



Contents lists available at [Journal IICET](https://journal.iicet.org)  
**Jurnal EDUCATIO (Jurnal Pendidikan Indonesia)**  
ISSN: 2476-9886 (Print) ISSN: 2477-0302 (Electronic)  
Journal homepage: <https://jurnal.iicet.org/index.php/jppi>



## Building religious moderation through islamic religious education: a study of high school teachers in Banten Indonesia

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### Article Info

#### Article history:

Received Jun 12<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
Revised Aug 20<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
Accepted Aug 26<sup>th</sup>, 2025

#### Keywords:

Religious moderation  
Islamic education  
Teacher strategies  
Educational challenges  
School environment

### ABSTRACT

Religious moderation has become an urgent issue in Indonesia's educational context, particularly in fostering tolerance and preventing radicalism among students. Schools play a crucial role in shaping students' perspectives on religious diversity, with Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers serving as key agents in instilling moderation values. However, the implementation of religious moderation in schools faces various challenges, including curriculum constraints, sociocultural influences, and students' diverse backgrounds. This study aims to analyze the specific strategies employed by IRE teachers in fostering religious moderation, the challenges they encounter, and the impact of their efforts on students. Using a qualitative research method with a social phenomenological approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis involving IRE teachers and students in a senior high school in Banten, Indonesia. Thematic analysis was conducted to identify recurring patterns and key themes related to religious moderation practices. The findings indicate that IRE teachers implement religious moderation through interactive teaching methods, interfaith dialogues, and role-modeling behaviors that emphasize tolerance and balance. However, challenges such as limited institutional support, resistance from certain groups, and a lack of comprehensive training hinder the effectiveness of these efforts. Despite these obstacles, the study highlights the positive influence of IRE teachers in fostering an inclusive and harmonious school environment. The implications of this research suggest the need for more structured teacher training programs, curriculum adjustments to integrate religious moderation effectively, and policy support from educational institutions. These findings contribute to the broader discourse on religious moderation and provide practical recommendations for improving Islamic education in diverse learning environments.



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## Introduction

Religious moderation has become an increasingly crucial issue in Indonesia's educational landscape. As the largest Muslim-majority country with significant religious diversity, Indonesia faces ongoing challenges in maintaining harmony among different religious groups. Schools play a vital role in shaping students' perceptions of religious tolerance, and Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers serve as key figures in promoting religious moderation. However, despite the government's emphasis on moderation, the practical implementation of these values in

schools remains inconsistent, facing various obstacles such as curriculum limitations, socio-cultural influences, and teachers' varying levels of competence in addressing interfaith issues (Munif et al., 2023).

Empirical data highlight the urgency of this issue. According to the 2020 BPS census, Indonesia's population of 270 million is composed of 87.2% Muslims, followed by smaller proportions of Christians (6.9%), Catholics (2.9%), Hindus (1.7%), Buddhists (0.7%), and Confucianists (0.05%). With such diversity, religious conflicts—whether intra-religious or inter-religious—remain a potential challenge, particularly in schools where students from various backgrounds interact daily (Munif et al., 2023). Studies indicate that unresolved religious tensions in educational settings can contribute to social polarization and intolerance among students, emphasizing the necessity of effective strategies in religious moderation education.

Previous research has examined the role of religious education in fostering tolerance, but gaps remain in understanding the practical challenges faced by teachers in implementing moderation values. Many studies focus on theoretical discussions without providing concrete insights into the daily realities experienced by educators. This research aims to address this gap by exploring the specific strategies employed by IRE teachers, the obstacles they encounter, and the effectiveness of their approaches in fostering religious moderation among students.

