Dialogue is facilitated through learning methods that provide opportunities for students to actively participate in the exchange of ideas. Teachers use group discussions, Q&A sessions, case studies, reflections, and discussions of current issues as spaces to develop dialogic skills (Hamid et al., 2026). Throughout this process, teachers play a key role in maintaining the direction of the conversation, ensuring it remains grounded in argumentation, knowledge, and ethical communication. Students are encouraged not to use differences as a basis for attacking individuals or groups. Instead, they are trained to distinguish between criticizing an idea and rejecting the individual who holds it. This practice gradually builds students' ability to engage in rational and civilized dialogue when confronted with differences.

The research also shows that Islamic Religious Education teachers strive to strike a balance between freedom of expression and responsibility in exercising that freedom. Students are given space to raise critical questions about religious issues, including issues that may have diverse interpretations. However, this freedom remains guided by the principle of respect for religious values, human dignity, and the rights of others. Teachers help students understand that not all differences need to result in agreement, but rather that any differences can be managed through polite communication. This approach reinforces the understanding that religious moderation does not mean eliminating differences, but rather building the ability to live peacefully amidst them (Busmayaril et al., 2026).

Facilitating dialogue also serves as a means of developing students' critical thinking skills in dealing with religious information. Today's students have extensive access to various sources of information through the internet and social media. Not all of this information has reliable context, sources, and arguments. In these situations, Islamic Religious Education teachers play a role in helping students critically evaluate information by considering its source, context, purpose, and impact. Teachers can guide students in comparing several views, identifying the arguments used, and avoiding hasty conclusions (Salamah et al., 2026). These skills are crucial to prevent students from becoming trapped in narrow, exclusive, or judgmental understandings of religion.

In practice, diversity dialogue also serves as a space for building empathy. When students listen to the experiences or perspectives of others, they gain the opportunity to understand perspectives they may have previously been unfamiliar with. Teachers can guide this process by asking reflective questions about how someone feels when their beliefs or identity are belittled, how differences should be addressed, and what actions can be taken to maintain social relationships (Bian et al., 2026). This process transforms dialogue into more than just an exchange of opinions, but an educational experience that fosters the ability to understand others. This empathy is an important foundation for fostering tolerance and preventing discriminatory behavior in the school environment.

However, the success of diversity dialogue depends heavily on the teacher's pedagogical and social competencies. Teachers need to be able to manage discussions, understand the sensitivity of religious issues, foster a safe atmosphere, and respond appropriately to controversial statements (Asril et al., 2026). Teachers also need to avoid dominating the dialogue process, as religious moderation cannot thrive in a completely one-way learning environment. In this regard, teachers act as both guides and facilitators, providing structure for the dialogue without stifling students' thinking. This approach transforms the classroom into a space for practicing social democracy and religious diversity, enabling students to express their opinions while respecting the right of others to differ.

Thus, Islamic Religious Education teachers, as facilitators of diversity dialogue, play a strategic role in transforming differences from potential conflicts into sources of social learning. Through open, focused, critical, and ethical dialogue, students not only gain knowledge about religious moderation but also experience firsthand how differences can be managed through communication and respect. This role strengthens the Islamic Religious Education teachers' position as agents of moderation, connecting religious learning with the ability to live together in a pluralistic society. Diversity dialogue ultimately becomes a space for building tolerance, critical thinking, empathy, respect for differences, and the ability to resolve differences peacefully, which are essential foundations for the formation of an inclusive school culture.

Islamic Religious Education Teachers as Mediators in Dealing with Differences

The research findings indicate that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers play a strategic role as mediators in addressing various forms of differences that arise in the school environment. These differences can include differences in opinion, religious understanding, social and cultural background, character, or how students respond to issues. In a pluralistic educational context, differences are an unavoidable part of students' social interactions (Langputeh et al., 2026). Therefore, the presence of teachers as mediators is necessary to prevent differences from developing into prejudice, discrimination, conflict, or intolerant actions. PAI teachers strive to place each party proportionally by providing opportunities to explain issues from their respective perspectives. This process demonstrates that religious moderation is not only related to the ability to accept differences, but also the ability to manage them fairly and constructively.

The mediation role is carried out through a dialogical approach that allows parties experiencing differences to express their views openly. When a conflict arises between students, the teacher does not immediately make a judgment based on one-sided information, but instead attempts to identify the root of the problem, listen to each party's explanation, and understand the context behind the conflict. The teacher then helps students identify the problem points that can be resolved together. This approach provides students with the opportunity to learn that conflict resolution requires the ability to listen, control emotions, understand others' perspectives, and find solutions that are not detrimental to any party (Mala & Hunaid, 2023). Thus, the mediation process becomes part of social learning that directly develops skills for living together in diversity.

