



Religious Moderation as a Pillar of Character Education in the Digital Era

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the urgency of religious moderation, focusing on tolerance as a pillar of character education in the digital era, and to identify strategies for strengthening it. The study employed a library research method using documentation techniques to collect data from books, policy documents, and national and international scholarly articles retrieved through Google Scholar, Publish or Perish, and journal databases. The data were analyzed using content analysis. A total of 25 articles that met the inclusion criteria were selected as the primary sources. The findings indicate that tolerance is the most practical indicator of religious moderation in shaping students' character within a pluralistic society. The digital era presents challenges such as opinion polarization, echo chambers, hate speech, and digital intolerance that may weaken tolerant attitudes. Strengthening tolerance can be achieved through curriculum integration, teachers' role modeling, habituation of tolerant behavior, enhancement of religious digital literacy, and collaboration among schools, families, and communities. This study contributes conceptually by synthesizing strategies for strengthening tolerance as a foundation for character education that is responsive to the challenges of the digital era. Theoretically and practically, these findings imply that religious moderation programs in schools should place tolerance at the center of curriculum design, teacher training, and digital literacy initiatives rather than treating it as a peripheral topic. This study is limited by its reliance on secondary literature obtained through a library research design, which does not involve direct empirical validation in the field, and by the restricted number and scope of the reviewed articles, so the findings should be interpreted as a conceptual synthesis rather than a generalizable empirical result.

Keywords: Character Education; Digital Era; Library Research; Religious Moderation; Tolerance.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis urgensi moderasi beragama dengan berfokus pada nilai toleransi sebagai pilar pendidikan karakter di era digital serta mengidentifikasi strategi penguatannya. Penelitian menggunakan metode studi kepustakaan (library research) dengan teknik pengumpulan data berupa dokumentasi terhadap buku, dokumen kebijakan, dan artikel ilmiah nasional maupun internasional yang diperoleh melalui Google Scholar, Publish or Perish, dan portal jurnal. Data dianalisis menggunakan teknik analisis isi (content analysis). Sebanyak 25 artikel yang memenuhi kriteria inklusi dijadikan sumber utama penelitian. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa toleransi merupakan indikator moderasi beragama yang paling operasional dalam membentuk karakter peserta didik di tengah masyarakat yang majemuk. Era digital menghadirkan tantangan berupa polarisasi opini, echo chamber, penyebaran ujaran kebencian, dan intoleransi digital yang berpotensi melemahkan karakter toleran. Penguatan toleransi dapat dilakukan melalui integrasi nilai moderasi beragama dalam kurikulum, keteladanan pendidik, pembiasaan sikap toleran, penguatan literasi digital keagamaan, serta kolaborasi antara sekolah, keluarga, dan masyarakat. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi

konseptual berupa sintesis strategi penguatan toleransi sebagai landasan pendidikan karakter yang relevan dengan tantangan era digital. Secara teoretis dan praktis, temuan ini mengimplikasikan bahwa program moderasi beragama di sekolah perlu menempatkan toleransi sebagai fokus utama dalam desain kurikulum, pelatihan guru, dan penguatan literasi digital, bukan sekadar sebagai materi pelengkap. Penelitian ini memiliki keterbatasan karena hanya mengandalkan data sekunder melalui desain studi kepustakaan tanpa validasi empiris langsung di lapangan, serta terbatas pada jumlah dan cakupan artikel yang ditelaah, sehingga temuannya perlu dipahami sebagai sintesis konseptual dan bukan generalisasi empiris.

Kata kunci: Era Digital; Moderasi Beragama; Pendidikan Karakter; Studi Kepustakaan; Toleransi.

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Introduction

Indonesia is a country with a high level of religious, ethnic, cultural, and racial diversity. This diversity constitutes a valuable national asset that must be preserved, yet it may also create challenges when people are unable to respond appropriately to differences. In recent years, various cases of intolerance, hate speech based on ethnicity, religion, race, and intergroup relations (SARA), as well as the spread of radical ideologies, have continued to occur. Unlike in the past, the dissemination of such ideologies no longer takes place solely through face-to-face meetings or religious forums but also through digital media. The rapid development of social media has enabled everyone, including students, to access religious information easily without adequate filtering or guidance. This situation increases the risk that students may be exposed to misleading, provocative, or even extremist religious content.