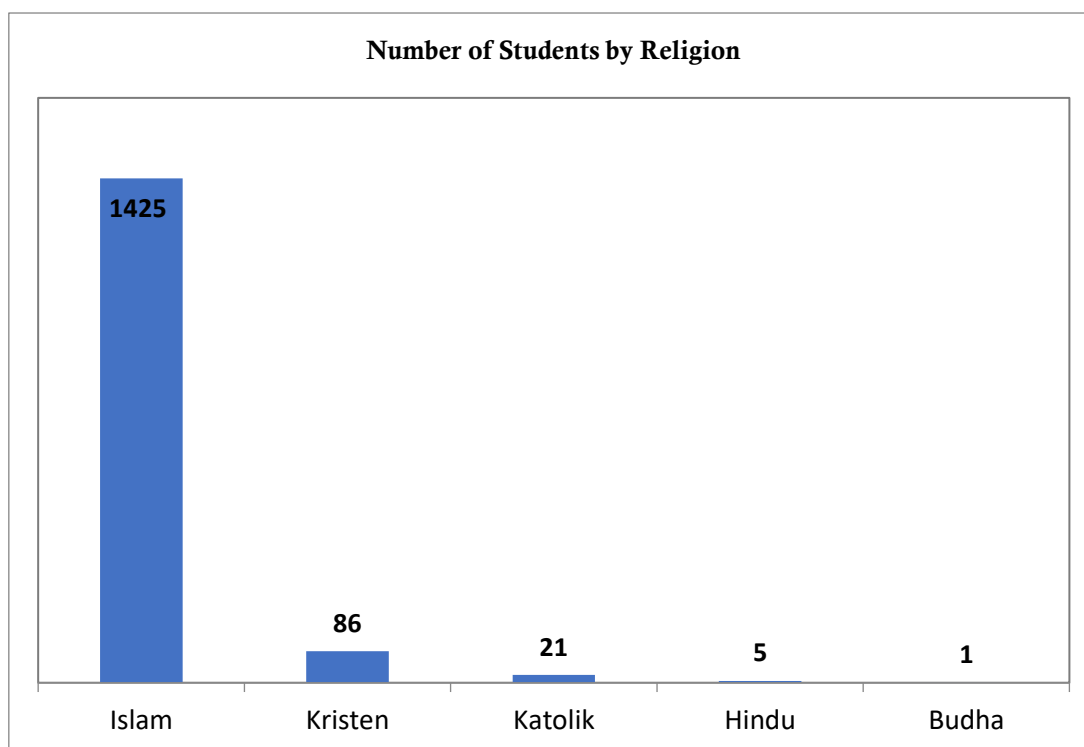
The primary objective of this study is to analyze how IRE teachers integrate religious moderation values into their teaching methods and how these efforts influence students' attitudes towards religious diversity. Additionally, this study investigates the challenges faced by teachers in implementing religious moderation, such as institutional constraints, curriculum limitations, and resistance from students or parents. By identifying these challenges and examining best practices, this research contributes to developing more effective teaching models that align with Indonesia's broader educational and social goals (Jamaluddin, 2022).

This study is significant because it not only enhances the understanding of religious moderation in education but also offers practical recommendations for policymakers, curriculum developers, and educators. The findings can be used to improve teacher training programs, refine educational policies, and develop strategies that ensure the effective implementation of religious moderation in schools. By addressing both the strengths and challenges of IRE teachers' roles, this research provides a comprehensive analysis that benefits both academics and practitioners in the field of Islamic education.

Banten Province has a diversity of religions practiced by the Banten community, the population data according to religious adherents in Banten in 2022 includes: Islam 11,686,756, Christianity 322,213, Catholicism 148,557, Hinduism 8,581, Buddhism 144,991, Confucianism 2371, Others 8,191. Based on these data, it can be seen that the majority of Banten people are Muslim. If viewed based on quantity, it is generally directly proportional to the number of students based on religion within the scope of educational units in Banten, namely Muslim students are the largest number (Zeng & Kaye, 2022). Therefore, it is important to teach students about religious moderation since school. Religious moderation offers a solution by emphasizing the search for common ground among differences, thus helping to create better understanding and tolerance. (RI, 2019). The strategic role of a PAI teacher in an effort to develop a spirit of moderation in religion is very important. They have a great opportunity to influence up to 80% of students on a national scale. Thus, teachers are expected to have the competence for lessons with an approach based on moderation that will have a significant impact on their students. (Aziz & Anam, 2021). Based on initial observations at State Senior High School 1 Ciruas, researchers saw that this school has students with diverse religious adherents. The religious diversity at this school includes Islam, Christianity, Protestantism, Hinduism, and Buddhism.

In Building religious moderation in schools, namely: first, providing guidance to teachers so that they can teach and provide examples in fostering a sense of togetherness among fellow school residents and mutual respect between religious communities. Second, the school always gives freedom to its students to practice their respective religions.

