

AL-ALBAB

CONTENTS

LGBT and Religious Negotiations: A Case Study of Youth Interfaith Forum on Sexuality (Yifos)

Roni, Fatimah Husein, Dewi Candraningrum

Pinah Laman: The Construction of Religious and Ethnic Identity Within the Mentuka Dayak of West Kalimantan

Felisitas Yuswanto, Sekar Ayu Aryani, Ahmad Muttaqin

Face Veil and Lawo-Lambu: Negotiating Religious Practices Among Muslims and Catholics in Ende City

Yosep Aurelius Woi Bule, Adison Adrianus Sihombing

Preserving Diversity: Lessons from Batang Tarang Village of West Kalimantan

Hermansyah, Faisal Abdullah, Mochamad Hamdan

Cultural Resistance and Sharia-Based Ecology in the Fishing Community in Aceh

Zubir, Abdul Manaf, Abdul Mugni, Noviandy

Ethnicity, Religion and The Changing Community Structure Within Fakfak Society in Papua

Ade Yamin, Musa Rumbaru, Nining Lestari, Mufliha Wijayati

Religious Solidarity for Coping with Economic Crisis During the Covid-19 Pandemic

Luqman, Ilhamdi

Portrait of Moderate Islam Within Muslim University Students in Indonesia

Ahmad Jais, Sumin



AL-ALBAB

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AL-ALBAB, Gedung Saifuddin Zuhri

Pascasarjana IAIN Pontianak,

Jalan Letjend Suprpto No. 19, Pontianak Selatan
Pontianak 78122, Kalimantan Barat, Indonesia.

Phone: (62-561) 734170 Fax: (62-561) 734170 ;

Handphone/WA: +6281256738348

E-mail: redaksi.bjrs@gmail.com

Website: <http://jurnaliainpontianak.or.id/index.php/alalbab>

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VOLUME 10 NUMBER 2 (DECEMBER 2021)

CONTENTS

1. LGBT and Religious Negotiations: A Case Study of Youth Interfaith Forum on Sexuality (Yifos)
Roni, Fatimah Husein, Dewi Candraningrum 161
2. *Pinah Laman*: The Construction of Religious and Ethnic Identity Within the Mentuka Dayak of West Kalimantan
Felisitas Yuswanto, Sekar Ayu Aryani, Ahmad Muttaqin 177
3. Face Veil and *Lawo-Lambu*: Negotiating Religious Practices Among Muslims and Catholics in Ende City
Yosep Aurelius Woi Bule, Adison Adrianus Sihombing 199
4. Preserving Diversity: Lessons from Batang Tarang Village of West Kalimantan
Hermansyah, Faisal Abdullah, Mochamad Hamdan 221
5. Cultural Resistance and Sharia-Based Ecology in the Fishing Community in Aceh
Zubir, Abdul Manaf, Abdul Mugni, Noviandy 245
6. Ethnicity, Religion and The Changing Community Structure Within Fakfak Society in Papua
Ade Yamin, Musa Rumberu, Nining Lestari, Muflaha Wijayati 267
7. Religious Solidarity for Coping with Economic Crisis During the Covid-19 Pandemic
Luqman, Ilhamdi 287
8. Portrait of Moderate Islam Within Muslim University Students in Indonesia
Ahmad Jais, Sumin 301

PORTRAIT OF MODERATE ISLAM WITHIN MUSLIM UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN INDONESIA

Ahmad Jais

IAIN Pontianak

Email: ahjaza@gmail.com

Sumin

IAIN Pontianak

Email: amien.ptk@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The violence in the name of religion is now not only happening in the Middle East but has also penetrated Indonesia. Indonesia is not only known as a Muslim-majority country that is friendly and peace-loving but also has a diversity of religions, ethnicities, races, and cultures that have the potential to trigger conflict at any time. Violations of religious freedom in Indonesia have increased dramatically in recent years. This study is aimed to explore the understanding of Muslim students in Indonesia about Islamic moderation, the perceptions of Muslim students in Indonesia about the application of Islamic moderation, and the challenges and strategies of universities in implementing Islamic moderation on Muslim students in Indonesia. This study uses phenomenology approach with Muslim students as the object of the research. The participants were selected purposively as many as 20 students. This study finds that Muslim students in Indonesia characterize Islamic moderation as Muslims who are open to technological change, tolerant and harmonious with other Muslims and non-Muslims, non-violent, democratic, and access to comprehensive Islamic sources. Even though Muslim students in Indonesia have implemented Islamic moderation, there are still misconceptions about Islamic moderation. The challenge of implementing Islamic moderation in Muslim students is that they are easily exposed to extreme understanding through social media or the pragmatic and rational Islamic community.