To address these challenges, the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia has, since 2019, established religious moderation as one of the national priorities in promoting harmonious religious and social life. Religious moderation is understood as taking the middle path, avoiding excessiveness, and adhering to established religious principles. According to Shihab (2019), moderation is an attitude that leads individuals to act fairly, maintain balance, and avoid behaviors that deviate from Allah's commands. Meanwhile, Wulansari Anita (2020) defines moderation as reducing violence and avoiding extremist attitudes. Therefore, religious moderation can be understood as a perspective, attitude, and practice of religion that rejects all forms of extremism in religious life.

This policy is reflected in four main indicators: national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and accommodation of local culture. Among these four indicators, tolerance has the strongest relevance to students' daily lives, both in face-to-face

interactions at school and in their activities within digital spaces. Tolerance refers to the attitude of respecting, appreciating, and providing space for every individual to hold and express their beliefs, even when they differ from one's own beliefs (Lukman Hakim Saifuddin, 2019).

Conversely, a lack of tolerance may give rise to various negative behaviors, including exclusivism, excessive fanaticism, and even the justification of violence in the name of religion. Such intolerance does not emerge spontaneously but is influenced by various factors. Halimah (2018) explains that intolerance may stem from personality traits, dogmatic religious understanding, power relations, and the belief that one's own individual or group possesses the absolute truth.

On the other hand, the advancement of digital technology has introduced new challenges to the character development of younger generations. Young people who grow up in a digital environment face numerous challenges in shaping their character. One of the most significant challenges is the abundance of unfiltered information available through social media (Purba et al., 2024). This condition creates fertile ground for opinion polarization, echo chambers, and religiously motivated cyberbullying, all of which gradually erode students' attitudes of tolerance. These circumstances indicate that character education can no longer rely solely on conventional approaches but must be strengthened by value-based frameworks that are relevant to contemporary contexts, one of which is religious moderation.

Character education is a conscious and systematic effort to instill moral, ethical, and religious values in students so that they develop positive character and the ability to behave according to prevailing social norms (Salsa Nurhabibah et al., 2025). Character education is not limited to the acquisition of cognitive knowledge but also focuses on the development of attitudes and behaviors reflected in everyday life. Therefore, the success of character education largely depends on the internalization of values through learning activities, habituation, role modeling, and a supportive educational environment.

Within the context of Indonesia's pluralistic society, religious moderation, with tolerance as one of its primary indicators, provides a relevant value framework to be integrated into character education. Such integration can be implemented through the formal curriculum, school culture, and the hidden curriculum (Mufi et al., 2023), enabling students not only to understand the importance of respecting differences conceptually but also to practice these values in their daily lives, including when

interacting in digital environments. Consequently, tolerance should not merely become a component of religious education but should serve as the foundation for developing students' inclusive character, respect for diversity, and ability to live peacefully within a multicultural society.

Previous studies have examined the relationship between religious moderation and character education across various educational levels, including elementary education (Alhafizh & Setiawan, 2025; Anita et al., 2025; Saleh et al., 2025), secondary education (Kurniawan & Kuswanto, 2026), Islamic boarding schools (Rizwadi et al., 2023; Rofi'ah & Yenuri, 2024), and Islamic higher education institutions (Sarbin et al., 2025). Other studies have explored the challenges of the digital era, such as religious digital literacy in Islamic Religious Education (Rajaminsah et al., 2025) and the promotion of digital tolerance among Generation Z (Masrur et al., 2025). Nevertheless, studies that specifically focus on tolerance as the primary perspective for explaining the relationship between religious moderation and character education in the digital era remain limited. Most previous studies have discussed religious moderation by combining its four indicators or have treated tolerance as an independent concept. As a result, the role of tolerance as the principal indicator in shaping students' character has not been thoroughly explored. This research gap forms the basis of the present study.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to explain the importance of religious moderation by focusing on tolerance as a pillar of character education in the digital era. It also seeks to examine various strategies for strengthening tolerance based on findings from previous studies. The novelty of this study lies in positioning tolerance, rather than the four indicators of religious moderation combined, as the primary lens for examining character education, and in synthesizing empirical findings across educational levels from early childhood to higher education into a single strategic framework that has not been offered by previous, more fragmented studies. The contribution of this study therefore lies in integrating the concept of religious moderation promoted by the Indonesian government with empirical findings from scholarly articles across different educational levels. Accordingly, this study is expected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the role of tolerance as the core value of religious moderation in shaping students' character amid the rapid development of digital technology.