In carrying out their mediation function, Islamic Religious Education teachers also prioritize the principle of justice as the basis for decision-making. They strive to avoid treatment based on personal closeness, family background, academic ability, or social identity. Each party is given an equal opportunity to express their opinion and receive dignified treatment. This attitude is important because students learn about justice not only through the concepts contained in Islamic Religious Education materials, but also through direct experience when facing problems (Warsah & Islatan, 2025). When teachers demonstrate that every individual has the right to be heard and respected, students gain a concrete model for applying these values. *'adl* in school life. This principle also strengthens students' trust in teachers as figures capable of handling differences objectively.

The research also shows that Islamic Religious Education teachers do not view every difference as a conflict. Teachers help students understand that differences are natural and productive, especially in terms of opinions, perspectives, and experiences. Differences become problematic when accompanied by condescension, coercion, discrimination, or violence. This distinction is important in religious moderation education because students need to be able to determine the boundary between acceptable differences and behavior that threatens the rights and dignity of others. Teachers play a role in helping students develop proportionate judgment so they are not easily labeled negatively against someone simply because they have different views or practices (Shawmi et al., 2025).

Teacher mediation is also related to the development of empathy and reconciliation skills. After a conflict occurs, students are not only guided to end the argument but also to understand the impact of their behavior on the other party. Teachers can encourage students to reflect on the causes of the conflict, each party's feelings, and possible corrective actions (Khadayi et al., 2025). In certain situations,

this process can continue with an apology, mutual agreement, or other forms of accountability. This approach makes conflict resolution a character-building process. Students learn that admitting mistakes is not a sign of weakness, but rather part of moral responsibility. They also learn that social relationships can be improved through communication, empathy, and a willingness to correct actions (Maulana & Wahyudi, 2024).

Research findings indicate that a teacher's success as a mediator is significantly influenced by their ability to build trust with students. Students tend to be more open about their concerns when they perceive that the teacher is non-judgmental and able to maintain the confidentiality of sensitive information. Therefore, teachers need to foster open communication, demonstrate empathy, and maintain professionalism in handling conflicts (Irwansyah et al., 2024). This trust allows teachers to obtain more comprehensive information, allowing for a more objective understanding of the mediation process. At the same time, teachers must continue to collaborate with homeroom teachers, counselors, school leaders, and other relevant parties when the conflict is complex and requires further management.

Overall, the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers as mediators demonstrates that religious moderation has a very strong practical dimension in school life. Teachers not only teach tolerance and justice as concepts, but also practice them when helping students navigate differences and conflicts. Through listening, clarification, dialogue, providing fair opportunities, fostering empathy, and seeking shared solutions, teachers help students develop the ability to resolve differences without violence. Thus, Islamic Religious Education teachers serve as bridges between differences and harmony, while also transforming conflict into learning experiences that foster attitudes of tolerance, justice, responsibility, and inclusiveness in school life.

Islamic Religious Education Teachers as Drivers of an Inclusive School Culture

Research findings indicate that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers play a strategic role as drivers of an inclusive school culture through the process of habituation, value reinforcement, role modeling, and involvement in various school activities. This role demonstrates that religious moderation is not simply a classroom learning topic but needs to be presented as a value that colors all interactions and school life. PAI teachers strive to build an environment that provides space for students to interact equally, respect differences, collaborate, and avoid discriminatory behavior (Annisa et al., 2026). In this context, school culture becomes a crucial space for transforming the value of religious moderation from knowledge into habits that are manifested in daily behavior.

The promotion of an inclusive culture is carried out through various forms of simple but consistent habituation. Teachers encourage students to use polite language, respect the opinions of their peers, help students experiencing difficulties, cooperate in group activities, and resolve differences peacefully. These habits are part of the character education process because students gain direct experience in applying the values of tolerance, caring, justice, and respect for others. Consistency of habits is crucial because school culture is not formed through a single activity or program, but rather through the repetition of behaviors that then become shared norms. Thus, the contribution of Islamic Religious Education teachers is not only visible in formal learning activities but also in informal interactions that shape students' social experiences (Arifin & Buda, 2024).

The research also shows that Islamic Religious Education teachers contribute to building a school culture through inclusive religious and social activities. Religious

activities are not only aimed at improving the understanding and practice of worship, but are also linked to fostering social awareness, responsibility, cooperation, and respect for others. Students are given the opportunity to engage in activities that encourage solidarity and concern for their surroundings (Erfandi et al., 2025). Through these experiences, students learn that religiosity is not only manifested through a vertical relationship with God, but also through social relationships that reflect compassion, justice, and respect for others. Thus, religious activities can be an instrument for strengthening a school culture oriented toward humanitarian values and communal living.

