

Implementation of Religious Moderation in a Multicultural Campus Environment: A Case Study of the Center for Excellence in Science and Technology University of Mataram

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji implementasi moderasi beragama di lingkungan akademik multikultural, dengan fokus pada Pusat Unggulan IPTEK Universitas Mataram. Sebagai universitas negeri di wilayah mayoritas Muslim yang secara rutin menerima mahasiswa internasional lintas agama, Universitas Mataram menjadi konteks yang tepat untuk menelusuri bagaimana nilai-nilai keagamaan hidup berdampingan dengan praktik akademik global. Melalui studi kasus kualitatif yang melibatkan wawancara, observasi, dan analisis dokumen, penelitian ini menemukan bahwa moderasi beragama diwujudkan secara aktif melalui penggunaan bahasa yang inklusif, kolaborasi lintas budaya, dan kebijakan kampus yang menghormati keberagaman. Peran dosen sangat penting dalam meneladani sikap toleran, sementara mahasiswa internasional merasakan keamanan dan penerimaan yang tinggi. Meski demikian, masih terdapat tantangan seperti kesalahpahaman budaya dan minimnya program terstruktur tentang kepekaan antaragama. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa moderasi beragama dapat menjadi nilai yang hidup di perguruan tinggi, mendukung harmoni dalam ruang akademik yang semakin mengglobal.

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the implementation of religious moderation in a multicultural academic environment, with a focus on the Center of Excellence in Science and Technology at the University of Mataram. As a public university

in a Muslim-majority region that regularly hosts international students of diverse faiths, Universitas Mataram provides a valuable context to explore how religious values coexist with global academic practices. Through a qualitative case study involving interviews, observations, and document analysis, the research finds that religious moderation is actively practiced through inclusive language, intercultural collaboration, and respectful campus policies. Faculty members play a crucial role in modeling tolerance, while international students express a strong sense of safety and belonging. However, challenges remain, including occasional cultural misunderstandings and the need for more structured programs on interfaith sensitivity. The findings affirm that religious moderation can be a lived value in higher education institutions, supporting peaceful coexistence in an increasingly globalized academic space.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the current era of globalization, universities are no longer isolated entities but serve as dynamic hubs of intercultural and interreligious interaction. The influx of international students from diverse religious backgrounds into higher education institutions in Indonesia has challenged universities to build inclusive and tolerant academic cultures. This is especially evident at the University of Mataram's Center of Excellence in Science and Technology (Pusat Unggulan IPTEK), which regularly hosts students from non-Islamic countries. As a public university in a Muslim-majority country, Universitas Mataram carries the dual responsibility of upholding national values while fostering global academic engagement. Religious moderation emerges as a pivotal approach to balance religious identity with openness to difference in such multicultural environments.

The concept of religious moderation in Indonesia, promoted by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, aims to strengthen harmony, prevent radicalism, and encourage peaceful coexistence among religious adherents. Within the context of Islamic education, moderation is reflected in teaching and learning processes that emphasize tolerance, inclusiveness, justice, and peaceful dialogue. However, the implementation of religious moderation is often more complex in practice, especially in settings that involve international and interreligious interactions. At University of Mataram, the presence of international students from Europe, Africa, and Asia brings new dimensions to religious diversity on campus. These students interact not only within academic spaces but also in informal settings such as student dormitories, laboratory groups, and community outreach programs.

Thus, understanding how religious moderation is operationalized within these spaces is crucial for evaluating the institution's inclusivity and intercultural competence. The University's Center of Excellence plays a central role in hosting interdisciplinary and international research programs, where religious identity may intersect with scientific collaboration. While much has been written about religious moderation in pesantren and public schools, few studies have explored its implementation in science-based, secular, and multicultural academic environments. This study seeks to fill that gap by exploring how religious moderation is interpreted, internalized, and practiced at Universitas Mataram's Center of Excellence. The primary research question guiding this study is: How is religious moderation implemented in a multicultural and interreligious university setting like the Pusat Unggulan IPTEK Universitas Mataram?

Sub-questions include: What are the perceptions of local and international students about religious moderation? What strategies are employed by faculty and administration to foster interfaith tolerance? The study is framed within the theory of interreligious dialogue and multicultural education, emphasizing the role of education in cultivating mutual respect. It also incorporates perspectives from Islamic educational thought, especially regarding *maqasid al-shari'ah* (objectives of Islamic law) and *wasathiyyah* (moderation). Methodologically, this research employs a qualitative case study approach, using interviews, observations, and document analysis.