The principal plays a vital role in fostering religious moderation by cultivating an inclusive school culture that values diversity and integrates moderation into the curriculum while supporting teachers in promoting tolerance. By engaging parents, addressing discrimination, and fostering collaboration, principals create a safe, supportive environment that nurtures mutual respect and humanistic values. Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers complement this effort by shaping students' character and spirituality through their roles as educators, moral guides, facilitators, value instillers, life skills mentors, and personal development supporters. They convey Islamic teachings effectively, model ethical behavior, create engaging learning environments, instill faith and devotion, teach practical religious applications, and support students' spiritual, social, and emotional growth. Together, principals and IRE teachers ensure students integrate Islamic values into their lives, fostering a generation with strong moral and spiritual foundations.



**Figure 1 <Student Data Table for the 2023-2024 Academic Year>**

By implementing these strategies, Islamic Religious Education teachers can help students develop an attitude of religious moderation that is important for building an inclusive and harmonious society. In implementing learning activities in the subject, Islamic Religious Education teachers always give freedom to students who are not Muslim to be allowed to attend class, are also allowed not to attend Islamic Religious Education class hours and leave the class. Based on the author's observations, the implementation of religious activities at SMAN 1 Ciruas includes enlivening the commemoration of Islamic holidays (PHBI) for Muslim students, and religious facilities such as the construction of mosques are also provided. However, for religious activities of non-Muslim students, there are no special facilities for religious activities and there has been no celebration of non-Muslim religious holidays.

## Method

This study employs a qualitative research approach with a social phenomenology design to explore the role of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers in fostering religious moderation among high school students (Basrowi, 2008). The phenomenological approach was chosen to capture the lived experiences of teachers and students in the learning environment, providing an in-depth understanding of the challenges and strategies in implementing religious moderation (Moleong, 2007).

### Research Location and Participants

The research was conducted at a senior high school in Banten, Indonesia, a region known for its religious diversity. The participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure relevance to the study's objectives. The sample consisted of: (1) 6 IRE teachers with at least five years of teaching experience; (2) 12 students from different religious backgrounds, representing diversity in school demographics; (3) 2 school administrators responsible for religious education policies. The inclusion criteria for teachers included their active involvement in religious moderation initiatives, while students were selected based on their participation in interfaith activities or religious tolerance programs.

### Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through multiple techniques to ensure a comprehensive understanding: (1) Semi-structured interviews – Conducted with teachers, students, and school administrators to gather perspectives on religious moderation practices; (2) Classroom observations – To analyze how teachers integrate moderation values in their teaching and interactions; (3) Document analysis – Reviewing school policies, lesson plans, and curriculum documents to assess institutional support for religious moderation.

### **Data Analysis**

Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns and key themes in the collected data. The analysis followed these steps: (1) Transcription and coding – All interviews were transcribed and coded based on emerging themes; (2) Categorization – Identifying recurring themes related to teaching strategies, challenges, and student responses; (3) Interpretation – Synthesizing findings to understand the broader implications for religious moderation education.

### **Validity and Reliability Measures**

To enhance the validity of the research, the study employed: (1) Data triangulation – Comparing findings from interviews, observations, and document analysis; (2) Member checking – Verifying interpretations with participants to ensure accuracy; (3) Peer debriefing – Consulting with fellow researchers for objective analysis.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The study adhered to ethical research principles, ensuring: (1) Informed consent – Participants were briefed on the study's purpose and provided written consent; (2) Anonymity and confidentiality – Identities of participants were kept confidential; (3) Right to withdraw – Participants were allowed to withdraw at any stage without consequences. By structuring the methodology systematically, this study ensures transparency, replicability, and a comprehensive understanding of the role of IRE teachers in fostering religious moderation in high school settings.

## **Results and Discussions**

### **The Role of Islamic Religious Education Teachers**

In the Merriam Webster dictionary, role is a reference to a person's social behavior which is determined by the individual's position in society. (Merriam-webster, 2024) Role can be interpreted as a set of stricter expectations of a person's behavior in a particular position. These expectations may be those of a professional group, the organization in which a person works, or society. They may be partly set formally, for example in professional standards. More important is what is expected in practice from a person in a particular position, and demanded of this person by members of his work environment. Role has another meaning, namely it can be interpreted as the behavior desired by society towards individuals who are in accordance with their positions in a system. Because everything is influenced both internally and externally. As an adult individual, teachers have an obligation to educate, foster and teach students, related to knowledge and their physical and spiritual personalities, in order to achieve the goal of creating superior students, as well as social and personal humans who compete independently. (Uhibiyati, 2013) This section presents the findings on how Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers implement religious moderation in schools, the challenges they face, and the impact of their strategies on students.