Keywords: Portrait of Moderate Islam; Muslim Students; portrait Islam, religiosity

INTRODUCTION

The challenges of Muslims today are becoming increasingly complex, no longer limited to religious issues but have penetrated other aspects of life, including education, economics, law, society, culture, and politics. The history of Islamic

civilization records that Islam is divided into several groups. These groups were born from different understandings and perspectives on the teachings of Islam itself or political affiliations and interests. Theological issues that arise among Muslims are the result of the struggle between various Islamic notions of fundamentalism and liberalism. Islam word derived from “*aslama*,” “*yuslimu*,” and “*islaman*,” which are Arabic words that mean submission, obedience, and protection (Manzūr & ibn Mukrin, 2003). Islam is defined as a complete surrender to Allah. People who identify as Muslim show that they have accepted and submitted to the teachings of Islam. A true Islamist implies that the individual must be able to save himself and others around him; even though it is not completely safe, its existence is still useful.

Lately, we have entered a new chapter in which violence in the name of religion exhibits various relatively more varied and extreme patterns. Perhaps, we have witnessed horrific propaganda on social media, beheadings, rapes, and tortures carried out in the name of Islam by fanatics fighting for the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (Quainton, 2020). The violence in the name of religion does not only occur in the Middle East but has now penetrated Indonesia, which culturally and socially is a nation that is polite, friendly, tolerant, and loves peace. Indonesia, as a country with a majority Muslim population, has a myriad of problems that intersect with religion, ethnicity, race, and class, thus forcing the government to be wise in managing diversity and potential conflicts triggered by religious sentiments.

Violations of religious freedom in Indonesia have grown dramatically in recent years, with a jump from 134 cases in 2014 to 208 cases in 2018 (Sudarto, 2022). From 2016 to 2018, there were 208 violations of freedom of religion/belief, including 270 different types of actions, spread across 24 regions in Indonesia. Of the 270 violations of freedom of religion/belief, 140 involve state authorities as to the perpetrators, 123 of 140 are active state activities (based on commissions), and 17 are passive (based on Negligence). Provocative words and violence committed by public authorities, 130 out of 270 violations of freedom of religion/belief were committed by non-state entities. Individuals and members of community groups commit violations in this category. The group of residents committed the most violations, namely 42 cases (Sudarto, 2022). Groups that receive less favorable treatment or acts of violence are Shia Islam, Ahmadiyah, Gafatar, and Salafi (Marshall, 2018; Zuhdi, 2018)

Several studies on religious study inform opinion and behavior among young Muslims in Indonesia, including high school and university students, have found a tendency to grow intolerance and religious radicalism and exposure to violent extremism and terrorism. According to Setara Institut (2019)

formalistic, conservative, and exclusive religiosity among state university students in Indonesia tends to be stronger than substantive, moderate, and exclusive religiosity (Sudarto, 2022). The Center for Islamic and Community Studies at the State Islamic University of Jakarta found an almost identical pattern. There are 58.8 percent of radical sentiments among students, although 74.5% of them prefer to take moderate action (Syafuruddin et al., 2018). On the other hand, Kanafi et al. (2021) found that through the influence of the implementation of *ahlussunah waljama'ah* Islam, leaders and members of Islamic organizations in Indonesia now have a more moderate view, following the established and consistent doctrine of *ahlussunah waljama'ah* in various disciplines, Islamic organizations help promote the moderation character of Islam in a positive way. Ab Rashid et al. (2020) study reveals than moderate moslem on 319 articles published from 2001 to 2018 and a critical review of 29 scientific publications, moderate Muslims have the characteristics of non-violence, liberalism, democracy, secularism, pluralism, and tolerance.

Considering the trend of violence in the name of religion and the increasing potential for inter-religious conflict in Indonesia, the government, through the Research and Development Agency for Education and Training of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Republic Indonesia 2019 released the book "Religious Moderation," which is specifically described in the Presidential Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia. Indonesia Number 18 of 2020 concerning the national mid-term development plan for 2020-2024, which was followed up by Regulation of the Minister of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia Number 18 of 2020 concerning the Strategic Plan of the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia.

Recently, Islamic Moderation in Indonesia has experienced significant opposition from various Muslim groups. Not only those who do not agree with the concept of Islamic Moderation but also those who claim to be moderate. In addition, several Muslim groups pressure the government to accommodate their interests, including sharia-based laws, Muslim leadership in Muslim-majority areas, and prohibiting the religious activities of anti-mainstream Islamic groups such as 'Shia,' 'Ahmadiyah,' Gafatar , and Salafis (Marshall, 2018; Zuhdi, 2018). This agenda is easily disseminated throughout the country due to the increasing use of social media, one of which is in universities.

