

STRENGTHENING RELIGIOUS MODERATION THROUGH COMMUNITY-BASED ISLAMIC EDUCATION PROGRAMS

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Abstract

This community service programme implemented community-based Islamic education initiatives with the aim of promoting religious moderation. The programme was implemented using participatory methods involving local community members, teachers, and religious authorities. The principal activities comprised collaborative discussions, mentoring sessions, and instructional workshops that emphasised inclusive religious understanding, tolerance, and social harmony. Data were collected through observations, participant feedback, and reflective assessments to evaluate shifts in participants' understanding of and attitudes toward religious diversity. The findings indicate that community-based Islamic education effectively deepens participants' understanding of moderate religious principles and fosters positive social interactions. The programme further demonstrates that collaborative and contextual pedagogical approaches can serve as strategic tools for promoting social cohesion and countering exclusivism in diverse societies. The study concludes that well-organised community engagement grounded in Islamic educational principles contributes significantly to fostering religious moderation and sustained social harmony.

Keywords: *Religious Moderation; Community Engagement; Islamic Education; Community-Based Learning; Social Harmony*

A. Introduction

Religious moderation has become increasingly significant in recent years, particularly in pluralistic communities that must navigate social, cultural, and ideological diversity (Fuadi, FaFishol, Rifa'i, Triana, & Ibrahim, 2024; Musyarrofah & Zulhannan, 2023). The advent of digital media and globalisation has facilitated the spread of exclusivist religious interpretations and intensified interaction between communities. These dynamics present major challenges to social harmony, particularly at the grassroots level, where community leaders and informal learning environments frequently influence religious understanding (Hanafi et al., 2022; Haris, Salikin, Sahrodi, & Fatimah, 2023; Ropi, 2019). As a result, there is a growing demand for practical and context-sensitive strategies to foster inclusive religious values in local communities.

This problem is addressed in large part by community-based Islamic education (Syarif, 2021). Community learning spaces such as mosques, study groups, and neighbourhood religious circles provide flexible and culturally embedded forums for social engagement and religious education, in contrast to formal educational institutions (Afwadzi, Sumbulah, Ali, & Qudsy, 2024; Musyahid, 2023). Community-based Islamic education can transform religious moderation from an abstract idea into a concrete social practice when designed employing participatory and dialogical methods (Arifinsyah, Andy, & Damanik, 2020; Husna & Thohir, 2020). This approach allows community members to critically engage with



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Islamic teachings on balance (*wasatiyyah*), justice, and coexistence, while situating these principles in the context of their daily social lives (Mulyana, 2023).

This community service programme aims to promote religious moderation by engaging religious leaders, teachers, and community members in interactive Islamic education activities (Pajarianto, Pribad, & Sari, 2022; Subchi, Zulkifli, Latifa, & Sa'diyah, 2022; Wardi et al., 2023). The curriculum promotes inclusive religious understanding and social responsibility through dialogue, mentorship, and cooperative learning (Brockner & Kunkler, 2013; Kamaludin & Purnama, 2021). The initiative seeks to deepen understanding of moderate religious values and encourage positive social interactions by engaging communities as active participants (Afwadzi & Miski, 2021; Chotimah, Qudsy, & Yusuf, 2025). Ultimately, this programme demonstrates that community-based Islamic education can serve as a powerful tool for fostering social harmony and resilience in diverse communities.

B. Method

Using a participatory and action-oriented approach, this community service programme aims to foster religious moderation through Islamic education at the community level (Nguyen, 2009). The programme was implemented in a neighbourhood characterised by religious and social diversity, where informal religious education exerts considerable influence on group norms and behaviours (Kohler et al., 2021). Religious leaders, Islamic education facilitators, youth representatives, and community members who were actively involved in religious and social activities constituted the principal participants (Méndez, Bacon, & Cohen, 2013). Their involvement was essential for ensuring that the programme was contextually relevant and locally owned.

The implementation process comprised three phases: preparation, execution, and assessment (Papamichail & Perić, 2023). During the planning phase, a preliminary needs assessment was conducted through informal observations and discussions with community leaders to identify the principal concerns regarding religious understanding and social interaction (Nagy, 2024). This evaluation formed the basis for the creation of instructional materials and learning approaches that highlight religious moderation, inclusion, and social harmony. The implementation phase comprised a series of instructional seminars, mentorship meetings, and guided group discussions (Small, 1995). These activities used collaborative and dialogical learning approaches to help participants consider Islamic teachings on moderation (*wasatiyyah*), justice, and coexistence in the context of their own lives.