The participants include faculty members, international students, and administrative staff involved in international cooperation and student services. Through these methods, the study examines both formal policies and informal interactions that shape the practice of religious moderation. This research is significant not only for religious or educational scholars but also for university policymakers and international program coordinators. The findings may offer insights into how Islamic higher education institutions can actively promote peace, understanding, and coexistence in pluralistic settings.

Moreover, the study contributes to the discourse on Islamic education in the global context, highlighting the role of Indonesian universities as models of moderate Islam. As Indonesia positions itself as a leader of peaceful Islam on the international stage, case studies like this provide practical evidence of how such values are embodied in academic life. In the following sections, this paper will present a review of relevant literature, outline the research methodology, and analyze the results and implications of the study.

Religious moderation has become a central theme in educational and sociopolitical discourse in Indonesia over the past decade. Defined broadly, religious moderation refers to a balanced approach to religious belief and practice, avoiding extremes while promoting tolerance and peaceful coexistence. The Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs defines religious moderation (*moderasi beragama*) as an attitude that avoids religious excesses and emphasizes fairness, equilibrium, and respect for diversity. This concept is particularly relevant in Indonesia, a nation with vast religious diversity and a constitutional commitment to pluralism. In educational contexts, religious moderation is often framed as a tool for fostering inclusive citizenship, promoting critical thinking, and preventing religious-based violence.

Several scholars have explored the integration of religious moderation in Islamic education, focusing on pesantren, madrasah, and general school curricula. (Muttaqin, 2021) argued that pesantren in Indonesia have historically promoted a *wasathiyyah* (moderate) interpretation of Islam rooted in local wisdom and tolerance. Similarly, (Zuhdi, 2019) emphasized the role of curriculum reform in embedding values of moderation in Islamic Religious Education (PAI). These studies, however, mostly examine primary and secondary education contexts, leaving a research gap in higher education, particularly in secular or science-based environments. Religious moderation in universities presents unique challenges due to increased diversity, academic freedom, and the presence of international students.

According to (Mahfud, 2020), the university is a microcosm of pluralistic society, and thus a key site for the practice and cultivation of religious moderation. In multicultural campus environments, the risk of misunderstanding, stereotyping, or exclusion based on religious differences can be high. International studies on religious tolerance in universities have shown that structured interfaith programs and inclusive pedagogies help promote interreligious understanding. For instance, (Eck, 2007) highlighted the role of interfaith dialogue in American universities as a way to build bridges between students of different faiths. In the European context, (Modood, 2013) explored the tension between secularism and religious expression in higher education, calling for policies that support pluralism and religious identity.

However, in Indonesia, empirical research on how religious moderation is implemented within the framework of international education is still limited. The presence of non-Muslim students in Muslim-majority universities can serve as a litmus test for institutional commitment to tolerance and inclusivity. The Center of Excellence in Science and Technology at Universitas Mataram, which often hosts international students, represents a unique environment to examine these dynamics. The literature on multicultural education provides useful frameworks for analyzing such contexts. (Banks, 2016) emphasized five dimensions of multicultural education: content integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and empowering school culture.

These dimensions align with the goals of religious moderation, particularly in promoting empathy, fairness, and inclusive learning spaces. Moreover, the concept of intercultural competence, as developed by (Deardorff, 2006), highlights the importance of attitude, knowledge, and skills for effective and respectful communication across cultures and religions. From an Islamic educational perspective, scholars such as (Al-Attas, 1980) and (Al-Faruqi, 1982) advocated for a balance between faith and reason, and between religious identity and universal human values. In recent years, scholars like (Azra, 2018) and (Hasyim, 2020) have championed Indonesia's model of "Islam Wasathiyah" as a framework for engaging global pluralism. However, they also caution that without active implementation and reinforcement in educational institutions, the ideals of moderation may remain rhetorical. This study, therefore, seeks to contribute to the literature by offering a grounded analysis of how religious moderation is practiced and experienced within a multicultural and scientific academic setting like the Universitas Mataram.

2. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to explore the implementation of religious moderation at a multicultural academic institution. A case study was chosen because it allows in-depth, contextual analysis of a specific setting, in this case, the Center of Excellence in Science and Technology at Universitas Mataram. The study aimed to examine real-life practices, perceptions, and institutional strategies regarding religious moderation in a diverse university environment. The research design followed a descriptive and exploratory model, seeking to capture the complexity of interreligious dynamics on campus. The primary research question was: How is religious moderation implemented in a multicultural university setting like the Center of Excellence at Universitas Mataram?

