



STUDENT STRATEGIES IN UNDERSTANDING CONTENT KNOWLEDGE OF RELIGIOUS MODERATION BASED ON ACADEMIC BACKGROUND

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Abstract: This research aims to examine the strategies used by students in understanding content knowledge in the field of religious moderation. To achieve this goal, a case study method involving 150 students from the Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (UPI) in the fields of language, vocational, and social studies was used. The data collection technique used was through questionnaires about the strategies used by students in understanding religion or religious moderation, and an attitude scale instrument to determine students' views on understanding strategies or knowledge acquisition. The results of the statistical analysis will be discussed, examined for trends, and compared with previous research findings or opinions. After the discussion, this study concludes that the most commonly used strategy by students is attending religious studies and engaging in discussions with individuals considered to have a better understanding of religion.

INTRODUCTION

According to Qardhawi disturbances among religious communities are caused, among other things, by excessive behavior (*al-ghuluww, ath-tatharruf*) in practicing religion. This attitude is indicated by several indicators, including fanaticism in expressing opinions, views that require people to do something that God has not mandated, opinions that make a task more difficult, rough and harsh behavior, ill intentions, and views that label others who disagree with them as disbelievers. He also (in Bukhori, 2018) stated that these six indicators occurred due to extreme understanding of religion and the absence of balance (*at-tawassuth*) in expressing opinions and acting, which leads to excessive behavior in religious practices. Excessive behavior and the lack of balance in religion are closely related to how individuals understand religion. Qardhawi's view is in line with Ath-Thayeb's opinion, who asserts that the main cause of extreme and excessive behavior is the incorrect understanding of the Quranic verses, the sayings of the Prophet, and classical books (Qardhawi : 2017).

In the context of Indonesia, such attitudes have become more widespread after the end of the New Order and the beginning of the reform era,

characterized by the emergence of freedom of thought, expression, and behavior, including in religious matters. Therefore, this study aims to elaborate on the strategies used by students in understanding the content knowledge of religious moderation based on their academic backgrounds, namely students from the Vocational Education, Islamic Education, and Arabic Language Education programs (Shohib, 2020).

Content knowledge in the field of religious moderation refers to the topics that students must master. Akhmadi (2022) stated that "content is the subject matter that is to be learned". Meanwhile, state that "content knowledge is the knowledge about the actual subject matter that is to be learned or taught." This concept refers to the latest knowledge about the material or subject being studied or taught (Rita & Iswantir, 2022). Content knowledge is not limited to the latest course material but it also includes knowledge of concepts, theories, ideas, frameworks of thinking, proof methods, and facts (Anwar & Muhayati, 2021).

Among the content knowledge that students need to master are empirical facts about the characteristics of the Republic of Indonesia as a country that is home to various cultures preserved and maintained by its people. In this country, there are various religions and beliefs, more than 740 ethnic groups, around 583 languages and dialects derived from 67 parent languages used by different ethnic groups for communication and interaction (Chang, 2022). These facts require individuals to practice religion, embrace, or adopt a religion in a moderate manner. This is what Nurdin refers to as living a religious life (Nurdin, 2021). Such religious practices are responded to by the comprehensive teachings of Islam. And emphasizes that Islam is a comprehensive religion that advocates harmonious relationships among its followers (Karam, 2021).

The teachings and values of Islam acquired by an individual from the Quran, Sunnah, and *ijtihad* are applied in daily life when interacting with God (worship), fellow human beings, and the environment. The implementation of these values and teachings is known as ethics (Aslan & Aybek, 2019). According to Indra (Indra, 2019), ethics has several characteristics, namely (a) something that is ingrained in a person's soul and has become their personality, (b) ethics are performed without conscious thought and are done consciously, (c) ethics are done voluntarily without external coercion, based on one's own will, (d) a person's good behavior is performed honestly, not driven by personal desires or interests, and (e) ethics arise from a person's intention for the sake of Allah.

