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The Role of Religious Extracurricular Program Activities in Fostering Religious Moderation among Students of Public Universities

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ABSTRACT. This study explores the role of religious extracurricular activities in fostering religious moderation among university students. In the context of increasing social polarization and extremism, the role of universities in fostering moderate attitudes is crucial. A quantitative approach was used, combining surveys and interviews with 20 students from various faculties, including 10 students who actively participated in religious extracurricular activities and 10 who were not involved. Respondents were aged 18 to 25 and came from various religious backgrounds. The results showed that participation in religious extracurricular activities positively contributed to developing tolerance, empathy, and strengthening of moderation values among university students. The results of this study indicate that extracurricular activities can be an effective means of building a culture of religious moderation, as well as a strategic effort to counteract the potential for radicalization. This study recommends developing more inclusive and dialogue-based extracurricular programs to further promote religious moderation among young people, especially university students.

Keywords: *Religious extracurricular, religious moderation, students, tolerance.*

INTRODUCTION

The role of religious activities outside the classroom in increasing diversity moderation in Indonesia is a relevant and essential topic amid rapidly developing social dynamics (Suharto, 2021; Khotijah et al., 2022; Kafid, 2023). Indonesia, as a country with the largest Muslim majority population in the world, has a great responsibility to promote moderation values in religious life (Naamy & Hariyanto, 2021; Afwadzi & Miski, 2021; Naim et al., 2022; Subchi et al., 2022). Moderation is needed to maintain harmony and stability in a multicultural and multi-religious society (Saifuddin, 2019; Parawati et al., 2021). It is essential, considering that the diversity that exists in Indonesia can be both a strength and a challenge. Therefore, understanding and implementing religious moderation is critical to maintaining social harmony. In the Islamic context, moderation is known as *"wasatiyyah"*, a middle and non-extreme attitude. This concept teaches Muslims to always be in the middle ground, avoiding radical and fanatical attitudes. *Wasatiyyah* is an essential foundation in creating a peaceful and tolerant society. Values such as compassion,

justice and mutual respect are taught in Islam to form a moderate person. The application of *wasatiyyah* covers inter-religious relations and social life in general.

The Indonesian government, religious organizations and the community strategically promote religious moderation (Taufiq & Alkholid, 2021; Muhtifah et al., 2021; Khotijah et al., 2022; Jubba et al., 2022; Wiyani et al., 2023; Mukhibat et al., 2024; Hasan & Juhannis, 2024). Various education and socialization programs have been implemented to instil moderation values in everyday life. The involvement of religious scholars and leaders in spreading the message of moderation is very important to achieve this goal. Ulama has dramatically influenced people towards a more inclusive and tolerant understanding of religion (Rubiyanah & Mauli, 2017; Islam, 2020; Zaduqisti et al., 2020). Thus, collaborative efforts between the government, clerics, and the community determine the success of religious moderation in Indonesia.

Indonesia is a plural and diverse country (Pedersen, 2016; Hoon, 2017; Raihani, 2018; Halik & Verweij, 2018; Latif & Hafid, 2021). Recently, Indonesia's diversity has been tested, where religious extremism is expressed by a group of people in the name of religion, not only on social media but also on the streets. Not only in Indonesia but even the world is facing the challenge of exclusive, explosive and intolerant groups of people in the name of religion. As has been seen, schools are like empty spaces. Inter-religious tolerance is a social mechanism carried out by humans in responding to religious diversity and plurality. In daily life, tolerance can be seen clearly from the social activities carried out daily in the community through gotong royong, which are related to public and individual interests (Faridah, 2013). Indonesia itself highly upholds and respects all existing religious communities because Indonesia consists of various tribes and religions. But in reality, divisions and conflicts with religious backgrounds are very easy to occur, even caused by trivial things (Pangeran, 2017).

The issue of education connects the important position of Islamic Religious Education with the internalization of moderate attitudes. Islamic Religious Education teaches the essence of Islamic teachings which contain the meaning of moderation (Suprapto, 2020; Senata et al., 2021; Khasanah et al., 2023). Islamic religious education is also a learning instrument in the formation of moderate attitudes and behaviour in religion. The content of teachings about tolerance, multiculturalism, and differences in understanding in religious contexts is essential to Islamic Religious Education. Ideally, learning Islamic Religious Education is closely related to the internalization of religious moderation. Moderate attitude is one of the characteristics developed in Islamic religious education. The touch of Islamic religious education in the context of character building is very strong and strategic.

