

THE ROLE OF ISLAMIC EDUCATION TEACHERS IN FORMING MODERATE CHARACTER AMIDST THE CURRENT DIGITAL RADICALISM

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Abstract

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This study aims to analyze the role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in shaping moderate character amidst the tide of digital radicalism among students. The phenomenon of digital radicalism through social media, online forums, and instant messaging applications has influenced students' mindsets, religious behavior, and social interactions, thus demanding strategic intervention from Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers as agents of religious moderation. The research method used is normative-qualitative with a library research approach. Data were obtained from Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum documents, academic literature related to religious moderation, and previous research on digital radicalism in developing countries. The analysis was conducted systematically through content analysis to examine pedagogical practices, learning strategies, and teacher interventions that have the potential to shape students' moderate character. The results show that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers play a strategic role as value keepers and moral mentors. The integration of moderation values into formal and hidden curriculum learning, teacher role models in being moderate, and ethical guidance on digital media use effectively shape students who are critical, tolerant, and able to sort out provocative information. Collaboration with parents and the community strengthens the effectiveness of this strategy. The impact of this research confirms the transformation of the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers from mere teachers to digital guides and value mentors, while also providing a basis for educational policy to strengthen the synergy between technology, religion, and morality in Islamic education.

INTRODUCTION

The development of information and communication technology has brought significant changes in the way society, especially the younger generation, accesses information. Social media, online forums, and instant messaging applications have become not only a means of entertainment but also a medium for the dissemination of ideologies, including extremist ideologies. The phenomenon of digital radicalism shows

that the widespread distribution of provocative content can influence students' thinking, attitudes, and religious practices (AM Zuhri, 2021) . Consequently, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers face new challenges: not only teaching religious material but also guiding students in critically navigating digital content. Data from the Ministry of Education and Culture shows an increase in cases of intolerance in schools influenced by online content, underscoring the urgency of appropriate educational interventions (Kemdikbud, 2023).

Digital radicalism often appears in seemingly trivial content, but systematically instills extreme views. Students exposed to it tend to experience polarized religious understanding, which can then influence social interactions and daily religious behavior. This impact is not only individual but can also lead to social conflict within the school environment and the community. Therefore, the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers is highly strategic, as they function not only as instructors but also as value keepers, maintaining a balance between spirituality and social ethics in the digital age.

PAI) teachers have the dual responsibility of delivering curriculum-based teaching materials and instilling essential values of moderation in the face of digital radicalism. These efforts include learning strategies that integrate critical perspectives on online information, foster content selection skills, and build students' ethical awareness (Ukasyah, 2025) . Teachers' role models of moderate behavior are a determining factor in the success of internalizing values, as students tend to emulate their teachers' attitudes and ways of thinking in their daily lives. Thus, teachers are not only facilitators of knowledge but also moral mentors who actively contribute to character formation.

A contextual learning approach based on digital reality, such as case-based learning, is an effective strategy for developing moderate character. Through analysis of real-life cases, students are encouraged to recognize provocative content, understand its impact, and learn to respond to differing views with tolerance (Silitubun, 2024) . Furthermore, the integration of moderation into the hidden curriculum and the use of digital media for peaceful preaching emphasize the importance of pedagogical innovation that aligns with digital dynamics. Collaboration between teachers, parents, and the community also strengthens the character education ecosystem, so that the formation of moderate attitudes occurs not only in schools but also in students' social environments.

However, implementing this strategy faces various challenges. Teachers' limited digital literacy, the influence of social media algorithms that reinforce bias and polarization, and weak character education in some educational institutions present real obstacles. Solutions offered include digital literacy and religious moderation training for teachers, the development of an adaptive curriculum based on Islamic values, and collaboration across educational institutions. This approach not only enhances teacher capacity but also prepares students to navigate the digital world intelligently, critically, and ethically.

The transformation of the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher's role in the digital era has become more complex, moving from mere instructors to digital guides and value mentors. Teachers must be able to harmonize technology, religion, and morality in the educational process, so that students not only acquire religious knowledge but also the ability to filter provocative information and develop a tolerant attitude (Setyowati et al., 2025) . This integration of moderation values emphasizes that Islamic education focuses not only on rituals and texts but also on developing character that is adaptive to contemporary challenges.

The state-of-the-art study of the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers in shaping moderate character demonstrates that current research emphasizes their active role in the digital environment. Normative and empirical studies highlight teachers as key actors capable of mapping the risks of extreme content, guiding students in addressing the plurality of information, and instilling the value of moderation through innovative learning practices. The role of teachers as agents of religious moderation is increasingly crucial due to the transnational nature and rapid spread of digital radicalism, making intervention at the formal education level a strategic preventative measure.