The above exposition demonstrates the content knowledge that serves as the subject matter in UPI lectures. The question then arises: how do students understand the aforementioned lecture topics? This question arises because in reality, acts of extremism, intolerance, and the lack of a moderate attitude still occur, which indicates a misunderstanding of the texts of the Quran, Hadith, and classical books. On the other hand, within the Islamic teachings, there are conceptions, demands, and teachings about practicing religion in a moderate manner. This phenomenon gives rise to a contradictory phenomenon: on one hand, there are clear concepts, teachings, and principles regarding religious

moderation and its urgency in real life, but on the other hand, there are misconceptions, errors, or inaccuracies in understanding religious teachings.

Previous research conducted over the last 5 years, some of which were carried out in the context of Indonesian regions, including research on the implementation of various moderation which was carried out in 2022 in the context of multiculturalism (Jamaluddin, 2022), research on the portrait of religious moderation in Gorontalo in 2021 (Saputera & Djauhari, 2021), efforts to sow student religious moderation at IAIN which will be carried out in 2020 (Salamah et al., 2020), even research on religious moderation through social media was conducted in 2019 (Wibowo, 2019).

Based on the explanation explained about the background of this research, it was found that this research was important to be carried out as an alternative to the very popular issue of religious moderation in the last 5 years, of course in a different context from previous research. This research raised a novelty in which the research context approaches universities. However, through the educational background approached students are also majoring in the fields of science they follow. Therefore, it was crucial to examine the strategies employed by Muslims, especially students, in understanding content knowledge, particularly those related to religious moderation. These strategies needed to be identified so that educators can identify the factors that influence a person's moderate stance. These factors may included strategies or approaches to understanding, the influence of friends, family background, or cultural background.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research used a qualitative approach with a case study method. The selection of this method aimed to formulate the strategies used by students at the Indonesia University of Education in understanding the content knowledge of religious moderation based on their background knowledge (Sulistyo Basuki, 2019). The selection of this method was based on the consideration that the research is conducted only at the Indonesia University of Education, which has its uniqueness, including its educational identity, the teaching of Islamic Education for 4 credits, the presence of the Islamic Education Science Program, the Arabic Language Education Program that includes several Islamic courses in its curriculum, and a campus motto that emphasizes being scientific, educational, and religious.

The data source of this research was the sixth-semester students at UPI who have taken the Islamic Education course in the first semester and the Seminar in Islamic Education course in the fifth semester. They came from three faculties that align with their respective fields of study, with the following numbers. The participants' demographics in this research were presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Participant Demographics.

Field of Study	N
Language Education	25

Social Education	25
Vocational Education	25
Gender	
Female	45
Male	30

Then, the research flow was shown in the following figure 1.