From elementary school to university levels, educational institutions welcome the government's attitude towards the policy of religious Moderation in Indonesia (Arifianto, 2019). School and university leaders organize seminars, and book reviews, incorporate Islamic Moderation into the curriculum and issue a joint statement committed to instilling Islamic values that are peace-

loving, tolerant, and accepting of diversity (Arifinsyah et al., 2020). However, the school cannot rule out the possibility of becoming a vehicle for spreading various religious and political ideas, including extreme or fundamental ideologies, especially in countries with different religious education systems, such as Indonesia. Based on the results of the researcher's search, although there have been quite some studies examining Islamic Moderation, there has not been a single study that has examined the portrait of the implementation of Islamic Moderation, its obstacles, and challenges. Previous research only focused on three aspects: theoretical aspects, implementation in communities and religious groups, and micro research on high school students or Islamic boarding schools.

Borum (2011) conducted research examining the theory of Islamic Moderation, Ab Rashid et al. (2020), Kanafi et al. (2021), Mujahid (2021), and Nasir & Rijal (2021), research that examines the implementation of Islamic moderation among the Muslim community, such as in Salik's research (Salik, 2019), Syafruddin et al. (2018), and Safei (Safei, 2021), and micro research in the local scope that discusses Islamic moderation in the context of student learning in schools, among others, carried out by Hanapi (2014), Sumbulah et al. (2018), Zuhdi (2018), Susilo & Dalimunthe (2019), Sirry (2020), Siswanto (2020), Subandi et al.(2020), Helmy et al. (2021), Yahya & Rahmat (2021), Gunawan et al.(2021), and Pajarianto et al. (2022). On the other hand, students and students are the nation's next generations, so they need special attention from all parties to develop into the future generation of Islamic Moderation. Teachers and lecturers are important in determining students' understanding of Islamic Moderation because they function as interpreters and implementers. There is not much difference if the religious education curriculum is designed to be more moderate and responsive to social change, as messages can be delivered differently in the classroom depending on how a teacher presents them (Zuhdi, 2018), in line with Sirry (2020) that Muslim students can be de-radicalized through education, publication of information, support and attention, alternative approaches to religious beliefs, and involvement of family and peers, and this is because students are more critical of dogmatic patterns in interpreting religious teachings.

Other previous study also discuss religious moderation phenomena, Syafruddin et al. (2018), Zuhdi (2018), Ab Rashid et al. (2020), Sirry (2020), Kanafi (2021), and Sudarto (2022), This study focus on the implementation of Islamic Moderation on Islamic students in Indonesia to answer three research questions, namely; how do students define Islamic moderation? how do students perceive Islamic moderation?, What are the challenges and strategies

used in implementing Islamic moderation for Islamic students in Indonesia? In line with the focus, this study aims to explore the understanding of Islamic students in Indonesia regarding Islamic moderation, as well as explore the perceptions of Islamic students in Indonesia regarding the implementation of Islamic Moderation, and explore the challenges and strategies undertaken by universities in implementing Islamic moderation on Muslim students in Indonesia. Islamic moderation is a manifestation of the Islamic convention known as *wasatiyyah*. *Wasatiyyah* Islam is defined as the middle way, balance, justice, implementation or extreme, tolerance, simplicity, and harmony as the embodiment of Islam as a carrier of goodness for all nature (Gunawan et al., 2021; Helmy et al., 2021; Qaraḍāwī, 2010; Safei, 2021; Salik, 2019; Siswanto, 2020; Subandi et al., 2020). Moderation is a manifestation of *wasatiyyah* Islam, positioning oneself fairly, not ignoring his religion's teachings, and not exaggerating.

Al-Wasatiyyah gives the idea of doing good with steadfastness and strength while remaining true to one's beliefs and refraining from committing any evil while avoiding evil with knowledge. A Muslim who makes Islamic moderation his lifestyle will be able to balance two opposing extremes of understanding, neither extreme-left nor extreme right (Hanapi, 2014; Safei, 2021). Islamic moderation is the opposite of Islamic extremism or Islamic radicalism; Islamic extremists are defined as "...as reactionary actors seeking direct and massive political change in the Status Quo through illegal and violent means" (Prinsloo, 2018). The term extreme left can be interpreted as behavior that is "skeptical," "apathetic," and too "permissive" so that it does not make religious teachings a guide for life. Contrary to the meaning of the extreme right, which tends to be fundamentalist, intolerant, feels the most righteous, acts beyond what is reasonable in the name of religion so that it violates the essential goals of Islam, namely, to bring about peace and safety.