### **Implementation of Religious Moderation by IRE Teachers**

Based on interviews and classroom observations, IRE teachers employ several strategies to instill religious moderation values among students: (1) Integration into Curriculum: Teachers incorporate religious moderation themes into Islamic education lessons by emphasizing tolerance, respect for diversity, and balanced interpretations of religious texts; (2) Interactive Learning Methods: Discussion-based learning, interfaith dialogues, and problem-solving activities are used to encourage critical thinking about religious diversity; (3) Role Modeling: Teachers serve as role models by demonstrating inclusive attitudes, respecting students of different faiths, and engaging in interfaith collaboration within the school environment; (4) School-Based Programs: Extracurricular activities, such as Islamic study groups (Rohis) and interfaith discussion forums, provide platforms for students to practice religious moderation.

### **Challenges Faced by Teachers**

Despite their efforts, IRE teachers encounter several obstacles: (1) Curriculum Limitations: The existing curriculum does not explicitly emphasize religious moderation, requiring teachers to make independent modifications to integrate these values; (2) Resistance from Parents and Community: Some parents and community members hold conservative religious views that may conflict with the promotion of moderation in schools; (3) Lack of Training: Many teachers have not received formal training on religious moderation, leading to varied interpretations and implementations (4) Institutional Constraints: Schools often lack structured programs and policies to support religious moderation, making it dependent on individual teacher initiatives.

### **Impact on Students**

The study found that the implementation of religious moderation has led to several positive outcomes among students: (1) Increased Tolerance: Students demonstrate higher levels of acceptance toward peers of different religious backgrounds; (2) Reduced Religious Bias: There is a noticeable decline in discriminatory attitudes and behaviors related to religious identity; (3) Stronger Social Cohesion: Students actively participate in interfaith

events and collaborative learning activities; (4) Critical Thinking Development: Exposure to diverse perspectives helps students develop a more balanced understanding of religious teachings.

### Strategies for Strengthening Religious Moderation in Schools

To enhance the effectiveness of religious moderation education, the following recommendations are proposed: (1) Curriculum Revision: The government and educational institutions should integrate religious moderation more explicitly into the formal curriculum; (2) Teacher Training Programs: Professional development workshops should be provided to equip teachers with standardized methods for promoting religious tolerance; (3) Institutional Support: Schools should implement structured programs and policies to reinforce religious moderation as part of their educational mission; (4) Community Engagement: Collaboration between schools, religious organizations, and local communities can help address resistance and build broader support for religious moderation initiatives.

The findings underscore the vital role of IRE teachers in shaping students' attitudes toward religious diversity. Despite the challenges, their efforts contribute significantly to fostering an inclusive and harmonious school environment. The terms that are often used for educators and teachers have almost the same meaning, the difference is that teachers are used in formal, informal and non-formal areas. Educators/teachers are those who teach knowledge and good and noble morals, and correct behavior that is bad or not in accordance with existing norms. So Islam also provides a position for an educator who is usually called an ustadz/syaikh. (Mudzaki, 2017) As a teacher he has an obligation to educate, develop and provide knowledge to the nation's children so that they become intelligent. As Allah says in QS. An-Nisa [3]: 58:

بَصِيرًا سَمِيعًا كَانَ اللَّهُ إِنَّ بِهِ يَعْظُمُ نِعْمًا اللَّهُ إِنَّ بِالْعَدْلِ تَخْضَعُوا أَنَّ النَّاسَ بَيْنَ حَكْمَتِهِ وَإِذَا أَهْلَهَا إِلَى الْأَمَلِ تُؤَدُّوا أَنْ يَأْمُرَكُمْ اللَّهُ إِنَّ

Meaning: "Indeed, the Creator calls you to send a message to the right to receive it, and calls you to determine the law between humans because you give him fairly, because God gives you a good reward. Indeed, Allah is all-hearing and all-seeing. (Q.S. An-Nisa' Ayat: 58)".