The evaluation phase prioritised formative and reflective assessment over quantitative measurement (Small & Uttal, 2005). Participant observations, feedback sessions, and facilitators' reflective notes provided the data. The data were thematically analysed to determine how participants' understanding, behaviour, and social interactions had changed (Kazutaka, 2012). Throughout the programme, ethical considerations were upheld through voluntary participation, mutual respect, and cultural sensitivity. Overall, this methodological approach enabled the programme to function as a vehicle for community empowerment and social change, in addition to serving as an educational intervention.

C. Results and Discussion

1. Results

The implementation of the community service programme yielded several notable outcomes with respect to participants' understanding of religious moderation, patterns of social interaction, and the broader dynamics of learning within the community (Hasan, Azizah, & Rozaq, 2023; Kruglanski et al., 2014). Reflecting the participatory and reflective character of the programme, these findings are presented thematically and descriptively. The results emphasise qualitative changes observed throughout and after the implementation of community-based Islamic education programmes, rather than numerical measures (Furrow & Roth, 2002; Chatters, 2000).

One of the programme's most significant outcomes was the improved knowledge and understanding of religious moderation among participants (Brody et al., 2015; Valente, Palinkas, Czaja, Chu, & Brown, 2015). Discussions with community members prior to the programme indicated that religious moderation was frequently perceived as a theoretical concept associated with government policy or elite academic discourse. For many participants, religious dedication was synonymous with a strict adherence to ritual practices, but they failed to link these practices to larger ethical principles like justice, tolerance, and social responsibility (Fallot, 2007). Participants gradually developed a deeper understanding of moderation grounded in Islamic teachings, notably the concept of *wasatiyyah*, through guided discussions and workshops. They started to see moderation as a genuine representation of Islamic values that highlight balance, compassion, and respect for diversity, rather than a compromise of faith (Ely, 2004).

The manner in which participants articulated religious concepts during group discussions demonstrated this shift in understanding. When discussing social concerns in their community, participants made increasing use of inclusive terminology and referred to Qur'anic precepts about justice (*'adl*), mercy (*rahmah*), and cooperation (*ta'awun*) (Yorio & Ye, 2012). Religious leaders who participated in the programme also demonstrated a greater degree of openness in discussing contemporary social concerns, such as the impact of social media on religious discourse and intergroup relations (Baldwin, Christian, Berkeljon, & Shadish, 2012). This finding suggests that community-based Islamic education, when delivered through participatory and dialogical approaches, can effectively bridge the gap between religious ideology and social realities.

The change in participants' perspectives on diversity and conversation was another notable outcome. Some participants were initially hesitant to engage in discussions involving varying religious interpretations or divergent social viewpoints. This reticence stemmed from concerns about theological disagreement and the prospect of conflict. As the programme progressed, however, the structured interactive workshops fostered a welcoming and respectful environment for dialogue. Participants' openness to hearing different viewpoints and expressing their own opinions without animosity increased. The younger participants were particularly affected by this change, demonstrating greater confidence in discussing sensitive questions of religion and social coexistence.

Additionally, the programme contributed to greater social cohesion within the community. Participants from various backgrounds interacted more frequently and meaningfully through mentoring sessions and collaborative learning activities (Jennings et al., 2017). These interactions extended beyond organised programme sessions and were reflected in everyday social behaviours, such as increased collaboration in community events and greater mutual support among residents. In both online and offline interactions, several participants said they felt more at ease interacting with those who had opposing opinions and were more conscious of maintaining respectful dialogue (Merzel & D'Afflitti, 2003). This finding underscores the role of community-based education in fostering not only cognitive but also relational change.

The programme also yielded beneficial outcomes at the community and institutional levels, beyond changes at the individual level. Religious leaders and teachers participating in the programme began to incorporate themes of moderation and inclusivity into their daily teaching (Dahlberg, Toal, Swahn, & Behrens, 2005). Increasing emphasis was placed on moral principles of social harmony and mutual respect in sermons, study groups, and informal religious gatherings (Goodman-Casanova, Dura-Perez, Guzman-Parra, Cuesta-Vargas, & Mayoral-Cleries, 2020). This integration demonstrates that the programme had an impact extending beyond its direct timeframe, contributing to enduring improvements in community educational practices. The participation of local religious leaders was particularly important in reinforcing the programme's message and ensuring its consistency (Peterson, Atwood, & Yates, 2002).