Islamic moderation has several main characteristics, namely; Adhering to the philosophy of non-violence in spreading Islamic da'wah; adhering to modernity which includes science and technology, democracy, human rights, and the like; using rational thinking; using a contextual approach to understanding Islam; secular, pluralist, has a high spirit of tolerance, respects differences or diversity, and performs *ijtihad* (educated decisions in deciding legal opinions if there is no justification) in deciding legal opinions (Ab Rashid et al., 2020; Safei, 2021; Wibisono et al., 2019). On the other hand, radical or extreme Islam has at least 3 factors; create hostility towards the target group; provide reasons and mandates for acts of violence; remove social and psychological barriers that can prevent violence (Borum, 2011). According to the opinions of experts

and theories that have been stated above, Islamic moderation is substantially essential Islamic teaching to regulate Muslims in interactions with fellow Muslims, Muslims, and non-Muslims, the government, or the surrounding environment, so that the concept of peace and safety which is the mission of Islam can be achieved. made the best.

The experts opinions we have described in the literature review section are interpretations of the verses in the Muslim holy book (Al-Qur'an), including the Qur'an Surah Al-Baqarah verse 142, Al-Qur'an Surah An-Nahl verse 90, and the Qur'an Surah Al-Mumtahanah verse 8 (Kementerian Agama, 2005), namely: "In the same way We have made you (Muslims) a middle class so that you may be witnesses of (deeds) of mankind and that the Messenger (Prophet Muhammad) may be witnesses of (deeds) you. ...". Almost the same meaning is also contained in the Qur'an Surah An-Nahl verse 90 "Verily Allah commands to be fair, to do good, and to help relatives. He (also) forbids evil, evil and enmity. He taught you a lesson so that you always remember." Al-Qur'an Surah An-Nahl verse 90 is emphasized by Allah SWT, through His words in the Qur'an Surah Al-Mumtahanah verse 8 "God does not forbid you to do good and be fair to those who do not fight you in matters of religion and does not expel you from your hometown. Verily, Allah loves those who act justly."

The Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia interprets "*umatan wasatiyyah*" in the Qur'an Surah Al-Baqarah verse 142 as "middle (moderate) people, the chosen people, the best, fair, and balanced people, both in beliefs, thoughts, attitudes, and behavior." Furthermore, the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia interprets the Qur'an Surah An-Nahl verse 90 "... Allah forbids all of His servants to commit heinous acts that are despicable in the view of religion, such as adultery and murder; commit bad deed, namely things that are Contrary to the values in customs and religion; and conduct enmity with others as a result of oppression and persecution. Through these commands and prohibitions, He teaches and guides you in matters relating to good and evil so that you can take valuable lessons." The meaning of the Qur'an surah Al-Mumtahanah verse 8 is that "Allah does not forbid you (Muslims) from doing good and doing justice, because goodness and justice are universal, to unbelievers who do not fight Muslims because of religion with emphasize religious freedom and tolerance; and to those who do not expel you from your hometown, because you believe in Allah. Verily, Allah loves those who are fair to themselves and to others." Prophet Muhammad SAW encouraged his followers to behave moderately and forbade his followers to be excessive in religion; this can be seen from the words of the Prophet

Muhammad in a hadith in Musnad Ahmad bin Hambal Number 3078, and Sunan An-Nasa'i Number 3007 (Lidwa, 2020), as follows; “Do not act *ghuluw* (excessive attitude in religion), because verily the destruction of those before you is due to being *ghuluw* in religion.”

Universities can instill Islamic Moderation values in theoretical, practical, and ideological aspects through the development of a curriculum that contains national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence, accommodates local wisdom (culture) in aspects of content, learning strategies, evaluation models, teaching materials, and references, as an effort to stem the strengthening of extremist understanding (Nasir & Rijal, 2021; Siswanto, 2020; Sumbulah et al., 2018). Building Islamic education with a local character and reducing the extreme teachings of Wahhabism and the like is an effective deradicalization strategy (Susilo & Dalimunthe, 2019). Through empirical studies conducted by Yahya & Rahmat (2021), The dialogue-argumentative method is highly recommended to develop Islamic moderation thinking among students because this technique is seen as more effective for students who are already familiar with academic discussion or critical thinking. A different method but still considered relevant as a way of inculcating Islamic Moderation values in Islamic boarding schools is through the dogma of *ushul fiqh*, which states “*al muhafadhatu ‘ala al-qadim as-sholih wal akhdu bi al-jadid al-ashlah* (maintaining a good tradition and using a new, better tradition) rooted in the Holy Qur’an and Hadith.” (Mujahid, 2021).

This study uses a phenomenological method with a qualitative approach. This method fits the purpose of this study, which aims to explore the experiences, perceptions, responses, and feelings of Islamic students in Indonesia towards implementing Islamic Moderation on their campuses. Phenomenology is an appropriate method used to explore a person’s experience or feelings regarding the phenomena he or she experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Taylor et al., 2015). The setting of this research is Islamic students in Indonesia to explore the experiences of Muslim students in implementing Islamic Moderation, based on open interview questions formulated in such a way as to reveal in-depth their experiences and perceptions of Islamic Moderation.