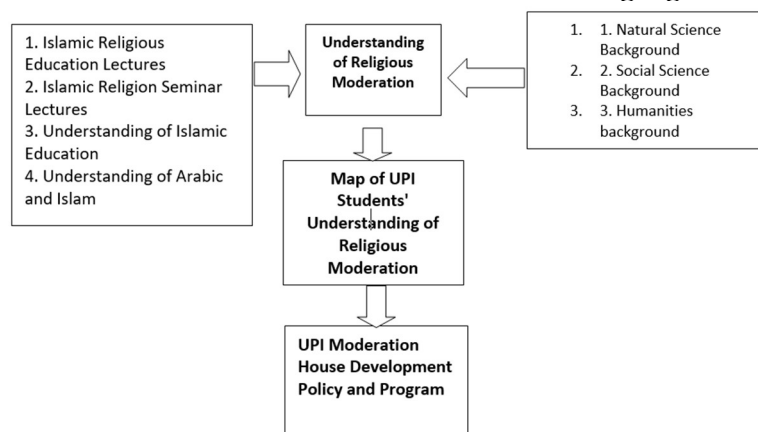


Figure 1. Flowchart of Research

Data collection technique used *first*, in-depth interview: researchers could conduct interviews with people involved in the situation or phenomenon under study, such as participants, witnesses, or experts. Researchers conduct interviews with people involved in the situation or phenomenon under study, such as participants, witnesses, and experts. *Second*, Observation non-participant: Observation involves direct observation of the situation or phenomenon being studied. The researcher recorded the observed behaviors, interactions, and situations. *Third*, Survey: a collection of written questions given to respondents to gather information about their views, opinions or experiences related to religious moderation. Data analysis technique used *first*, data organization: includes compiling field notes, transcribing interviews, or compiling data in tables or diagrams. *Second*, descriptive analysis: Descriptive analysis involves presenting data in a narrative manner. *Third*, analysis of questionnaire results with a Likert scale.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Strategy of Student Religious Moderation

The research aimed to map the level of understanding of UPI Bandung students regarding the concept of religious moderation. This will be done by examining theories and journal articles related (Hakim, 2020; Salamah et al., 2020). The strategy for understanding religious moderation among students is an approach aimed at promoting balanced understanding, tolerance, and interfaith dialogue. This strategy is crucial in developing inclusive attitudes and mutual respect towards religious diversity within the campus and society at large. In the development of understanding religious moderation, it is also important to pay

attention to commitments to human rights principles, gender equality, and social inclusion. With these strategies, students can become agents of change who play a role in building a harmonious, inclusive, and mutually respectful society within the context of religious diversity.

According to the study, the internalized content is based on the content of the Islamic Religious Education course itself, which includes (a) the methodology of understanding Islam, (b) *ijtihad* as the process of developing Islamic law and various *khilafiyah* issues in Islam, (c) the concept of ethics and its application in behavior, (d) the concept of *da'wah* and enjoining good and forbidding evil in Islam, and (e) the concept of *jihad* in Islam and its embodiment. These five contents are believed to have a direct relationship with a moderate character. A moderate character is determined by these five subjects, as indicated by several previous studies.

Supriadin et al. (2022) examined Mukti Ali's views on approaches to understanding Islamic teachings. The researcher concluded that there are at least three approaches that can be followed to understand religious teachings. Firstly, by studying the primary sources of Islamic teachings, namely the Quran and Sunnah. Secondly, by using reason and intellect without being driven by desires. Thirdly, by believing that truth comes from the Almighty Allah. These three approaches are encompassed in the scientific-cum-doctrinaire approach, which combines normative and empirical approaches. Islamic teachings are analyzed from doctrinal, historical, and empirical perspectives.

Religious moderation and religious education strategies for students in Indonesia were highly important considering the diversity of religions in the country. Here were several aspects related to religious moderation and religious education strategies for students in Indonesia: *First*, Inclusive Religious Education: Students need to receive inclusive and balanced religious education in higher education institutions. This involved teaching about the religions present in Indonesia, including Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. The goal was to promote understanding and tolerance towards these religions.

Second, Inter religious Dialogue and Cooperation: Students in Indonesia need to engage in interreligious dialogue and cooperation among religious communities. This can be done through activities such as workshops, seminars, discussions, and interfaith meetings. Interreligious dialogue allows students to learn from one another, share experiences, and understand the perspectives of other religions. *Third*, Increasing Awareness of Religious Pluralism: Students need to have a strong understanding of religious pluralism, which entails recognizing and appreciating the diversity of religions. Religious education and learning should reinforce values of tolerance, mutual understanding, and respect for interreligious differences. *Fourth*, Formation of Interreligious Student Organizations: Students can establish interreligious student organizations on their campuses. Such organizations aim to facilitate interreligious dialogue, joint social activities, and collaboration in promoting religious moderation. It also

provides a space for students to learn more about other religions and build interfaith friendships.

Fifth, Comprehensive Research and Study of Religions: Students can conduct comprehensive research and studies on the religions present in Indonesia to gain a deeper understanding. This research can help overcome prejudices and misconceptions, as well as build a broader understanding of the universal values and commonalities among these religions. *Sixth, Introduction to Local Wisdom and Religious Culture:* Students need to develop an understanding of local wisdom and religious culture in Indonesia. This involves understanding the traditions, customs, and unique religious practices in each region. This introduction helps to appreciate the cultural and religious diversity in Indonesia.

