

Fostering Religious Moderation among Orphans and Disadvantaged Children in Jepara

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Abstract

Religious moderation needs to be promoted at all levels of society, especially among adolescents, including orphans and the underprivileged. Jepara is one of the cities with a significant number of orphans and the disadvantaged. This study aims to instill the values of Religious Moderation in orphans and the disadvantaged at the Orphan and the Underprivileged Educational Institutions in Jepara. The method employed is the Community-Based Research (CBR) model, utilizing a descriptive approach. The children were provided with participatory mentoring through training that included three stages: understanding the concept, internalizing the values, and implementing Religious Moderation in daily life. This activity was designed to increase participants' awareness and ability to apply attitudes of tolerance, justice, and respect for differences. The results revealed a significant increase in the understanding and practice of the values of Religious Moderation. Before the training, most participants did not fully understand this concept; however, after the mentoring, they exhibited positive changes in their social and religious behavior.

Keywords: *Religious Moderation; Educational Institution for Orphans and the Disadvantaged; Jepara.*

Introduction

Indonesia is a pluralistic nation comprising diverse ethnicities, tribes, groups, cultures, and religions. Interestingly, Indonesia is one of the countries with the largest Muslim population in the world. Nevertheless, the founding fathers never proclaimed Indonesia as an Islamic state or one that implements Islamic sharia (Mulyana, 2023; Rahmawati, 2021). This was an agreement among the nation's founders that Indonesia is a republic within the framework of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI), with Pancasila as the state foundation (Epafra, 2016; Wulandari et al., 2024).

Despite this, the country has never been free from religiously motivated rebellions, particularly those based on Islam, even since its inception. Shortly after independence, the DI/TII Movement, led by Kartosoewirjo, emerged, aspired to establish an Islamic state, and was accompanied by similar movements in Java and beyond (Zubaedi & Saputra, 2024). The floodgates for such movements opened wider with the advent of the Reformasi era. Reformasi marked the starting point at which freedom of thought and expression for every citizen was guaranteed by law (Aini et al., 2022; Malik et al., 2017). However, Reformasi is like a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it fostered a more democratic climate. On the other hand, it catalyzed the emergence of radical Islamic groups and ideologies. The Reformasi era provided fresh momentum for them. These groups have spread to all levels of society (Ahyar, 2017; Umam, 2016).

One institution particularly vulnerable to the influence of radical groups is the educational system, despite the fact that education should ideally serve as a crucible for the nation's youth to develop perspectives aligned with national educational ideals (Yanti & Yusnaini, 2018). According to a 2018 study by the Center for the Study of Islam and Society at UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta on radicalism, as many as 57.03% of teachers at the elementary and junior high school levels hold intolerant views in Indonesia. This aligns with data released by the Institute for Islam and Peace Studies (LaKIP), which states that 48.9% of students support radical actions (Anwar & Muhayati, 2021; Tuhuteru et al., 2023).

Thus, it is clear that the primary victims of such radical Islamic movements are children. Children, who are still in the developmental stage, are influenced by intolerant, unjust, and discriminatory views. In practice, for

example, a child becomes antipathetic toward befriending another child of a different religion. A child mocks a friend for wearing different clothing, and so on. Such attitudes are highly detrimental and unnecessary in maintaining Indonesia's national diversity and the integrity of the NKRI (Zahro & Nursikin, 2024).

Conversely, moderate attitudes should be more widely promoted among the younger generation, particularly school-aged children. According to Ali Ramdhani, religious moderation is a perspective, attitude, and practice of religion in communal life, embodying the essence of religious teachings that protect human dignity and build public welfare based on the principles of justice, balance, and adherence to the constitution as a national agreement (Marjuni, 2022; Mubarok, 2016). Many believe that religious tolerance will erode religious understanding. In fact, religious moderation realizes the true principles of religion. A strong understanding of religion can foster tolerance for differences and a friendly attitude toward others. In other words, religious moderation in Indonesia prioritizes the value of religious diversity over the mixing of doctrines from different religions (Bachtiar, 2018; Dafidela et al., 2022). Ali Ramdhani states that there are four indicators of moderation: tolerance, anti-violence, respect for traditions, and national commitment. Ironically, many of the nation's youth or adolescents are exposed to radical ideologies. Therefore, instilling and introducing moderate religious perspectives is crucial, especially among school-aged children who are in the process of developing their thinking (Corey, n.d.; Munandar & Amin, 2023).