Methods

This study employed a library research method, which involves a series of activities including collecting, reading, and analyzing research materials without conducting direct fieldwork (Zed, 2014). The research data were derived from official documents, particularly the book *Religious Moderation* published by the Research and Development Agency and Education and Training Agency of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia (2019), which served as the primary conceptual reference. Additional data sources included national and international scholarly journal articles discussing religious moderation, tolerance, character education, and the digital era, published between 2019 and 2026.

Data were collected using the documentation technique, involving the identification and retrieval of relevant books, journals, and scholarly articles. The literature search was conducted through Google Scholar, Publish or Perish, and various academic journal databases using the keywords "*religious moderation*," "*tolerance*," "*character education*," and "*digital era*." Articles that did not clearly explain the specific roles or strategies examined, as well as those that were not relevant to the research topic, were excluded from the review. Through the processes of identification, eligibility assessment, and inclusion, a total of 25 articles met the predetermined criteria and were selected for in-depth analysis.

The data were analyzed using content analysis, a systematic technique for drawing valid conclusions from collected documents and textual data. The findings from each selected article were subsequently classified into four interrelated themes: (1) tolerance as the core value of religious moderation; (2) tolerance as the foundation of character education across different educational levels; (3) challenges to tolerance in the digital era; and (4) strategies for strengthening tolerance through religious moderation in the digital era.

Result and Discussion

The findings indicate that the initial literature search, using the keywords described in the methodology section, yielded a large number of journal articles and scholarly documents. Most of these sources were excluded because they were not aligned with the focus of this study, either because they did not explicitly examine the relationship between religious moderation, tolerance, and character education, or

because they did not specifically describe the roles or strategies under investigation. Following the screening process, approximately 25 articles met the inclusion criteria and were selected for further analysis.

Based on the selected studies, it was identified that the majority employed qualitative approaches, including case studies, phenomenological studies, descriptive research, and library research, while the remaining studies adopted mixed methods or systematic literature review approaches. In terms of educational levels, the reviewed studies covered early childhood education, elementary schools, secondary schools, Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), and Islamic higher education institutions. This distribution indicates that religious moderation and tolerance have become important issues across all educational levels. However, studies explicitly examining their relationship with the digital era have only become more prominent in publications since 2024, reflecting the growing scholarly attention to religious digital literacy in the post-pandemic period.

Tolerance as the Core Value of Religious Moderation

In Islam, tolerance is commonly referred to as *tasamuh*. *Tasamuh* denotes an attitude of respecting and appreciating differences in religion, ethnicity, race, culture, and worldview, while allowing every individual the freedom to practice their beliefs and express their views without coercion. From an Islamic perspective, *tasamuh* does not imply blending religious teachings or equating all religions. Rather, it emphasizes respecting every individual's right to practice their own faith without diminishing one's commitment to the teachings of one's religion. Therefore, *tasamuh* is manifested through openness, broad-mindedness, respect for diversity, and the maintenance of harmonious social relationships (Abdul Aziz & Anam, 2021).

This value is grounded in several Qur'anic teachings, including Qur'an 6:108 (Surah Al-An'am), which prohibits insulting the objects of worship of other religions to prevent hostility; Qur'an 109:1–6 (Surah Al-Kafirun), which affirms respect for differences in religious belief; and Qur'an 5:48 (Surah Al-Ma'idah), which emphasizes that diversity is part of Allah's divine decree and that humanity is encouraged to compete in doing good deeds (Abdul Aziz & Anam, 2021). As one of the fundamental values of religious moderation, *tasamuh* has received considerable attention in scholarly studies examining its role in fostering character development and promoting harmonious social life.

Findings from several studies affirm that tolerance occupies the most central position within the framework of religious moderation. Nur Hidayati (2025) reconstructs the concepts of *tasamuh* (tolerance), *i'tidal* (justice), and *tawazun* (balance) as an inseparable set of values, arguing that tolerance serves as the gateway to achieving justice and balance in socio-religious relationships. Similar findings are reported by Mukhlisin et al. (2026), who demonstrate that the value of *tawassuth* is reflected in balanced and non-extremist religious attitudes, while *tasamuh* is specifically expressed through respect for religious and cultural differences.