Researchers set the criteria for participants to obtain complete, objective, and credible information. Participants in this study consist of 2 (two) groups, namely, (1) key participants, (2) main participants, and (3) supporting participants. The key participants in the research are the chancellor, vice-chancellor, or other parties who have general but comprehensive and complete information about religious moderation programs in universities in

Indonesia, namely, the head of the university, the head of the higher education quality assurance institution, and the head of the management of the study program at the university. The main participants are students participating in the religious moderation learning program. The main participants in this study were students at Islamic campuses in Indonesia as the object of implementing Islamic moderation learning. Supporting participants are lecturers at public universities and Islamic religious universities in Indonesia who can provide additional information related to mentoring, coaching, and monitoring the Islamic behavior of Muslim students in Indonesia. The technique of selecting research participants in this study was chosen on the condition that the adequacy of the information provided by the purposive technique was used (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Informants were selected purposively to represent campuses in Indonesia's West, Central, and East regions. The number of participants is 20 consisting of 18 main informants, 1 key informant, and 1 supporting informant.

The data collection uses in-depth interviews and focuses on group discussions (FGD). The FGD process was carried out first, followed by in-depth interviews with the same participants to explore the initial information obtained through the FGD. The data collection instrument was in the form of an open-ended interview guide (question list). The stages of data analysis in this study include data condensation, presenting data, verifying data, and drawing conclusions (Miles et al., 2014). Data reduction was made by summarizing, coding, patterning, ranking, partitioning, or grouping each piece of information contained in the interview transcript throughout the research process. The presentation of the data is carried out on the reduced data, in the form of matrices, charts, and others, to obtain dense and integrated information that is easy to interpret. Data verification is done by checking the completeness, correctness, and suitability of the data obtained; if the data is still incomplete, the previous process is carried out until the information obtained can answer the research objectives. Checking the validity or credibility of the data using member check and triangulation with key participants (Denzin, 2012; Lub, 2015). To ensure the consistency of the process and the results of the analysis of the data obtained, the researcher carried out strict control over the dependability and confirmability of the participants. Dependability is related to participant bias and subjectivity. To make it easier to encode data (coding), researchers used the QSR International NVivo Plus 12 software free version for 14 days.

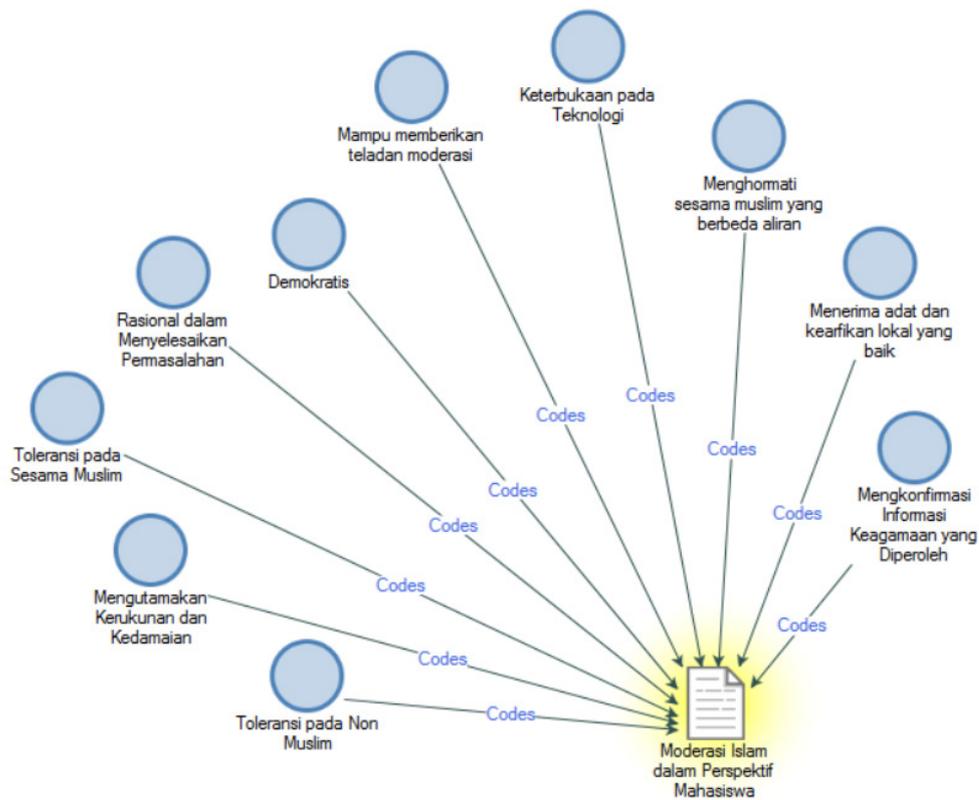


Figure 2. Gram's Explorer of Islamic Moderation in the Perspective of Islamic Students

Openness to Technological Development

Based on the results of interviews related to participants' experience in using information technology to facilitate access to information, understand and practice Islamic teachings, participants are open to using technology for the progress and good of the ummah. Internet-based information technology, digital technology, or other relevant technologies can make it easier to understand the holy text of the Qur'an in an attractive and flexible mobile format and can be a source of literacy to access information related to Islamic science and general sciences. However, every Muslim must use information technology wisely, filter positive information, and clarify and confirm its truth with trusted sources.