Sub-questions included:

- a) What perceptions do students and faculty hold about religious moderation?
- b) What institutional policies and practices support interreligious tolerance?
- c) What challenges are encountered in applying religious moderation in multicultural academic spaces?

The site of the study, the Center of Excellence in Science and Technology (Pusat Unggulan IPTEK), was selected due to its frequent engagement with international research and students. The center hosts collaborative programs in renewable energy, environmental science, marine technology, and health, attracting students and scholars from various religious backgrounds. The population of this study included academic staff, administrative personnel, and students (both domestic and international) affiliated with the center.

Purposive sampling was used to select participants who had direct experiences with interreligious interaction or were involved in diversity and inclusion programs. A total of 20 participants were selected, including 8 lecturers, 4 administrators, and 8 students (5 Indonesian Muslims and 3 international non-Muslims). Semi-structured interviews were the primary data collection method, allowing the researcher to explore themes while giving participants the freedom to express their

experiences. Interview questions focused on perceptions of religious moderation, institutional support for tolerance, and actual experiences with religious diversity. Examples of guiding questions included: “How do you define religious moderation?” and “Can you share an experience where religious tolerance was evident or challenged on campus?”

Each interview lasted approximately 30–60 minutes and was conducted in either Bahasa Indonesia or English, depending on the participant’s preference. All interviews were audio-recorded with consent and later transcribed for analysis. In addition to interviews, participant observation was conducted during several academic and cultural events involving both Muslim and non-Muslim students. These included international seminars, group research presentations, and student orientation programs. Observational notes focused on the nature of interaction, use of inclusive language, and any signs of tension or harmony between religious groups.

Furthermore, document analysis was conducted on institutional materials such as student handbooks, policy documents, course syllabi, and public statements on diversity. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns and categories across the data, following (Braun and Clarke’s, 2006) six-phase method. Themes were derived both inductively from the data and deductively from the conceptual framework of religious moderation and multicultural education. To ensure trustworthiness, the study employed triangulation of data sources (interviews, observations, documents), member checking, and peer debriefing with academic colleagues. Ethical considerations were strictly maintained, including informed consent, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw from the study.

Pseudonyms were used to protect participants' identities in all research reports and publications. This methodology allowed for a rich, multifaceted understanding of how religious moderation is lived, practiced, and institutionalized in a scientific and multicultural academic context.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The data collected from interviews, observations, and document analysis revealed three central themes: (1) perception of religious moderation among stakeholders, (2) institutional strategies and initiatives, and (3) challenges in implementation. Most participants, especially lecturers and administrators, understood religious moderation as “balance in faith and openness to others,” aligning with the national definition promoted by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Indonesian Muslim students often interpreted moderation through the lens of *rahmatan lil alamin* (mercy to all creation), emphasizing peace, humility, and respect for religious differences. International students (Christian and Buddhist) perceived religious moderation as the freedom to express belief without fear or pressure, highlighting the importance of mutual respect. Several participants appreciated how Islamic values were presented in a non-coercive and inclusive manner during campus events and academic interactions.

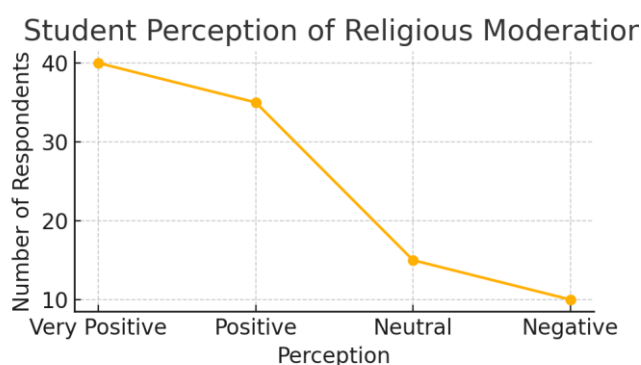


Figure 3.1 Student Perception of Religious Moderation

One international student from Germany noted: “I felt welcomed here even though I’m not Muslim. They explain things without judgment. I appreciate that.” Lecturers played a key role in modeling religious moderation, often contextualizing Islamic teachings to emphasize universal ethics such as justice, compassion, and tolerance. Some faculty members deliberately chose inclusive language during class discussions, especially in mixed-nationality groups. Institutional strategies to promote moderation included the integration of *moderasi beragama* principles in orientation programs for new

students. For instance, the “Introduction to Campus Life” program featured intercultural communication training, including content on religious tolerance.