Inclusive religious education strategies and religious moderation for students in Indonesia are important for fostering harmony among religious communities and creating a harmonious society. It is also important for strengthening awareness of the significance of religious diversity in national identity and nation-building. Moderation in religious education for students holds great urgency in the context of a society with diverse religions. Here are several reasons why moderation in religious education for students is highly important: *First, Building Tolerance and Understanding:* Religious education moderation helps students build attitudes of tolerance, mutual respect, and understanding towards religious diversity. This is important in fostering harmonious relationships among students from various religious backgrounds and helping avoid potential religious conflicts.

Second, Overcoming Prejudice and Stereotypes: Through religious education moderation, students can overcome prejudice and stereotypes they may hold against other religions. They can gain accurate knowledge about the teachings, practices, and values of different religions, thereby promoting broader understanding and reducing religious discrimination. *Third, Shaping Responsible Citizens:* Religious education moderation helps students develop attitudes and values crucial in their lives as responsible citizens. They learn to respect human rights, promote peace, and build harmonious relationships in a multicultural society.

Fourth, Developing Communication and Dialogue Skills: Religious education moderation involves the development of effective communication skills and the ability to engage in dialogue with people from diverse religious backgrounds. Students learn to listen attentively, appreciate differing opinions, and seek common ground in understanding religion. *Fifth, Addressing Global Challenges:* In an increasingly interconnected and globalized world, students need to understand different religions to interact and collaborate with individuals from diverse religious backgrounds. Religious education moderation helps students develop the understanding and skills necessary to thrive and work in an increasingly multicultural society. *Sixth, Building Peace and Harmony:* Religious education moderation is a crucial step in building peace and harmony at the individual, community, and societal levels. Through a deep

understanding of different religions, students can contribute to conflict resolution, promote dialogue, and create a harmonious environment.

Overall, moderation in religious education for students holds great urgency in fostering harmonious relationships, overcoming prejudice, and promoting tolerance in a society with diverse religions. It helps students become inclusive individuals who embrace diversity. To the concept of religious moderation, indicators of religious moderation, instruments for measuring religious moderation, and content knowledge. Here are the summarized results of the survey on students' perceptions of Figure 2, Figure 3, and Figure 4 by using a Likert scale:

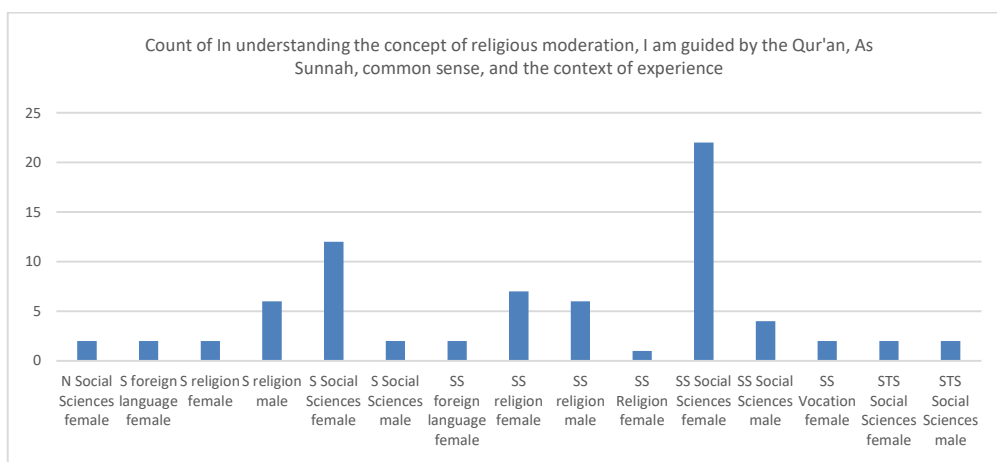


Figure 2. Students' attitudes towards something new

Based on three categories of study fields, namely social sciences, languages, and vocational studies, it is observed that female students tend to be more active and engaged in addressing an issue. However, it can be concluded that 75% of students, regardless of their gender, across all study fields do not blindly accept every issue that arises but rather refer back to the Quran and Sunnah in dealing with problems.