Democratic and Respect Differences of Opinion

The shared experience of participants regarding respecting democratic deliberation decisions revealed that participants had different opinions in deliberation, but even though they had different opinions, they respected

and prioritized the majority opinion as a final decision or joint decision, even though, according to personal perception, the decision was considered inappropriate.

Apply the philosophy of non-violence

In the results of in-depth interviews with participants about applying the philosophy of non-violence in upholding truth and justice, participants expressed their experiences that conveying the truth (Islamic da'wah) and fighting for justice; it must be done by prioritizing harmony, tolerance, peace, and love, and avoiding hatred, hostility, and division. Truth can only be conveyed right, and justice must be fought for in a just and wise manner. Violence and hostility will only trigger a more violent reaction of hostility and hatred from the other party.

Respect for human rights

Participants expressed their experiences in respecting human rights; according to participants, apart from the right to life, everyone also has the right to be treated non-discriminatory even though they are of different ethnicity, race, skin color, economy, political rights, and those who are very sensitive are in their beliefs and practice worship, according to their religion. Participants also revealed that in their area of origin, they had been involved in inter-ethnic wars, which later spread to political and religious issues; this was a result of the lack of awareness of certain individuals in the area on the importance of respecting human rights.

Tolerance

The results of in-depth interviews related to tolerance for fellow Muslims who have different understandings, different groups or sects, some participants revealed that they had different opinions with their friends, relatives, or parents in understanding the teachings of worship or *amaliyah* in Islam, but the differences did not reach cause quarrels or disputes, because they have adhered to the principle of mutual respect, respect, and tolerance for their fellow Muslims. Participants' experiences on how to implement tolerance to fellow Muslims who have different understandings, we summarize as follows:

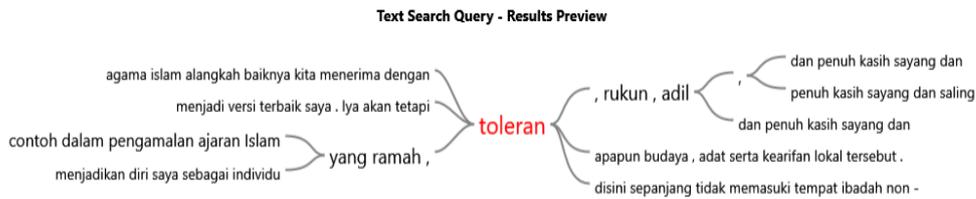


Figure 3. Word Tree of Muslim Students in Tolerance

In the interview related to tolerance, we expand on tolerance towards adherents of other religions (non-Muslims); the participants shared their experiences.

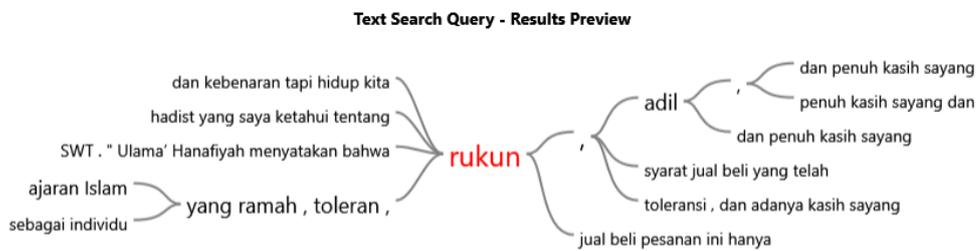


Figure 4. Word Tree of Muslim Students in Tolerance on different religions

Most participants have shown tolerance in the practice of associating with friends of the same religion or different religions as a consequence of different understandings, cultures, ethnicities, regional origins, and languages.

Appreciating differences

Participants shared their experiences regarding how they responded to the diversity of cultures, races, ethnicities, languages, groups, religions, and sects in Indonesia. Participants revealed that:



Figure 5. Word Tree of Muslim Students in Appreciating differences

The ability of participants to understand and appreciate ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and religious diversity is a form of individual awareness that represents a moderate attitude as the embodiment of the values of *rahmatan lil 'alamain*.

Accommodating local wisdom that does not conflict with Islamic teachings.

Participants' experiences in respecting local culture and wisdom, data from in-depth interviews with Muslim students in Indonesia are presented in the form of a word tree graph in Figure 6.