The participatory approach adopted by the programme also fostered a greater sense of community ownership over the project. Participants perceived the programme as a collective effort to address shared concerns, rather than as an external intervention (Butterfoss, 2006). Community

members' active participation in discussions and their desire to offer thoughts and solutions clearly demonstrated this sense of ownership (Perry & Katula, 2001). To sustain the programme's momentum, some participants suggested follow-up initiatives, such as regular discussion groups and collaborative social projects. These outcomes demonstrate that community service programmes have the potential to transform communities into active agents of change rather than passive recipients of assistance.

The development of reflective learning habits among participants is another significant outcome (Rhodes & DuBois, 2006). Mentorship and feedback sessions were employed to encourage reflection, enabling participants to examine their own views and practices in relation to the values addressed throughout the programme (Campbell et al., 2007). Through this reflective process, participants were able to identify the areas in which their practices aligned with or diverged from the values of moderation and inclusion. Facilitators reported that participants became more self-aware and critical in evaluating religious narratives encountered through digital media (Aziz, Absetz, Oldroyd, Pronk, & Oldenburg, 2015). This heightened critical awareness is especially important now, when communities are inundated with religious information from diverse ideological sources.

The programme also illuminated the significant role of facilitators and pedagogical strategies in fostering religious moderation. Dialogue-based and collaborative learning strategies were more successful than lecture-based ones in capturing participants' attention and promoting thoughtful contemplation (Zakariyah, Fauziyah, & Kholis, 2022). Participants responded well to activities that included case discussions, problem-solving, and shared experiences since they connected religious themes to real-world social contexts (Wardi, Fithriyyah, Hidayat, Ismail, & Supandi, 2023). This finding underscores the importance of pedagogical approaches in community-based Islamic education and suggests that methodological innovation is essential to achieve transformative outcomes.

Despite these favourable outcomes, the programme also encountered a number of challenges that affected its results. The depth of the conversation was occasionally impacted by variations in the participants' educational backgrounds and degree of religious understanding. Initially, some participants found it challenging to articulate their views or to critically analyse religious texts. However, the use of approachable language and examples, along with mentoring, helped lessen these difficulties (Saepudin, Supriyadi, Surana, & Asikin, 2023). Maintaining engagement and inclusivity depended greatly on the facilitators' capacity to tailor their material and approach to the needs of the audience. This flexible approach strengthened the programme's participatory ethos and fostered a more equitable learning environment (2010).

Overall, the findings of this community service programme demonstrate that community-based Islamic education can effectively foster religious moderation (Muhsin, Kususiyanah, & Maksun, 2024). The programme effectively deepened participants' understanding of moderation, enhanced their attitudes toward dialogue and diversity, and fostered social cohesion within the community (Kim & Esquivel, 2011). The active participation of local religious leaders, contextual sensitivity, and participatory learning methods contributed to these results. The programme's influence on social behaviours and educational practices, beyond individual learning, is noteworthy (García-Cabrera & García-Barba Hernández, 2014).

Additionally, the research emphasizes the larger relevance of community service programs in tackling socio-religious issues (Arriagada, Ferraro, Sills, Pattanayak, & Cordero-Sancho, 2012). Community-based initiatives have the potential to convert abstract principles into useful ethical advice by locating religious education in real-world social situations (Koschate-Fischer, Stefan, & Hoyer, 2012; Massey, 2011). This method improves religious comprehension while also fostering social harmony and resilience (Scharff et al., 2010). Therefore, the findings of this program offer practical evidence that integrating community engagement with Islamic education is a wise strategy for fostering religious moderation in diverse communities (Corrigan, Druss, & Perlick, 2014; Fox, Bartholomae, & Lee, 2005).

The findings, in summary, suggest that community-based Islamic education, when implemented using participatory and reflective methods, can successfully promote religious

moderation and bring about constructive social change. These initiatives have the potential to foster long-term social harmony, as evidenced by the improvements seen in comprehension, behavior, and social interactions. For academics, practitioners, and politicians looking to create and implement community service programs that target the moral and social aspects of religious life, these results provide useful information.