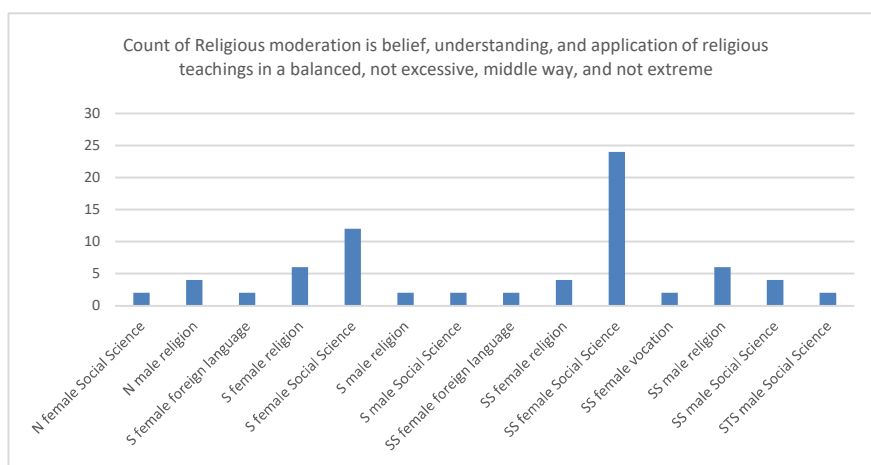


Figure 3. understanding of religious moderation

Based on three categories of study fields, namely social sciences, languages, and vocational studies, it can be observed that approximately 80% of students have an understanding of the concept of religious moderation.

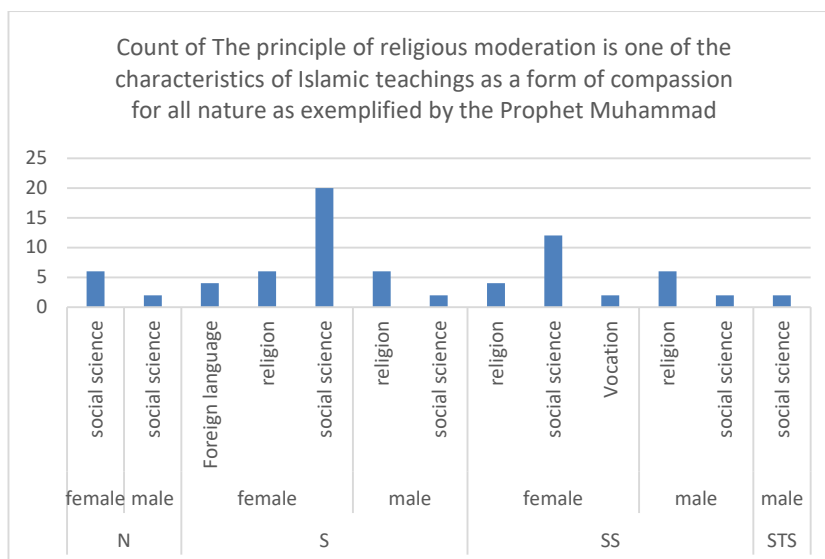


Figure 4. Understanding the urgency of religious moderation.

Based on three categories of study fields, namely social sciences, languages, and vocational studies, it can be observed that approximately 80% of students have an understanding of the concept of religious moderation.

Understanding of Student Religious Moderation

Moderate teachings in Islam have been studied by experts, including Khiyathi (2022), who quoted the views of several scholars. He cites Ahmad Umar Hasyim's perspective that moderation is a balance and middle ground between two extremes, between excess and deficiency, and between exceeding limits and deficiency. Furthermore, she also examined the concept of moderation from the perspectives of language, the Quran, and the Sunnah in an article titled "*Al-Wasthiyyah Wal I'tidal Fil Khithab ad-Dini Bahtsun fil Maqashid Wal Ab'adh al-Ishlahiyyah.*" According to him, the term moderation in Islam is represented through two main terms, namely *al-'itidal* and *at-tawassuth*.