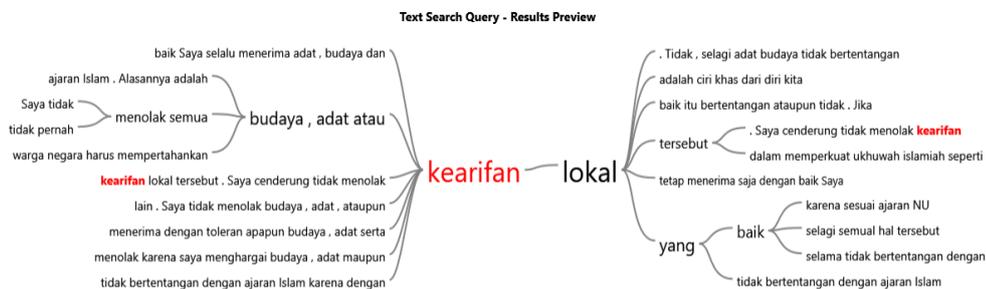


Figure 6. Word Tree of Acceptance of Muslim Students in Local Wisdom

Based on the interviews presented in Figure 6, we get information that Muslim students in Indonesia generally accept and respect local culture and wisdom

that do not conflict with religious values and Islamic beliefs.

CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ISLAMIC MODERATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The results of interviews with key participants (college leaders) and supporting participants (lecturers) revealed that the implementation of Islamic moderation in universities faces several challenges and obstacles, namely:

“[1] the low level of understanding of students and the community (student parents) towards Islamic teachings. [2] there are suspicions from students or the public, linking Islamic Moderation with political interests. [3] Islamic moderation is understood as liberal or plural Islam which is considered weak and not militant.[4] Islamic moderation is perceived as “Islam Nusantara,” which is promoted by certain religious organizations, so there is resistance from people who are not from these organizations.[5] Extreme and radical notions are easily accessible by students through social media, or websites or community studies of certain religious groups.”

Principally, the challenges, and obstacles to implementing Islamic moderation for Muslim students can be reduced to two factors first; internal factors, students who misunderstand (misconceptions) Islamic moderation, and second; external factors, students easily access extreme radicals from the internet or social media and through religious communities affiliated with extreme radicals.

STRATEGIES FOR ISLAMIC MODERATION IN UNIVERSITIES IN INDONESIA

The results of in-depth interviews with key participants (leaders of higher education institutions in Indonesia) revealed their experiences regarding strategies and policies for implementing Islamic moderation in universities, that.

“The implementation of Islamic moderation in universities is an extension of the government, to create harmony, tolerance, mutual respect in order to prevent division or disintegration of the Indonesian nation which is plural in terms of race, ethnicity, culture, language and religion.”

Key participants explained the efforts that have been made in universities to implement Islamic moderation, including academic and non-academic

activities. These efforts include the following:

“[1] include Islamic Moderation as test material in the selection of new students, [2] hold public lectures on nationalism, [3] include Islamic moderation material in Islamic student character education programs, [4] include Islamic moderation study materials as part of the curriculum Islamic studies or general courses at public universities, [5] supervises student organization units so they are not exposed to extreme (radical) teachings or ideas [6] opens research opportunities for students and lecturers with the theme of Islamic moderation. [7] make leadership policies regarding the obligation of all academics to practice *wasatiyyah* (moderate) Islamic values that are harmonious, tolerant, non-violent and compassionate.”

The strategies that have been used in implementing Islamic moderation in universities, in general, include academic, non-academic, and extra-curricular activities as well as policymaking for higher education leaders that require the academic community to model the practice of practicing moderate Islam.

Through this study, we have explored Muslim students' experiences in Indonesia as subjects of implementing Islamic moderation. Students have explained how they define Islamic moderation or *Wasatiyyah* Islam, which they have implemented in life within the university environment and the community. We can interpret their perception regarding how they define moderate Islam as a portrait of the implementation of moderate Islam they have practiced. This study is relevant to study of Prasojo et al. (2019), which states that “the portrait of moderate Islam can be seen from people's understanding of the practice of Islamic values, and how their efforts create harmonization, harmony, and tolerance in a pluralistic society .

When we asked students to define Islamic moderation according to their experiences, participants focused on the depth of information related to 7 (seven) issues, first; the openness of participants as Muslim students to the development of information technology and using it to understand and practice religious teachings in daily life, secondly; the democratic attitude they display in deliberation to make decisions, third; respect/respect fellow Muslims who have different understandings about the practice of Islamic teachings, third; building good relations with non-Muslims, being tolerant, and associating with good morals with non-Muslims without reducing the commitment to faith and Islamic creed, fourth; rational use in understanding and practicing religion, sixth; using multi-literacy as a source of religious information, and seventh; vigilance against detribalization by extreme/radical-minded people.