Iqbal (2023) and Qomariah et al. (2026) further strengthen this argument from the perspective of nation-building. Their studies indicate that religious extremism generally originates from rigid and literal interpretations of religious teachings. Consequently, character education grounded in religious moderation, with tolerance as its core value, is regarded as a key strategy for preventing radicalism while simultaneously strengthening national identity and civic awareness. The consistency of these findings across studies with diverse methodological approaches and institutional contexts reinforces the argument that tolerance is not merely one of the four indicators of religious moderation, but rather the most operational indicator and the one most readily observed in everyday educational interactions.

Tolerance as the Foundation of Character Education Across Educational Levels

At the early childhood and elementary education levels, the promotion of tolerance is generally carried out through habituation and role modeling. Wahyuna et al. (2025) found that in *Raudhatul Athfal* (RA), the values of religious moderation are instilled through routine practices such as greeting others, praying, maintaining cleanliness, and cultivating attitudes of tolerance and patriotism, with particular emphasis on collaboration between teachers and parents from an early age. These findings are consistent with those of (Anita et al., 2025), who emphasize the importance of religious moderation education beginning in early childhood, although both studies also identify challenges, including limited teacher training and the lack of optimal school policies. At the elementary school level, Widiastuti et al. (2023) found a positive relationship between students' tolerance and their ability to cooperate with others. Likewise, Kamal (2023) and Tamaeka (2022) argue that teachers' role modeling, habitual practice, and the creation of a supportive learning environment are key strategies for fostering tolerance at this educational stage.

At the secondary school and madrasah levels, the integration of religious moderation values is primarily implemented through Islamic Religious Education (IRE). Kurniawan and Kuswanto (2026) found that the internalization of religious moderation values is achieved through dialogical learning, teachers' role modeling, the habituation of positive attitudes, and students' reflection on their learning experiences. This process contributes to the development of tolerant attitudes, reflected in mutual respect, openness to differences, and inclusive social interactions. These findings highlight that Islamic Religious Education serves not merely as a medium for transmitting religious knowledge but also as a vehicle for value transformation. Similarly, Yuwanda et al. (2026) reported that tolerance is cultivated through the integration of school policies, religious habituation, and pedagogical strategies employed by Islamic Religious Education teachers, including heartfelt advice, group discussions, and interactive question-and-answer sessions on religious issues. Together, these findings demonstrate that tolerance at the secondary and madrasah levels is fostered through the consistent combination of dialogical learning, teacher role modeling, and institutional habituation.

Within the context of Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), the strengthening of tolerance has distinctive characteristics because it takes place within an intensive and collective educational environment. Rizwadi et al. (2023) proposed the HUAM (Habituation, Understanding, Application, Meaning) model, which has proven effective in developing students with moderate religious character at Pondok Pesantren Salafiyah Samarinda. Meanwhile, Rofi'ah and Yenuri (2024) found that the revitalization of the value of *tasamuh* is achieved through multilingual programs, in-depth study of classical Islamic texts, and the exemplary conduct of *kiai* (Islamic boarding school leaders). At the level of Islamic higher education, Sarbini et al. (2025) and Syamsuriah et al. (2025) emphasize the importance of a more systematic model of character education that integrates moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action, enabling university students not only to understand tolerance cognitively but also to internalize and practice it in their daily lives.

The consistency of these findings across different educational levels indicates that although the strategies employed vary according to institutional contexts, tolerance consistently emerges as the intended outcome of character education based on religious moderation. This reinforces the argument that tolerance is not an isolated value but rather the cumulative result of a continuous and systematic character education process. This conclusion is further supported by Aulia et al. (2024), whose comparative analysis

demonstrates that the effectiveness of cultivating tolerance is strongly influenced by the social environment, school policies, and students' socio-economic conditions.

Challenges to Tolerance in the Digital Era

Several of the reviewed studies specifically highlight the new challenges faced by character education, particularly in fostering tolerance, as a consequence of digitalization. Purba et al. (2024) identified that the rapid advancement of digital technology has introduced challenges such as the increasing use of social media without adequate supervision, cyberbullying, and declining face-to-face social interaction, all of which have the potential to erode students' empathy and social awareness. In the more specific context of religious issues, (Rajaminsah et al., 2025) found that the post-truth era requires students to be able to access, evaluate, and verify religious information critically, as the overwhelming flow of religious content in digital spaces is not always accompanied by accuracy or balance.