Attitudes and understanding of extremism and radicalism have also penetrated the world of education. Based on the findings of the Institute for the Study of Islam and Peace in 2010 in DKI Jakarta Province, 48.9% of Jabodetabek students were involved in radicalism (Khoirunnissa & Syahidin, 2023). The National Counterterrorism Agency informed that some pesantren teach radicalism and have the potential to make their students terrorists (Anas, 2019). Gerstein and Moeschberger (2003) stated that there are three approaches that can be taken to overcome student conflicts, namely the integration of peace education and school curriculum, constructive problem-solving exercises, and deliberation between friends. This statement is also supported by Akhmadi (2019), who states that this type of conflict resolution is more effective because students can constructively increase their knowledge in resolving conflicts, socialize more, and prevent acts of violence.

The Indonesian Survey Circle survey results, as cited by Anas (2019), show that as many as 31% of students have an intolerant attitude, and even students' understanding of diversity and cultural diversity is considered low. According to Anwar and Muhayati (2021), religious radicalism has reached intellectuals and students. The Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education stated that there are 10 universities that have been exposed to radicalism for a long time,

although various efforts have been made to counteract this understanding but have not been successful (Husna, 2022). According to Azra as cited by Khozin (2013), students of general universities are more easily exposed to radical movements and more easily recruited than students of Islamic religious universities.

This phenomenon is related to the perspective of general university students who tend to see and understand religion secretly and in black and white. In contrast, students of Islamic universities who obtain a diversity of knowledge and Islamic teachings from various scientific sources tend to be open and associate with various points of view in understanding Islamic teachings (Khozin, 2013). It indicates that schools and universities have become arenas for combating transnational ideologies that often disregard national identity. The infiltration of students' minds inside and outside the classroom weakens their understanding of nationality while strengthening a superficial grasp of religious formality. It reflects a half-hearted approach to religion that prioritizes outward appearances (Sutrisno, 2019).

Therefore, religious moderation can be used as a middle way in the midst of religious diversity. The core moderation of Islamic teachings is very relevant in the context of various aspects of religion, customs, ethnic groups, and nations. The cultivation of religious moderation must be understood contextually, not textually, meaning that religious moderation in Indonesia is moderated but moderately by having many cultures, cultures, and customs. (Pratiwi, 2022). One of the most popular cultural theories is modernization theory. This theory adds one more explanatory variable to its model, namely the society's socio-economic development level. According to this theory, the extent to which a society develops economically affects the existence of values believed in or believed by religious people. If a society's economy is developed, people's gratitude for freedom and tolerance values will also increase. So, according to this theory, the lack of tolerance in a Muslim country is related to the low socio-economic development in the country (Ali-Fauzi et al., 2017).

The design of an independent Islamic religious education curriculum is an essential part of efforts to strengthen religious moderation in people's lives. The principles contained in the independent curriculum are very much in line with the values of religious moderation thinking. An independent Islamic religious education curriculum needs a conceptual and rational framework that is moderate and contextual (Muhammad, 2021). It is, of course, a slap to religion by its adherents. Religion is present and revealed by God through revelation to provide instructions and guidelines so that humans can live as well as possible so that the essence of the presence of religion is peace for humanity (Amin, 2012; Asir, 2014). As quoted by Sutrisno (2019), Hakim called for religious moderation to become mainstream in the religious style of Indonesian society. The reason that is apparent and accurate is that moderate religious beliefs have become a characteristic of religious communities in Indonesia and are more suited to the culture of a pluralistic society. Religion in moderation is a religious model practised for a long time and is still needed in the current era (Gultom, 2022).

Islamic religious education, which encompasses normative and sociological values, contributes substantially to national development. The Ministry of Religious Affairs, as regulated by Government Regulation No. 55/2007 on Religious Education, holds a strategic position in enhancing the quality of national character education. The Directorate General of Islamic Education carries out this role, operating under its auspices (Syamsuriah & Ardi, 2022). Unfortunately, the character that reflects a religious person does not always grow in every individual despite being religious. It happens because of the lack of awareness of the teachings of their religion. The problems that occur based on observations at Pamulang University are students deliberately and consciously littering, being late for religious activities, not doing assignments, making excuses for not participating in religious activities, speaking indecently, the number of violations committed by students and even a much more dangerous phenomenon is the spread of religious sects that are misleading and far from moderate.