Muslim students' understanding of the concept of Islamic moderation does not merely reflect the values of moderation that they have implemented in their daily life and society. However, it also comes from external sources. The external factors that we mean in this context can be in the form of moderation learning in the university curriculum, moderate friends, community leaders, religious leaders, and the role of parents. The results of this study are relevant to the results of the Mubarak & Razali study (2019), and Susilo & Dalimunthe (2019).

The implementation of Islamic moderation on these participants is a perceptual internalization that they build about Islamic values *rahmatan lil 'alamin* through academic and non-academic activities in universities, parents, the environment, and social media. This is consistent with research conducted by Sirry (2020) that Muslim students can be de-radicalized through education, publication of information, support and attention, alternative approaches to religious beliefs, and involvement of family and peers; this is because students are more critical of dogmatic patterns in interpreting religious teachings.

This study identifies the existence of negative stereotypes in a small number of students who consider Islamic moderation as an organized effort from certain groups to undermine the originality of Islamic teachings following the Qur'an and As-Sunnah by incorporating cultural values, liberalism, pluralism, and political jargon. Islam phobia or anti-semitism (anti-Arabic).

Based on the results of our confirmation with key participants, the emergence of stereotypes is caused by students' misconceptions about Islamic moderation, the large amount of media exposure that often displays radical content, and the influence of parents, society or religious communities, or religious leaders whom Muslim students follow. This is in line with the results of research by Lailial et al. (2021, p. 1) that "education plays an important role in the process of building community peace and in generating tolerance through the application of Islamic moderation values."

CONCLUSION

Understanding the concept of Islamic moderation, which directly impacts religious attitudes and practice, is based on the ability of students to reduce the Islamic values of *rahmatan lil 'alamin*, which is a manifestation of the Core Values of Islamic teachings originating from the Qur'an and As-Sunnah. Family, peers, and community can shape students' understanding and perception, religious communities, academic and non-academic activities in universities, as well as digital literacy (internet and social media).

The findings of this study indicate that students have strong views regarding implementing Islamic moderation in higher education. Participants expressed their understanding in understanding Islamic moderation, as Muslims who are not anti-advancement of the times who adopt modern technology from non-Muslim countries to understand and practice Islam, are tolerant and harmonious with fellow Muslims and non-Muslims, anti-violence, democratic, using comprehensive sources of Islamic law (Al-Qur'an, As-Sunnah, Ijma', and Qiyas). Muslim students in Indonesia already have a good understanding of Islamic moderation and have implemented Islamic Moderation values in the campus, family, and community environment; however, Muslim students still "misunderstand" Islamic moderation. Moderation of Islam is considered an attempt by certain parties to erode the purity of Islamic teachings by mixing culture with religious teachings, incorporating Western liberalism and pluralism into Islamic teachings as part of Islam phobia or anti-Arabs.

Challenges and obstacles to the implementation of Islamic moderation in Muslim students in Indonesia are related to the misunderstanding of students who consider the concept of Islamic moderation as an effort to erode the purity of Islam through liberalism and religious pluralism, the influence of extreme understanding from social media, or Islamic studies from certain Islamic communities in Indonesia that offer a pragmatic, rational religious concept.

The strategy of universities in implementing Islamic moderation in Indonesia is carried out in several ways, including; [1] incorporating Islamic Moderation as test material in the selection of new students, [2] holding public lectures on nationalism, [3] inserting Islamic moderation material in Islamic student character education programs, [4] inserting Islamic moderation study materials as part of the Islamic studies curriculum or general courses at public universities, [5] to supervise student organization units so that they are not exposed to extreme (radical) teachings or ideas. [6] opens research opportunities for students and lecturers with the theme of Islamic moderation. [7] make leadership policies regarding the obligation of all academics to practice *wasatiyyah* (moderate) Islamic values that are harmonious, tolerant, non-violent, and compassionate."

This study suggests to improve the understanding of Muslim students to eliminate negative stereotypes about Islamic moderation, as well as how to optimize the implementation of Islamic moderation among Muslim students and students in Indonesia. These efforts can be carried out through cross-ministerial cooperation, in this case, the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Republic Indonesia and the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic

of Indonesia. The implementation of Islamic Moderation is not only limited to seminars or extra-curricular activities in universities but must also be included in special courses measured by valid and reliable instruments with achievements that must be monitored on an ongoing basis.

The limitation of this study is the difficulty of tracing and digging deeper into information to informants because, at the time of the research, there were still social restrictions by the government of the Republic of Indonesia to prevent the spread of the Covid-19 virus. Researchers only met face-to-face with a few participants who could be reached; the rest of the information from participants in different regions or islands was explored via WhatsApp and zoom meetings. Further studies need to be carried out quantitatively to determine the factors that influence the implementation of Islamic moderation in Muslim students in Indonesia. Sampling can be done using a cluster random sampling technique by considering the representation of students from all provinces in Indonesia, including students from public universities and Islamic religious universities.

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