As someone who is given the mandate to preach the values of goodness to students so that they can hold the mandate in the form of carrying out everything that He commands and is applied in their daily lives. To become a teacher, you must have special abilities, especially in terms of your professional profession. Not everyone can become a teacher without learning and becoming a professional person as an educator, even though the person is good at speaking or explaining, but cannot be fairly called a professional teacher. Because becoming a teacher must pass several special requirements for professional teachers. (Usman, 2013).

Islamic education has an important role in determining the definition of educator/teacher. Because education is required in religion, it is given to those who have reached puberty, which is individual in nature. So everyone has an obligation for their own education. Then it is social for educators. As stated in QS. At-tahrim [12]: 6

يُؤْمَرُونَ مَا وَيَفْعَلُونَ أَمْرَهُمْ مَا اللَّهُ يَعْصُونَ لَا شِدَادَ غَلَاظَ مَلِكَةٍ عَلَيْهَا وَالْجَارَةُ النَّاسِ وَقَوْلُهَا نَارًا وَأَهْلِيكُمْ أَنْفُسُكُمْ قُوا أَمْنُوا الَّذِينَ يَأْتِيهَا

Meaning: "O believers, protect yourselves and your families from the fire of hell whose fuel is people and stones. Its guardians are rough and tough angels. They did not disobey Allah for what He commanded them and always did what they were ordered to do".

The word of God explains that teachers as educators who teach and guide students on the path of goodness, on the one hand the role of the family can influence the success of their child's education, the responsibility of the family in caring for, raising and protecting. The most important responsibility of parents towards children's education plays a big role in educating morals and behavior in the process of their lives.

In the context of the role of teachers in schools, most of them focus on educating through teaching. As individuals who are expected to have broad knowledge, teachers must wholeheartedly apply their knowledge in a comprehensive, tolerant learning process and strive continuously to improve the quality of life of students. The role of Islamic religious education teachers can be qualified in the indicators of a teacher's role in learning activities to be actualized within the scope of the school as follows (S & M.A., 2019): (1) As a teacher, (instructional), the teacher is tasked with designing teaching programs, implementing planned programs, and evaluating the results after the program is implemented; (2) As an educator, the teacher has a role to guide students towards maturity with an Islamic personality, in line with the purpose of human creation by Allah; (3) As a leader (managerial), the teacher plays a role in managing and controlling themselves, students, and the

community involved. This task involves directing, supervising, organizing, and controlling participation in each program implemented; (4) Teachers as mediators and facilitators, Islamic religious education teachers must understand and master the use of learning media as a communication tool. Islamic Religious Education teachers are expected to be able to choose the right media, become a liaison between students, and provide effective learning resources to achieve learning goals; (5) Teachers as mentors, is the role of a teacher who can guide students so that they can carry out conducive learning activities. In this case, the teacher's learning interaction as a mentor, in his role the teacher must provide motivation and encouragement so that a conducive interaction process occurs; (6) Role as a role model, A teacher can provide a good example to his students. It can be seen from the behavior, polite speech for a teacher.

### **The Urgency of Religious Moderation Among Students**

The importance of instilling the values of religious moderation becomes very clear considering that the diversity of religions and beliefs is something that cannot be avoided. Religious moderation is present as a solution, because this concept aims to find common ground amidst existing differences (RI, 2019). Religious moderation directs society to face religious pluralism, maintain nationalism and harmony, and maintain diversity and social identity of Indonesia. Moderation is the way for all religious and faith communities in Indonesia to respect diversity and national interests. (Prasetya et al., 2021)

In the view of religious moderation, upholding human values is an absolute must. Often, extremism traps a person in religious fanaticism, under the pretext of defending God and religion, but ironically, it actually ignores human values. When someone belittles fellow human beings "in the name of God," he actually forgets that maintaining human dignity is the core of religious teachings itself. Therefore, the importance of instilling the values of religious moderation is to direct religious practices back to their nature and essence, namely protecting human honor and dignity.