Pamulang University, based on humanist and religious values, is committed to integrating these principles into all campus activities, including religious extracurricular programs. The organization of this extracurricular activity is one of the initiatives of the religious education institution at Pamulang University, which consists of religious education lecturers. This initiative plays a vital role in implementing the values of religious moderation and creating an academic environment that supports students' intellectual and spiritual development.

This research has high significance, given that the situation of religious moderation in Indonesia is currently facing severe challenges due to the rise of radicalism and extremism, especially among the younger generation, including university students. In this context, religious activities outside the classroom, often overlooked in previous studies, have great potential to serve as an effective instrument in shaping moderate attitudes and reducing societal polarization. Utilizing this space is expected to create a more harmonious and inclusive learning environment. Given the importance of education in character and values formation, this research has strategic significance in supporting government policies related to religious moderation and character education in Indonesia. Based on these issues, this study explores the role of religious extracurricular activities in fostering religious moderation among university students.

METHOD

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design. This approach was chosen to examine the role of religious extracurricular activities in fostering religious moderation among Pamulang University students, where the researcher acts as a critical instrument in data collection. The data collection methods used include documentation and in-depth interviews, which are then reviewed using triangulation techniques to ensure the validity of the data. This research explores the role of religious extracurricular activities in fostering religious moderation among students. This research was conducted during one academic year, from September 2022 to August 2023, at Pamulang University. The stages of the research method can be seen in Table 1 below.

Research Component	Details
Research Approach	Descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design.
Research Objective	Explore the role of Extracurricular Religious Activities (ERA) in fostering religious moderation among students.
Research Location	Universitas Pamulang
Research Period	September 2022 – August 2023
Data Collection Methods	Documentation, in-depth interviews
Interview Structure	Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions to allow flexible exploration of topics.
Sampling Methods	Stratified Sampling: Choosing students from various faculties, including both active ERA participants and non-participants
Data Validation Technique	Triangulation
Interview Focus	- Motivations for joining ERA.
	- Impact on religious attitudes.
	- Interaction with students from different religious backgrounds.
	- Understanding of religious moderation.
	- Challenges and opportunities in ERA.
Data Analysis Method	Thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes from interview responses.

In-depth interviews in this study were designed to explore students' experiences and views on extracurricular religious activities (ERA) to assess the impact of these activities on religious moderation. In addition, the interviews also aimed to identify challenges and opportunities faced in the implementation of ERA. The method used was semi-structured interviews, which provided flexibility in exploring topics with an open-ended question guide. The interview questions included a discussion of students' motivation to participate in ERA, the impact of activities on religious attitudes, interactions with students from other religious backgrounds, and students' understanding of religious moderation.

The interview process was conducted by setting a convenient place and time for the respondents and recording the conversation (with permission) for further analysis. Purposeful sampling was chosen to ensure that the respondents included had relevant information related to ERA. A stratified sample was drawn from different faculties to include students who were active in ERA and those who were not to obtain more diverse views. Data from the interviews were then thematically analyzed to identify meaningful patterns related to ERA's impact on religious moderation among university students.

Data from the interviews were transcribed and analyzed using a thematic approach to identify patterns and central themes from the respondents' answers. This approach allowed the researcher to explore the meaning and context behind respondents' experiences, thus providing a deeper understanding of students' involvement in religious extracurricular activities. Following the idea that knowledge is built through the experience of the five senses, this thematic analysis will help reveal the relationship between these experiences and the religious moderation that develops among students.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The results of a study of 20 students from various faculties at Pamulang University show that students' extracurricular religious activities (ERA) at Pamulang University contribute significantly to the spiritual development and religious moderation attitudes among them. The results of five key questions, namely Motivation to join ERA, Impact on religious attitudes, Interaction with students from different religious backgrounds, Understanding of religious moderation, and Challenges and opportunities in ERA, are discussed.

Figure 1: Extracurricular Religious Activities (ERA) at Darul Ulum Mosque, Pamulang University Center

Motivation for joining ERA.