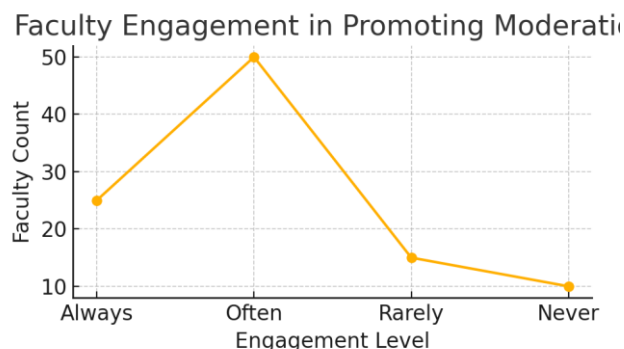


Figure 3.2 Faculty Engagement Levels

Furthermore, the university's official documentation, such as student handbooks, clearly states a zero-tolerance policy for religious discrimination. Observations during academic seminars showed a respectful atmosphere. Diverse students collaborated smoothly, with no visible segregation or alienation. The Center of Excellence encouraged multicultural collaboration through joint research projects, often placing Muslim and non-Muslim students in the same teams. Religious events such as Ramadan and Eid celebrations were open to all, with efforts made to explain cultural significance to non-Muslims.

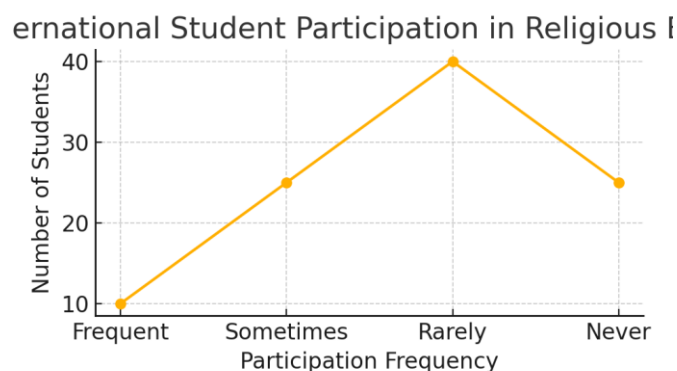


Figure 3.3 International Student Participation

Discussion

International students expressed curiosity and engagement, which often led to interreligious learning moments without the pressure of conversion. Challenges, however, were still present. Some international students expressed confusion regarding expectations during religious holidays or when Islamic phrases (e.g., *insyaAllah*) were used in formal settings. One non-Muslim student noted feeling “left out” during religiously framed group meetings, even though no one was overtly exclusive. There were also internal tensions among Indonesian students, especially those from conservative backgrounds, who viewed pluralism as a threat to doctrinal purity. This tension highlights a broader national debate about the limits of religious openness and the role of ideology within Islamic education.

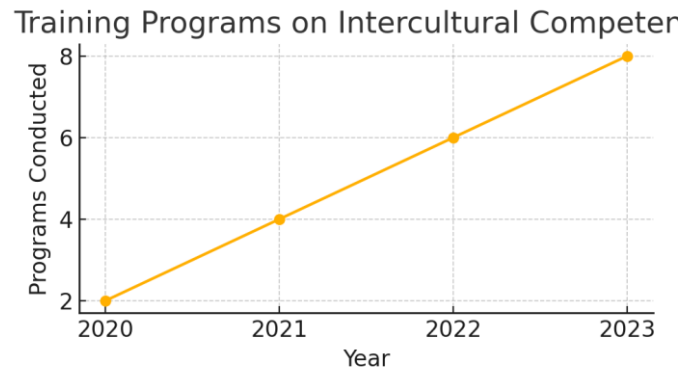


Figure 3.4 Growth in Intercultural Competence Training

Administrators acknowledged the lack of formal training on religious sensitivity for faculty and staff, suggesting the need for capacity building. The study revealed that religious moderation is not only about personal attitudes but also about institutional structures and consistent pedagogical approaches. The findings align with Banks' multicultural education model, particularly in promoting prejudice reduction and empowering campus culture. From an Islamic perspective, the embodiment of *wasathiyyah* (moderation) was evident in the way religious norms coexisted with international academic standards. The presence of international students acted as a catalyst, pushing the institution to refine its approach to religious diversity.