Second, in the context of national life, instilling the values of religious moderation is also crucial to maintaining and caring for the diversity of the nation. Indonesia, as a very heterogeneous country, has been inherited by the founders of the nation a solid agreement as a basis for the nation and state, namely Pancasila. Pancasila has proven to be able to unite various ethnicities, languages, cultures, and religious groups in Indonesia, becoming a strong foundation in maintaining unity and harmony amidst diversity. State-Religion Relations: In the context of religious moderation, the state is considered a common home. The state and religion live side by side and support each other. In this sense, religion and state coexist and support each other. The state does not enforce religious law as state law; religion is a political force for the common good, and the state allows and guarantees freedom of expression of one's beliefs in social life as long as it is in accordance with the law.

Indonesia, as a multicultural country, has a high risk of religious-based conflict. In this context, religious moderation is the main foundation for building harmony and peace, because the harmony produced prioritizes the values of justice and balance, both in individual life and in society as a whole. (Akhmadi, 2019). The principles of moderation include Fair and Balanced, which are part of the most important principles of moderation, namely being fair and balanced in religion. This principle involves efforts to achieve balance between various aspects, namely balance in the aspects of reason and revelation, individual interests with the common good, rights and obligations, and balance between obligations and voluntariness. In addition, it is also important to maintain the physical and spiritual dimensions as well as the balance of texts and *ijtihad* of religious figures. (Dodego et al., 2020).

In general, there are at least 9 Values of Religious Moderation, including: (1) *tawassuth* (middle-middle), (2) *i'tidal* (upright and proportional), (3) *tasamuh* (tolerant), (4) *Asy Syura* (deliberation), (5) *Al-ishlah* (improvement), (6) *qudwah* (pioneering), (7) *muwathanah* (love of the homeland), (8) *al-la 'unf* (anti-violence), and (9) *i'tiraf bil urf* (culturally friendly). (Arhanuddin Salim, 2023).

Islamic Religious Education teachers play an important role in strengthening and developing religious moderation. They have the opportunity to influence up to 80% of students across the country. Therefore, a competent Islamic Religious Education teacher in teaching Islamic Religious Education material with a religious moderation approach will have a big impact on their students. A teacher is said to be professional if he/she has various competencies and characteristics that are needed. In other words, a professional teacher is an individual who has mastered a number of important skills, including intellectual, social, spiritual, personality, and moral competencies. These competencies enable teachers to carry out their duties effectively and make significant contributions to the education and character formation of students. (Wasehudin, 2018).

The development of religious moderation in an institutional context will be more effective if school leaders actively play a role in creating an atmosphere that respects differences in beliefs and religions. They are expected to create a harmonious school environment that supports diversity. The sustainability of this atmosphere will be

more assured if the values of religious moderation are used as a basis for religious understanding in schools. (Ali Muhtarom, Mahnan Marbawi, 2021)

## Conclusions

This study has demonstrated the significant role of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers in fostering religious moderation among high school students. Through their roles as educators, guides, facilitators, and role models, IRE teachers contribute to shaping students' understanding and application of religious moderation values. The research findings highlight that the integration of moderation values into the curriculum, interactive learning methods, and role-modeling behaviors effectively instill tolerance, balance, and respect for religious diversity among students.

Furthermore, this study identifies several challenges in implementing religious moderation, including curriculum constraints, resistance from certain segments of the community, and the need for more structured training programs for teachers. Despite these obstacles, the efforts of IRE teachers have led to tangible positive outcomes, such as increased student tolerance, reduced religious bias, and stronger social cohesion in the school environment. The research findings align with existing theories on religious moderation and educational transformation, reinforcing the idea that teachers play a pivotal role in shaping students' perceptions of religious diversity. By addressing both the opportunities and challenges, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse on religious moderation and provides practical recommendations for enhancing its implementation in schools. In terms of practical implications, this study suggests that policymakers and educational institutions should consider revising curricula to explicitly incorporate religious moderation principles. Additionally, the development of professional training programs for teachers and the establishment of institutional policies supporting religious moderation can further strengthen its practice in educational settings.

Future research should explore the long-term impact of religious moderation education on students beyond the school environment. Investigating how these values influence students' perspectives and behaviors in higher education or professional settings would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of religious moderation education. By fostering religious moderation through structured teaching strategies, IRE teachers contribute not only to a more harmonious school environment but also to broader societal cohesion, ensuring that students grow into individuals who respect and uphold religious diversity in their daily lives.

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