Most respondents who participated in religious extracurricular activities mentioned that their primary motivation was to deepen their religious understanding and strengthen their faith. In addition, they also saw these activities as a means to make friends with individuals who share similar religious values. One respondent said, *"I want to find friends who share the same values and also deepen my religious knowledge."* This motivation reflects the importance of religious extracurricular activities in building a community supporting students' spiritual development.

Impact on religious attitudes

Respondents reported that participation in religious extracurricular activities positively impacted their religious attitudes, especially in terms of openness and tolerance of differences. Many felt better able to understand other religious perspectives and more comfortable discussing

with friends from different backgrounds. One respondent stated, *"After participating in this activity, I have become more understanding of other religious perspectives and feel more comfortable discussing with friends from different backgrounds."* It shows that the activity successfully fostered an attitude of religious moderation among students.

Interaction with students from different religious backgrounds.

Religious extracurricular activities have improved students' ability to interact with friends from different religious backgrounds. Respondents revealed that they felt more prepared for debates and differences of opinion, with a more open and respectful attitude. One student stated, *"I feel more confident to share my views and respect other people's opinions."* It shows that the activities strengthen religious understanding and build inclusive and tolerant communication skills among students.

Understanding of religious moderation.

Most respondents understood religious moderation as tolerance and mutual respect between religious communities. They argued that religious extracurricular activities are essential in building this attitude of moderation. One respondent explained*, "Moderation is about how we can coexist without losing our respective identities."* It confirms that religious moderation involves maintaining personal beliefs and respecting differences, a value further reinforced through participation in religious activities.

Challenges and opportunities at ERA

Although many students perceived the benefits of religious extracurricular activities, some respondents faced challenges, especially regarding other students' lack of time and interest in participating. One respondent revealed, *"It's very difficult to invite friends who are not interested. Sometimes they prefer other activities."* It suggests that while the activity offers many advantages, its success is often hampered by the lack of enthusiasm from some students, who prefer other activities outside of religious activities.

Based on the above findings, most respondents were motivated to join ERA to deepen their religious understanding and make friends with individuals who share similar values. Participation in these activities has been shown to positively impact religious attitudes, increase openness and tolerance for differences, and strengthen the ability to interact with friends from different religious backgrounds. Despite challenges such as lack of time and interest from other students, ERA still plays an essential role in building an inclusive and supportive community while instilling an understanding of religious moderation that respects each other's identities.

Discussion

The findings regarding students' motivation to join extracurricular religious activities (ERA) show that most respondents have clear goals in deepening religious understanding and strengthening faith. It aligns with Maslow's theory of motivation, as revealed by Navy (2020), which emphasizes that individuals require self-actualization, where the search for meaning and understanding of religion is part of this process. Involvement in ERA as a means to make friends with individuals who share similar values also confirms the importance of social ties in developing religious identity. Communities formed through religious activities can increase social support, crucial for students facing academic and daily life challenges (Mishra, 2020; Astuti et al., 2024). Research by Satra and Muarifah (2024) also shows that individuals involved in religious activities often experience increased life satisfaction and psychological well-being. Thus, students' motivation to join ERA reflects a desire to learn, deepen faith, and build a supportive social network, an essential element in their spiritual and social development.

The positive impact of students' participation in extracurricular religious activities (ERA) on their religious attitudes indicates that involvement in these activities can increase openness and tolerance towards differences. It aligns with the view that social interaction in a religious context can broaden an individual's understanding of different perspectives, essential in developing an attitude of religious moderation. A study by Lauring and Selmer (2012) confirmed that participation in religious organizations is related to increased openness to diversity, including understanding other religious beliefs and practices. Research by Saroglou (2010) also showed that individuals active in religious activities tend to be more tolerant of differences because they can dialogue and share experiences with people from different backgrounds.

The increase in students' ability to interact with friends from different religious backgrounds through extracurricular religious activities (ERA) indicates that these activities are essential in building inclusive social and communication skills among students. Respondents reported feeling more prepared to deal with debates and differences of opinion, indicating development in interpersonal skills and attitudes of mutual respect. It shows the importance of interfaith interaction in the educational context, as Suryani and Muslim (2024) explored the impact of the educational environment on students' attitudes towards tolerance. In addition, according to them, religious diversity in schools increases students' appreciation of different perspectives and fosters inclusive attitudes.