The role of Islamic Religious Education teachers as promoters of an inclusive culture is also evident in efforts to prevent discrimination and exclusivism in the school environment. Teachers provide an understanding that differences in background, ability, character, or perspective cannot be used as a reason to exclude or demean someone. In the interaction process, students are guided to provide equal opportunities to their peers, including in group activities and school activities. Teachers also play a role in identifying behaviors that have the potential to create social exclusion, stereotyping, or unfair treatment. The response given is not solely through punishment, but also through dialogue and values education so that students understand why such behavior conflicts with the principle of respect for human dignity (Ningsih et al., 2025).

An inclusive school culture also requires cross-role collaboration. Research shows that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers cannot build a culture of moderation individually because students gain educational experiences from various parties. Principals, other subject teachers, homeroom teachers, education staff, parents, and the social environment influence the formation of student attitudes. Therefore, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers play a role in fostering communication and collaboration with various school elements to ensure consistency of values (Sudirman & Amaluddin, 2025). When the principles of tolerance, justice, respect, and non-violence are implemented collaboratively, religious moderation is no longer viewed as a program exclusively for Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers but develops into the institutional character of the school.

Promoting an inclusive culture also plays a crucial role in creating a socially and emotionally safe school environment. Students need an environment that allows them to express their opinions, interact without fear, and receive fair treatment (Harianto & Abdurrahman, 2025). Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers can contribute by fostering open communication and demonstrating that differences are not grounds for stigmatizing students. A safe environment allows students to develop self-confidence and the ability to interact with diverse groups. From the perspective of religious moderation, this condition forms the foundation for the development of tolerance and the ability to coexist peacefully.

In the digital context, an inclusive culture also needs to be extended to the online communication spaces used by the school community. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers can encourage students to practice digital communication ethics, respect privacy, refrain from spreading information that demeans others, and avoid hate speech and identity-based provocation. A culture of moderation will be incomplete if applied only in face-to-face interactions, while digital spaces can be a breeding ground for behaviors that contradict these values (Alhafiz et al., 2025). Therefore, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers need to help students understand that the principles of respect and responsibility still apply when communicating through digital media. This approach extends the meaning of school culture from the physical space to the social and digital ecosystems of students (Walad et al., 2024).

Overall, Islamic Religious Education teachers, as drivers of an inclusive school culture, demonstrate that religious moderation can be an integral part of school life if realized through learning, role modeling, habituation, socio-religious activities, diversity management, and institutional collaboration. An inclusive school culture enables students not only to understand the importance of tolerance and respect for differences but also to experience and practice them in their daily lives. Thus, the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers contributes to building an educational ecosystem capable of fostering students with religious commitment, social openness, the ability to live side by side, and the readiness to face diversity peacefully and responsibly.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers have a strategic role as agents of religious moderation in building a tolerant, inclusive, and harmonious school environment. Based on the results of the thematic analysis, there are five main roles of PAI teachers: as educators of religious moderation values, role models of religious diversity, facilitators of diversity dialogue, mediators in dealing with differences, and drivers of an inclusive school culture. As educators of values, teachers integrate the principles of tolerance, justice, balance, respect for differences, and non-violence into PAI learning. As role models, teachers translate these values through attitudes and behaviors that are fair, polite, open, and respectful of differences. As facilitators of dialogue, teachers create a learning space that allows students to express their views, listen to different perspectives, and develop critical thinking skills and empathy. As mediators, teachers help students manage differences and resolve conflicts through communication, justice, and a non-violent approach. Meanwhile, as drivers of school culture, teachers encourage the value of moderation not only to stop at learning but to become part of habits, interactions, and school life. These findings confirm that religious moderation is a multidimensional educational process and cannot be achieved solely through the transfer of religious knowledge. Its success requires an integration of learning, role modeling, dialogue, conflict management, habituation, and support for school culture. In the context of technological development, the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers also needs to be expanded by strengthening religious digital literacy so that students are able to respond critically and responsibly to information, differing views, and digital interactions. Therefore, strengthening Islamic Religious Education teachers' competencies in moderation education, dialogical communication, conflict resolution, character education, and digital literacy is a crucial need. Theoretically, this study reinforces the perspective that Islamic Religious Education teachers are not merely transmitters of religious knowledge, but agents of value transformation and school cultural change. Practically, the research findings provide implications for schools to develop educational ecosystems that support tolerance, justice, respect for differences, and anti-violence through collaboration between teachers, principals, students, families, and the community. Thus, optimizing the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers as agents of religious moderation can be an important strategy in shaping students who have a strong religious commitment and are able to live peacefully, inclusively, and responsibly in a pluralistic society.

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