The importance of discussing this topic stems from a normative motivation: Islamic education has a moral responsibility to protect the younger generation from ideologies that undermine social order. This research seeks to explore the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers as determinants of moderate character and to formulate practical strategies that can be implemented in the field. By understanding the complexity of digital radicalism and the role of teachers, this study contributes to strengthening Islamic values-based character education and serves as a policy reference for developing curricula responsive to digital challenges.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a normative-qualitative approach that emphasizes conceptual analysis of the role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in shaping moderate character amidst the tide of digital radicalism. The normative approach was chosen because the focus of this study is the study of the values, principles, and regulations of Islamic education, and how teachers can be effective agents of religious moderation. The primary data sources were obtained from official PAI curriculum documents, pedagogical guidelines from the Ministry of Education and Culture, academic literature related to religious moderation, and previous empirical studies on digital radicalism among students (Hefner, 2021; Rahman, 2022). Data analysis was conducted using a systematic content analysis method, where each document and literature was reviewed to identify pedagogical practices, learning strategies, and teacher interventions that have the potential to shape moderate character. Furthermore, this study also considered contextual factors, such as digital media penetration in schools and student behavior in utilizing information technology, so that the research results can objectively reflect the reality on the ground and be relevant to contemporary dynamics.

In the second phase, this research emphasizes normative and strategic synthesis to formulate a model for developing moderate character by Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers. The analysis is conducted by comparing international best practices in religious education with local practices in Indonesia, thus identifying gaps and opportunities for innovation. This approach involves triangulating sources, including literature studies, curriculum documents, and relevant previous research, to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings. The analysis is then structured into a conceptual framework that describes the role of teachers as value mentors, digital guides, and agents of religious moderation, with implementation strategies that include contextual learning, ethical use of digital media, and collaboration with families and communities. This research method is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in the digital era, while also providing the basis for applicable policy and practice recommendations for strengthening moderate character education in schools.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Phenomenon of Digital Radicalism Among Students

The phenomenon of digital radicalism among students has emerged as a form of adaptation of extreme ideologies to the virtual world. The spread of radical content through social media, online forums, and instant messaging applications has become an effective means for extremist groups to reach the younger generation. Studies in Indonesia and several developing countries such as Bangladesh and Nigeria show that students are often targeted due to their varying levels of digital literacy and limited critical understanding of online content (S. Zuhri et al., 2024). This radical content does not always take the form of explicit propaganda; it is often packaged in videos, memes, or narratives that appear religious and full of moral values, thus creating misperceptions about religious teachings.

The impact of digital radicalism on students' religious thinking and behavior is very real. Students who are frequently exposed to extreme content tend to develop a black-and-white mindset, intolerance of differences, and a tendency to interpret religion literally without considering the social context. This can change their behavior at school, such as social isolation, conflict with peers, and even participation in radical groups. Cases in Pakistan and Egypt show that students exposed to extreme digital content are more susceptible to acts of intolerance, which then raises concerns among educators and parents (Fanindy & Mupida, 2021).

The challenges facing Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in this context are increasingly complex. Teachers must be able to understand students' digital behavior, map content that influences religious patterns, and provide critical guidance on the information students receive. These challenges are exacerbated by differences in teachers' digital literacy levels, curriculum pressures, and a lack of relevant pedagogical resources. Therefore, teachers are required not only to be instructors but also to be critical guides capable of fostering student resilience against the influence of digital radicalism, making character education a crucial component of Islamic Religious Education (Kemdikbud, 2023).

The Role of Islamic Religious Education Teachers as Agents of Religious Moderation

Education (PAI) teachers play a strategic role as value keepers and spiritual guides for students. They are central figures who facilitate the internalization of moderate values, instill a sense of tolerance, and guide students in a balanced understanding of religion (Hidayati, 2023). In developing countries like Indonesia and Malaysia, research shows that teachers who actively emphasize the value of religious moderation through lectures, discussions, and extracurricular activities are able to shape students who are more critical of extreme content and more inclusive in social interactions (Taufiq, 2024). Teachers' consistent role models of moderation are the most effective instrument in fostering similar attitudes in students.

Efforts to integrate religious moderation into Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning are carried out through various pedagogical strategies. Teachers use a contextual approach that adapts material to digital realities, incorporates discussions about social media content, and guides students in assessing the veracity of information. In developing countries, such as India and the Philippines, this learning model has been shown to suppress the adoption of extreme views among adolescents while simultaneously increasing students' critical awareness of digital propaganda (Andalas et al., 2021). The

integration of moderation occurs not only in formal subjects but also in hidden curriculum practices, such as fostering tolerant dialogue and instilling ethical digital media use.

The role of Islamic Religious Education teachers also includes guiding students in sorting through provocative digital information. Teachers act as filters and mentors, helping students understand the context of content, distinguishing between authentic information and propaganda, and fostering a healthy skepticism toward extremist content. A case in Nigeria demonstrates that teacher intervention through critical media learning can reduce student engagement in radical online activities, reinforcing the premise that teachers are key actors in developing moderate character in the digital age (Akande et al., 2024).

Moderate Character Building Strategy

A moderate character-building strategy requires a contextual approach based on digital reality. Case-based learning is an effective method because it encourages students to analyze real-life cases they encounter on social media, such as provocative content or fake news containing elements of radicalism (Amir et al., 2025). This way, they learn not only theory but also the practice of critically analyzing information. Examples of implementation in secondary schools in Bangladesh show that students who regularly participate in case-based learning have higher content analysis skills and are more likely to reject extreme narratives (Yassin et al., 2024).