2. Discussion

The findings of this community service programme offer valuable insights into how community-based Islamic education can effectively promote religious moderation (Kim & Esquivel, 2011). When incorporated into participatory educational methods, the findings reveal that moderation is a socially constructed and contextually negotiated practice, rather than a solely normative or policy-driven concept (García-Cabrera & García-Barba Hernández, 2014). This conclusion supports the claim that religious moderation is more than simply a question of doctrinal expression; it is a lived ethical orientation that is influenced by interactions, conversations, and thoughtful involvement in certain social contexts.

Conceptually, the participants' improved understanding of moderation aligns with the theoretical framework of *wasatiyyah* in Islamic thought, which places strong emphasis on balance, fairness, and proportionality. Islamic academics throughout history have stressed that moderation is an epistemological and ethical position, not a reduction of religious dedication (Arriagada et al., 2012). Previous research, however, frequently concentrates on textual or normative examination. By illustrating how *wasatiyyah* can be put into practice through community-based pedagogical approaches, the current programme advances this scholarly dialogue (Koschate-Fischer et al., 2012). The observed change in participants' perception of moderation, from seeing it as an outside or elite discourse to seeing it as an essential Islamic value, demonstrates a successful translation of theory into practice. This is consistent with prior literature that emphasises the significance of contextualised religious education in shaping ethical attitudes (Mardhiah, A., et al. 2025).

The programme's emphasis on dialogue and participatory learning makes a significant methodological contribution to the discourse on community engagement and Islamic education (Scharff et al., 2010). Educational philosophers such as Freire have long argued that dialogical learning enables learners to become active participants in the educational process rather than merely passive recipients of knowledge (Corrigan et al., 2014). This strategy is particularly important in religious education because it questions authoritarian and monological methods of teaching that may inadvertently reinforce rigid or exclusivist interpretations. According to the results, dialogical interaction enables community members to reinterpret religious teachings in light of their lived experiences, which leads to a more thoughtful and inclusive religious perspective. This supports prior empirical research in adult learning and community education, which highlights participation as a crucial factor in transformative learning (Fox et al., 2005).

Community-based Islamic education may serve as a tool for social harmony, as evidenced by the noticeable shift in attitudes toward diversity and dialogue. Unlike formal educational settings, which tend to reach a limited segment of the population, community-based programmes operating within everyday social environments allow religious identities to be continuously performed and negotiated (Massey, 2011). Participants' willingness to engage with diverse viewpoints indicates a shift from defensive religiosity, which emphasises ideological boundaries, to relational religiosity, which values ethical interaction (Mala & Hunaida, 2023). This conclusion supports worldwide research on religion and social capital, which highlights the potential of inclusive religious practices to foster civic participation, trust, and collaboration in plural communities.

Notably, the increase in social harmony seen in this initiative should be understood as the promotion of positive interaction with diversity rather than the eradication of it (Hanif, Syarifudin, & Muhtarom, 2025). In academic discussions about pluralism and moderation, this distinction is essential. Moderation, according to critics, runs the risk of encouraging compliance or stifling religious

authenticity. However, the results show that moderation, when viewed as an ethical dedication to justice and mutual respect, does not diminish religious diversity but rather offers a normative framework for governing it. By portraying moderation as a dynamic and relational process rather than a static ideological position, this realization advances current theoretical discussions.

Another significant finding with theoretical implications is the incorporation of moderation narratives into existing religious practices within the community (Hasan et al., 2023). A significant obstacle to community service initiatives, which often find it difficult to maintain their viability after the project cycle, is the institutionalization of values. By integrating moderation into established authority structures and educational routines, the participation of local religious authorities in this programme appears to have mitigated this challenge (Yorio & Ye, 2012). This result is consistent with sociological theories of religious authority, which highlight the significance of trusted leaders in legitimising novel interpretations and behaviours. It also supports empirical evidence that community engagement projects are more sustainable when they leverage local leadership and cultural capital (Husna & Thohir, 2020).

The study's conclusions add to the expanding body of scholarly literature on community participation as a mode of knowledge creation from a wider academic perspective. Community service-based scholarship emphasises situated knowledge and practical relevance, whereas traditional academic research frequently prioritises theoretical abstraction (Syarif, 2021). This programme illustrates how community engagement can generate empirically grounded insights that enrich theoretical debates about Islamic education, religious moderation, and social harmony. The research bridges the gap between normative theory and social reality by documenting shifts in knowledge, beliefs, and behaviours, presenting a framework for integrative scholarship that integrates action, reflection, and analysis (Musyahid, 2023).