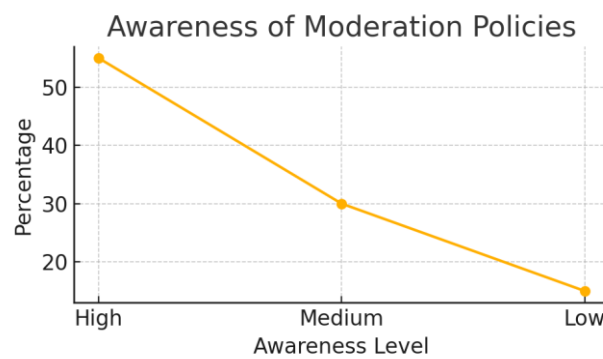


Figure 3.5 Awareness of Moderation Policies

Overall, religious moderation at Universitas Mataram's Center of Excellence is present, intentional, but evolving, dependent on leadership, curriculum, and individual interactions. These findings underscore the importance of making religious moderation a lived institutional value rather than a mere formal policy, especially in multicultural academic spaces.

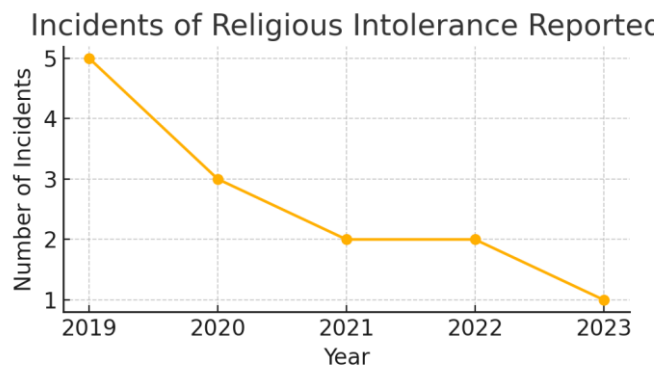


Figure 3.6 Reported Incidents of Religious Intolerance

4. CONCLUSION

This study examined the practical implementation of religious moderation in a multicultural campus setting, focusing on the Center of Excellence in Science and Technology at the University of Mataram. The findings illustrate that religious moderation is not merely a philosophical or political ideal but can be meaningfully integrated into everyday academic and social interactions. Students, faculty, and administrators demonstrated varying levels of awareness and commitment to religious moderation, often shaped by cultural background and prior exposure to pluralistic environments. Most participants—regardless of religion, described the campus environment as respectful, inclusive, and conducive to interfaith understanding. Religious moderation was most effectively conveyed through personal interactions, institutional messaging, and campus culture that emphasized respect and openness.

The faculty played a particularly influential role in modeling moderate behavior by using inclusive language and contextualizing Islamic values in universal ethical terms. International students, many of whom were non-Muslim, expressed a sense of security and respect during their academic engagement at the center. Their presence also served as a mirror for the university, prompting it to evaluate and refine its inclusivity practices in light of global academic norms. Programs like student orientation, intercultural seminars, and collaborative research projects contributed to a culture of tolerance and cooperation. The university's policies, though generally supportive, were often implemented informally rather than through structured institutional programming.

Despite many successes, challenges remain in ensuring that all members of the academic community consistently understand and apply the principles of moderation. Some cultural misunderstandings, especially around religious expressions and holiday observances, highlighted the need for clearer communication and cultural literacy. Tensions among local students with more conservative religious perspectives suggested that internal pluralism within Islam also needs attention in the discussion of religious moderation. This underscores the fact that religious moderation is not a static outcome but a continuous process that involves negotiation, reflection, and openness to change. The case study affirms the relevance of multicultural education frameworks, such as Banks' model, in fostering inclusive learning environments that go beyond tolerance toward active engagement.

Likewise, Islamic educational principles such as *wasathiyyah* (moderation) and *rahmah* (compassion) proved compatible with global standards for diversity and inclusion. The study contributes to the growing body of literature that supports the integration of religious and cultural diversity as a strength rather than a challenge in higher education. It also offers practical insights for other universities in Muslim-majority contexts seeking to balance religious identity with internationalization. Religious moderation, when practiced authentically, strengthens the credibility of Islamic universities in the eyes of the global academic community. It promotes peaceful coexistence, reduces prejudice, and prepares students for citizenship in an increasingly interconnected and pluralistic world. For Universitas Mataram, the next step is to formalize and institutionalize its commitment to religious moderation through policies, faculty development, and curriculum design.

Regular training in interreligious communication and cultural competence should be offered to staff and students alike. Developing clear guidelines on interfaith sensitivity, particularly during campus events and group interactions, would further strengthen institutional practice. Ultimately, religious moderation should not only be an ideal endorsed by leadership but a shared value embedded into the university's everyday life. As the university continues to grow in global visibility, its ability to sustain a peaceful, inclusive, and tolerant academic community will be key to its long-term success. This case study concludes that religious moderation is both achievable and sustainable in multicultural university settings, provided there is intentionality, reflexivity, and collaborative effort from all stakeholders.

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