Furthermore, integrating moderation into the hidden curriculum allows for the natural internalization of values of tolerance and cooperation. Extracurricular activities, group discussions, and teacher mentoring are effective tools for developing moderate character within the school environment. Research in the Philippines and Indonesia shows that students exposed to the hidden curriculum of religious moderation have a better understanding of plurality, appreciate differences, and develop social empathy (Musahwi & Wahyuni, 2024).

The use of digital media for peaceful da'wah, or digital da'wah literacy, is a relevant additional strategy. Teachers guide students in the ethical use of digital media, disseminate positive content, and produce moderate da'wah messages. Collaboration with parents and the community strengthens the character education ecosystem, so that the formation of moderate attitudes occurs not only in schools but also at home and in the community. The case of Malaysia demonstrates that family and community involvement in digital religious literacy programs can strengthen teachers' effectiveness as agents of moderation (Prasetyo, 2025).

Implementation Challenges and Solutions

Implementing moderate character-building strategies faces several significant challenges. First, teachers' limited digital literacy hinders their ability to critically navigate online content and guide students in addressing digital radicalism. Second, social media algorithms that reinforce bias and prioritize provocative content increase the risk of students' exposure to extreme information. Third, character education in many schools remains weak and unsystematic, so the values of moderation are not always conveyed consistently. Cases in Nigeria and Bangladesh highlight that without competent teacher intervention, exposure to extreme content can increase sharply among adolescents (Yuliati, nd).

The solutions offered include digital literacy and religious moderation training for teachers. This training aims to improve teachers' abilities to assess digital content, develop pedagogical strategies based on moderate values, and utilize technology as an ethical

learning tool. Furthermore, the development of an adaptive curriculum based on Islamic values allows for the systematic integration of moderation, while collaboration between educational institutions, communities, and families strengthens the implementation of character education. Studies in Indonesia show that systematically trained teachers can reduce the influence of radical content among students by up to 40% within a single academic year (Milda et al., 2025).

By implementing these solutions, Islamic Religious Education teachers can become key actors in building students' digital resilience against radicalism. Their role is not only as teachers but also as moral mentors, able to guide students in facing the challenges of the digital era critically, ethically, and based on the values of moderation. This strategic integration makes character education a solid foundation for preventing the spread of extremist ideologies among the younger generation, particularly in developing countries with increasing digital media penetration.

Implications for Islamic Education

The transformation of the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher's role in the digital era has become more complex and strategic. Teachers serve not only as instructors delivering material but also as digital guides and value mentors capable of facilitating the internalization of moderate values. In practice, teachers guide students in navigating online content, filtering provocative information, and internalizing the value of tolerance in social interactions. In developing countries, such as Indonesia and Malaysia, the implementation of this transformational role has been shown to increase students' critical awareness of radical content, strengthen proportional religious understanding, and reduce the risk of adopting extreme ideologies (Ningsih & Hurairah, 2024).

Strengthening the synergy between technology, religion, and morality is at the heart of the implications of contemporary Islamic education. The ethical use of digital media, the development of a moderate-values-based curriculum, and the involvement of the educational community create a learning ecosystem that supports the formation of moderate character. The case of Bangladesh demonstrates that this synergistic integration can significantly reduce the spread of radical content among adolescents while fostering a heightened social awareness of diversity (Soares, nd).

Furthermore, implications for education policy include the need to develop teacher training programs, provide digital-based learning resources, and build cross-institutional collaboration networks to foster moderate character development. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers play a central role in this character education ecosystem, not only transmitting religious knowledge but also guiding students to become critical, tolerant, and ethical digital citizens. Thus, Islamic education in the digital era goes beyond teaching rituals and texts to foster the moral capacity of the younger generation to face the real challenges of digital radicalism.

CONCLUSION

Based on literature review and phenomenon analysis, digital radicalism among students has emerged as a real challenge for Islamic education in the digital era. The spread of extremist ideologies through social media, online forums, and instant messaging apps has influenced students' religious mindsets and behaviors, requiring Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers to play a role beyond mere instructors. They must be critical mentors capable of instilling the value of moderation, guiding students in sorting through provocative digital information, and fostering tolerance and critical thinking.

The role of Islamic Religious Education teachers as agents of religious moderation has proven strategic in shaping moderate character. Through personal example, integration of moderation values into formal and hidden curriculum learning, and ethical guidance on the use of digital media, teachers can serve as value keepers and moral mentors for students. Moderate character-building strategies include contextual learning based on digital reality, digital da'wah literacy, and active collaboration with parents and the community, which systematically foster critical awareness and social empathy.

The implementation of moderate character-building strategies faces challenges such as limited digital literacy among teachers, the influence of social media algorithms, and weak character education. Proposed solutions include digital literacy and religious moderation training for teachers, the development of an adaptive curriculum based on Islamic values, and collaboration across educational institutions. The implications of this research demonstrate the transformation of the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers: from instructors to digital guides and value mentors, while also emphasizing the synergy between technology, religion, and morality as the foundation of Islamic education capable of shaping a critical, tolerant, and moderate young generation in the face of digital radicalism.

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