A more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of tolerance in digital spaces is provided by Masrur et al. (2025), who found that social media serves a dual function. On the one hand, it acts as a digital public sphere that facilitates social learning, identity negotiation, and the promotion of tolerance through interfaith dialogue. On the other hand, social media algorithms contribute to the formation of echo chambers, limiting users' exposure to diverse perspectives. Furthermore, All et al. (2025) and Sahri and Aziz (2025) reported that the implementation of blended learning, gamification, and digital learning media—such as educational videos on tolerance and digital projects including vlogs, posters, and infographics—has proven effective in enhancing both students' digital literacy and their understanding of tolerance. These findings suggest that the digital era should not be viewed solely as a threat to the cultivation of tolerance; rather, it can also serve as a powerful instrument for strengthening tolerance, provided that it is supported by appropriate pedagogical strategies.

Strategies for Strengthening Tolerance through Religious Moderation in the Digital Era

By synthesizing the findings of all the reviewed studies, this research identifies five key strategies for strengthening tolerance through religious moderation that consistently emerge across different educational levels and institutional contexts. These strategies include: (1) integrating the values of religious moderation into the curriculum and learning materials through the stages of value transformation, value transaction, and value internalization (Muafiq & Muali, 2025; Mufi et al., 2023); (2) educators' role modeling, which is consistently identified as a determining factor in the successful

cultivation of tolerance across educational settings; (3) the habituation of tolerant behavior in daily life within schools, *madrasahs*, and *pesantren*; (4) strengthening religious digital literacy, a strategy that is particularly relevant in the digital era to equip students with the ability to critically evaluate and filter religious information; and (5) collaboration among the three centers of education, namely schools, families, and communities (including digital communities), which is consistently regarded as a prerequisite for sustaining the internalization of tolerance values.

When examined through the framework of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action, these five strategies complement one another. Curriculum integration and religious digital literacy primarily contribute to the development of moral knowing, while educators' role modeling and the habituation of tolerant behavior foster moral feeling and moral action. Meanwhile, collaboration among the three centers of education serves as a reinforcing mechanism that maintains the consistency of these three dimensions beyond the classroom, including within digital environments that cannot be fully supervised by schools.

Unlike most previous studies, which discuss religious moderation in general terms or treat tolerance as only one among many character values, this study specifically positions tolerance as the key indicator of religious moderation that is most relevant to the challenges of the digital era. Furthermore, it synthesizes findings from studies conducted across various educational levels into a comprehensive and coherent strategic framework that promotes the development of tolerance progressively from the cognitive domain to the affective and conative domains.

Conclusion

The synthesis of the reviewed scholarly articles demonstrates that religious moderation has a high degree of urgency as a pillar of character education in the digital era, with tolerance serving as the most operational indicator and the one that most directly influences students' daily interactions, both in classroom settings and in digital spaces. Tolerance functions as the foundation for the other indicators of religious moderation because, without a tolerant attitude, national commitment, non-violence, and accommodation of local culture cannot be fully realized. The digital era has introduced new challenges, including opinion polarization, echo chambers, and religion-based cyberbullying, which require character education to move beyond conventional approaches, while at the same time offering effective instruments for

strengthening tolerance when supported by appropriate pedagogical strategies. The findings further indicate that strengthening tolerance is most effective when implemented through five complementary strategies: curriculum integration, educators' role modeling, the habituation of tolerant behavior, the enhancement of religious digital literacy, and collaboration among the three centers of education, namely schools, families, and communities.

These findings imply that religious moderation, particularly the value of tolerance, should be positioned not merely as supplementary learning content but as a guiding perspective that underpins the entire process of character education, with practical relevance for curriculum designers, teacher training programs, and school policies on digital literacy. This study is limited by its reliance on a library research design based on secondary literature, which does not involve direct empirical validation in the field, and by the restricted number and scope of the 25 reviewed articles, so the resulting strategic framework remains conceptual rather than empirically tested. Future research is therefore recommended to empirically examine the effectiveness of these five strategies in specific educational contexts and to develop more specific instruments for measuring digital tolerance among students.

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