A study conducted by Tondok and colleagues (2022) in the field of education showed that an interfaith dialogue-based intervention program also successfully reduced prejudice in educational environments, especially in the context of religious pluralism. They found that interfaith interactions guided in a safe and open environment were essential in building more profound understanding between religious groups and fostering more inclusive attitudes. By increasing students' confidence in discussing and interacting with others, ERA can help create a more open and supportive atmosphere for diversity in the academic community.

The understanding of religious moderation among respondents showed that most of them interpreted moderation as an attitude of tolerance and mutual respect between religious communities. The emphasis on the importance of balance between maintaining personal beliefs and respecting differences reflects the essence of religious moderation, which is further strengthened through participation in religious extracurricular activities. Religious moderation is not only about being tolerant but also about positive interactions between different groups. Religious moderation involves constructive dialogue and a deeper understanding of others' beliefs and practices, which in turn can promote peace and harmony in diverse societies (Abu-Nimer, 2001; Woodhead & Catto, 2012; Subchi et al., 2022; Fadil et al., 2024).

Findings on the challenges and opportunities in extracurricular religious activities (ERA) indicate that while the benefits of participating in ERA are acknowledged, significant barriers hinder student participation. Respondents identified other students' lack of time and interest as critical challenges. Many students preferred to engage in other activities that they considered more exciting or relevant to their needs. It reflects the reality that students often have to choose between activities on offer in a busy educational environment, and those deemed less attractive can easily be marginalized. The challenges faced in ERA are consistent with findings in the literature that students' motivation to participate in extracurricular activities is often influenced by external factors such as time, interest, and the types of activities available (Eccles et al., 2003; Fredricks & Eccles, 2006; Patrick et al., 2007). Time constraints are a common issue student's face, especially in an era where they are also involved in high academic demands and other social activities.

Intrinsic motivation comes from personal interest and satisfaction and is critical to successful activity participation (Diwakar et al., 2023; Ogbanufe & Ge, 2023). Students are unlikely to participate if they do not feel connected or interested in the activities offered. It can be compounded by group norms where other students may not share the same interest in ERA,

creating the perception that the activity is not valuable or relevant. However, this challenge also creates an opportunity for developing better strategies to promote ERA. These activities can be integrated with more engaging approaches, such as using technology, collaborative events, or developing programs more relevant to students' interests. Student engagement can increase when activities are tailored to their interests and needs. Therefore, efforts to involve students in designing more engaging and relevant activities can help overcome this challenge.

Religious moderation is a perspective and attitude of acting in the middle, in the sense of responding to events or realities that occur in a balanced manner following religious teachings and, at the same time, resolving various religious problems by fostering an attitude of cooperation, mutual respect, tolerance in society, both by people of different religions, cultures, races and so on, not wavering in terms of mutual respect for the sake of achieving peace and unity of the people of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia. A fair and balanced attitude is the basic principle of religious moderation, tolerance, egalitarianism, deliberation, uprightness, and firmness. It means that religious moderation is the key to creating a climate of tolerance and harmony in living together. Religious moderation in Islam is governed by justice, balance, and tolerance (Kamali, M. H. (2015; Wani et al., 2015; Abubakar et al., 2021; Hidayat et al., 2023).

Religious moderation does not open room for compromise regarding *ushuluddin, far'iyyah* issues that originate from *qath'i dalil* and *far'iyyah* issues that are *mujma' 'alaih*. Religious moderation in Islam also does not allow Muslims to criticize or hurt adherents of other religions. It is a sign that Islam is a religion of *rahmatan lil 'alamin*. By making cultural and citizenship literacy in the era of the Industrial Revolution 4.0 a stepping stone in forming an attitude of religious moderation, Indonesian citizens will be increasingly aware of their national identity as citizens who live in diversity so that the unity and integrity of Indonesia within the framework of Bhinneka Tunggal Ika is increasingly maintained.

CONCLUSION

Student participation in extracurricular religious activities (ERA) significantly positively impacts religious understanding, religious moderation attitudes, and social interaction skills. Students' motivation to join ERA is focused on strengthening faith and forming supportive social networks. The importance of ERA in educational management is to increase tolerance and mutual respect in a diverse society. However, challenges such as lack of time and peer interest must be addressed to increase participation. Therefore, further research is recommended to explore innovative strategies for promoting ERA and understand the factors influencing student engagement.

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