Additionally, the results call for a rethinking of how religious moderation is defined in scholarly and political discussions. Much of the existing literature situates moderation within a security-oriented framework, framing it as a response to extremism (Pajarianto et al., 2022). Although this framework has practical applicability, it risks portraying moderation as a reactive tactic rather than a proactive ethical endeavour. The current programme offers an alternative perspective, presenting moderation as a constructive educational and social value that fosters human development and community resilience. This point of view is consistent with international discussions about religion and sustainable development, particularly as they relate to social cohesion, peacebuilding, and inclusive education (Subchi et al., 2022).

The implications of this research go beyond the immediate community environment in terms of global relevance. Religious diversity, polarisation, and the influence of digital media on the formation of beliefs are challenges confronting many societies across the world (Hasan et al., 2023). The community-based, participatory methodology presented in this programme offers a replicable model that may be adapted to diverse cultural and religious contexts. Although the specific content taught in Islamic education may vary, the core principles of dialogue, contextualisation, and community ownership are broadly applicable (Merzel & D'Afflitti, 2003). This enhances the study's contribution to the international academic discourse on faith-based education and community engagement.

The study underscores the significance of qualitative and reflective methods for evaluating the impact of community service programmes. Quantitative metrics alone may not be able to reflect subtle yet important shifts in values, interpersonal dynamics, and moral perspectives. The programme provides a comprehensive understanding of social change processes through the integration of observation, participant feedback, and reflective analysis (Kruglanski et al., 2014). This methodological insight adds to discussions about evaluation frameworks for community involvement, implying that impact should be viewed in relational and process-oriented terms rather than just in quantifiable outcomes.

The contextual limitations of the findings are, however, acknowledged. The results are shaped by particular social, cultural, and religious dynamics, and their generalisability must be carefully

considered (Kazutaka, 2012). Future research and initiatives may expand on this work by including comparative methodologies across various communities or by integrating mixed-method designs to supplement qualitative data with quantitative data. These initiatives would reinforce the empirical and theoretical underpinnings of community-based methods of religious moderation.

In conclusion, the discussion affirms that community-based Islamic education is not only feasible but also conceptually and practically significant for promoting religious moderation. The findings indicate that when educational processes are participatory, contextual, and socially embedded, moderation can be internalised as a lived ethic (Corrigan et al., 2014). This study advances our academic knowledge of how religious values can foster inclusive and harmonious societies by connecting empirical findings to theoretical frameworks in Islamic education, community participation, and social cohesion. The programme thus offers a valuable model for community service as well as a conceptual contribution to the ongoing scholarly discussions on religion, education, and social change at both national and international levels.

D. Conclusion

This community service programme demonstrates that community-based Islamic education aimed at promoting religious moderation is not merely a technical intervention, but rather a transformative educational and social endeavour. The programme demonstrates that moderation can be internalised as a lived ethical orientation, rather than remaining an abstract normative discourse, through the situating of religious learning in participatory and dialogical community settings. The integration of empirical data with analytical thought demonstrates that religious moderation gains significance when it is consistently discussed in daily social encounters and rooted in local cultural and religious settings.

This research reconceptualises religious moderation as a dynamic and relational practice, thereby enhancing our conceptual understanding from an analytical perspective. The data indicate that moderation is not a fixed ideological stance or policy slogan, but rather an educational outcome shaped by community ownership, participatory pedagogy, and reflective engagement. By offering empirical data on how moderation may be put into practice through community participation, this viewpoint advances current theoretical debates about *wasatiyyah* and Islamic education. In this regard, the study addresses the longstanding gap between normative religious theory and its social application.

In practice, the programme presents a viable model for community service initiatives aimed at fostering social harmony in pluralistic societies. Contextual awareness, interactive pedagogical strategies, and the integration of local religious leaders were all essential for ensuring relevance and sustainability. These elements emphasise that successful community-based interventions must move beyond the one-way transmission of values and instead promote collaborative meaning-making processes. The larger point is that community participation based on religious instruction can be a useful tool for promoting social cohesion, resilience, and ethical citizenship.

This research contributes to the global scholarly conversation about religion, education, and community engagement by demonstrating that faith-based educational programmes can yield positive social outcomes without compromising their religious integrity. The insights gained from this programme offer transferable principles that can be applied across diverse contexts, notwithstanding its contextual limitations. This approach may serve as a foundation for future community service initiatives and research aimed at developing participatory models of religious education that address contemporary social and religious challenges.

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