The term *al-'itidal* is synonymous with *al-istiqamah*, *al-qashdu*, and *al-istiwa*. Something is said to be *al-istaqama* when it is equal and parallel. The term *al-'itidal* is also synonymous with *al-qashdu*, which means a moderate state in various aspects and does not exceed limits. In short, the term *al-'itidal* is synonymous with *al-'adlu*. As for *al-'itidal*, it means establishing justice, *istiqamah*, straightness, parallelism, similarity, balance, equality, fairness, and purity. If the term *al-'itidal* is associated with the Quran, at least five contextual meanings can be found, namely *al-'itidal* meaning fairness as found in Surah An-Nisa' verse 58, *al-'itidal* meaning *'adlun* as found in Surah Al-Baqarah verse 123, *al-'itidal* meaning balance as found in Surah Al-Infithar verse 7, *al-'itidal* meaning equality as found in Surah Al-An'am verse 1, and *al-'itidal* expressed with its

synonyms such as *al-istiqamah*, *al-qiwwam*, and *al-istiwa* (parallelism) as found in Surah Hud 112 and Surah Fussilat verse 30.

Terminologically, the term *al-'itidal* is equivalent to the term moderation, which means steadfastness on the path of justice, straightness, and truth. Moderation means being in the middle between excess and deficiency, and between extremes and moderation. Therefore, *al-'itidal* and *al-istiqamah* mean existing in the middle between two sides, namely the side of excess and the side of deficiency. *I'tidal* means *istiqamah*, *tazkiyah*, *tawassuth*, and goodness.

Another equivalent term for moderation is *Al-Wasthiyyah*. The word consisting of *waw*, *sin*, and *tha* is a correct form of the word. It means fair and moderate. *A'dalus syai* means the middle of something. The word *al-wasth* is used in two ways.

Firstly, *al-wasth* is used as the word "*wasth*" with a *sukun* on the letter *sin*, making it a locational adverb meaning "between" or "in the middle." This aligns with Ibn Manzhur's view in *Lisanul 'Arab*, where he emphasizes that *wasth* is a locational adverb (*zharaf*), not a noun (*ism*), with the same meaning as "between" or "in the middle." The expression "*jalastu wasthal qaumi*" means "I sat in the middle of the crowd."

Secondly, *al-wasth* is used as the word "*wasath*" with a *fatha* on the letter *sin*. In the Quran, the word "*wasath*" has several contextual meanings according to its derivatives. "*Wasatha*" means moderation, as found in Surah Al-Baqarah verse 143. "*Al-wustha*" means the prayer positioned in the middle or the best, as mentioned in Surah Al-Baqarah verse 238. "*Ausath*" means ordinary food, as found in Surah Al-Ma'idah verse 89. "*Ausathahum*" means someone who is most just and good, as mentioned in Surah Al-Qalam verse 28. "*Wasathna*" means the middle of an area, as found in Surah Al-'Adiyat verse 5.

In addition to content knowledge related to understanding Indonesia's multicultural conditions and the concept of moderation in the Quran and Sunnah, on the internalization of religious moderation values at UPI concludes that internalization is associated with (a) content directly correlated with the formation of moderate character among students, (b) exemplary behavior exhibited by all stakeholders, and (c) Islamic Education tutorials. Lately, the discourse on religious moderation has been increasingly vocalized and echoed by the government, considering the various conflicts that have been triggered by misunderstandings of religious matters in the diverse reality of Indonesia (Saputera and Djauhari 2021; Abror Mhd. 2020).

First, Understanding Religious Moderation: Students need to understand that religious moderation refers to a balanced, inclusive, and tolerant approach towards religious diversity. This involves respecting differences in beliefs, having an open attitude towards interfaith dialogue, and rejecting extremism or intolerance. Religion becomes a guide and a middle path in addressing societal issues (Monang et al., 2022).

Second, Tolerance and Appreciation of Diversity: Students must understand the importance of tolerance and appreciation for religious diversity. This involves respecting human rights, religious freedom, and freedom of

expression for individuals from various religious backgrounds. Islam views diversity as a divine norm. The existing differences are Allah's decree. In response to these differences, Islam teaches its followers to be open-minded, respectful, and loving towards one another. As long as matters of faith are not mixed with the beliefs of other religions, Islam allows us to interact and engage in good relationships with followers of other religions. Islam is a religion that is full of tolerance and friendliness towards all of Allah's creations in various matters, including social and national affairs (Monang et al., 2022).

Third, Inter faith Dialogue: Students need to understand the importance of interfaith dialogue in promoting mutual respect and building positive relationships among different religions. The unique multi-ethnic and multicultural context, such as Indonesia, faces potential threats. This multicultural society is vulnerable to conflicts and divisions (Alim & Munib, 2021). Preventing this involves the ability to listen, share perspectives, and seek common ground and a deeper understanding of the beliefs and practices of other religions.

Fourth, Understanding Different Religions: Students should strive to objectively and critically study different religions. This involves researching and learning about the teachings, practices, and cultures of other religions accurately. A deep understanding of different religions helps eliminate stereotypes, prejudices, and misunderstandings. Such an orientation can be realized through the objectification of social and religious education values that refer to prophetic social values within religious teachings. For example, in Islamic teachings, there are Islamic social and religious values that can be objectified to embody the attitude of religious moderation in a universal context (Rizkiyah & Istiani, 2021).

Fifth, Development of Moderation Values: Students need to internalize the values of moderation in their daily lives. This involves practicing inclusivity, tolerance, and respect for individuals from various religious backgrounds. Students should also be able to identify and challenge attitudes and actions that contradict the values of moderation. The intended religious moderation in this context is to bring society into a moderate understanding, not being extreme in practicing religion, and not deifying unlimited rational thinking (Rizkiyah & Istiani, 2021).

Sixth, Role of Students in Building Religious Moderation: Students are expected to be agents of change in building religious moderation within the campus and society. They can participate in interfaith activities, take a leadership role in organizing inclusive dialogues, seminars, or religious events. Students should also be able to educate others about the importance of religious moderation and promote awareness of these values. Currently and in the future, the religious moderation movement initiated by the Ministry of Religious Affairs has found its momentum. Framing religious moderation is important in managing religious life in Indonesia, a plural and multicultural society (Sutrisno, 2019). Understanding knowledge about religious moderation for students is a crucial step in building attitudes that are inclusive, tolerant, and respectful of religious diversity within society.

CONCLUSION

Strategies used in understanding the concept of moderation. These strategies include (a) independent study, (b) reading primary references, (c) conducting ijthad, (d) asking for expert opinion, (e) attending studies, and (f) conducting simple research. Then based on survey results and field observation studies, Strategies for teaching religious moderation: *First*, Promote critical thinking: Encourage students to critically analyze religious teachings and beliefs, helping them develop a nuanced understanding of different perspectives. *Second*, Provide a balanced curriculum: Include courses and materials that cover various religious traditions, promoting understanding and appreciation for diversity. *Third*, Foster open dialogue: Create a safe and inclusive environment where students can openly discuss and share their thoughts on religious matters, fostering mutual respect and understanding. *Fourth*, Encourage interdisciplinary learning: Integrate different fields of study, such as social sciences, languages, and vocational studies, to provide students with a holistic understanding of religious moderation. *Fifth*, Emphasize the importance of empathy and compassion: Teach students to empathize with others' beliefs and experiences, promoting harmony and unity among different religious communities. *Sixth*, Engage with religious leaders and experts: Invite guest speakers from different religious backgrounds to share their insights and experiences, providing students with firsthand knowledge and exposure to diverse perspectives. By prioritizing the urgency of understanding religious moderation and implementing effective teaching strategies, universities can empower students to become agents of peace and religious harmony in society.

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