Several studies related to the issue of moderation have been conducted so far. For example, Musyrifin et al. (2022) examined efforts to realize religious moderation among students through textbooks. This research aimed to explore how the government promotes religious moderation among schoolchildren via textbooks. There are four indicators of religious moderation as formulated by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia: national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence, and accommodation of local culture. The study found that not all indicators are applied in every school textbook. Then, Yuliana et al. (2022) investigated the strengthening of religious moderation in early childhood as an effort to prevent radicalization during the COVID-19 pandemic. This research aimed to examine efforts to strengthen religious moderation in early childhood. The study revealed that religious moderation efforts for young children encompass

four aspects: instilling national loyalty, fostering tolerance, promoting anti-violence, and introducing and preserving local culture. Meanwhile, Hadiat & Syamsurijal (2021) explored mainstreaming religious moderation among adolescents. The results found that religious moderation within the family is highly important. The moderate attitudes demonstrated by parents serve as part of the learning-by-doing process. Religious moderation in schools/madrasahs is strategically vital to implement. Moderation values are easily applied to students, with teachers acting as the primary pioneers in internalizing these values through subjects. Religious moderation on social media is highly representative of the broader community. The reach of socialization and internalization of moderation values is not limited to local communities but can extend to various cities, provinces, and even across countries.

However, as far as authors are concerned, efforts to promote religious moderation among orphans and disadvantaged children have never been carried out. This is important because they represent one of the most vulnerable societal groups, including their need for balanced information on religious issues, particularly religious moderation. Moreover, they possess the same potential as other community groups in serving as social agents to promote religious moderation on a broader societal scale. Therefore, this study aims to examine the impact of a mentoring program in instilling religious moderation values among adolescent school-aged children at the Orphan and Dhufafa Education Institution in Jepara. This institution accommodates children from diverse social backgrounds, including orphans, at all levels, from elementary to senior high school. This effort is crucial not only to shield them from radical ideologies but also to position them as social agents capable of influencing their peers in both school and broader community settings.

Method

This study adopts a Community-Based Research (CBR) methodology to meet real community needs and empower participants through collaborative, participatory, and transformative processes (Leeuw et al., 2012). CBR integrates local knowledge, fosters mutual learning, and pursues sustainable social impact. The CBR process begins with contextual analysis and community engagement, including initial field immersion and focus group

discussions (FGDs) with institutional leaders, caregivers, and children to assess social conditions, vulnerabilities, and existing attitudes toward religious moderation. This is followed by building trust-based partnerships with Lembaga Yatim dan Dhuafa. A pre-post participatory intervention design was implemented. Fifty orphans and dhuafa children (aged 10–18, male and female) from Jepara institutions were selected via purposive sampling, meeting criteria of active participation, diverse social backgrounds, willingness to join the mentoring program, and informed consent from guardians and institution heads. An 8-week full-day mentoring program, co-designed with the institutions, delivered four religious moderation indicators (per Ministry of Religious Affairs): national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence, and cultural accommodation—through experiential activities. Data were collected through pre- and post-surveys, in-depth interviews, and participant observation, and analyzed using data triangulation to cross-validate findings across sources.

Results

Profile of *Lembaga Pendidikan Yatim dan Dhu'afa* (Educational Institution for Orphans and the Underprivileged) of the Al-Ishlah Foundation Jepara

LKSA Al Ishlah is a social welfare organization. Established in 2009, the foundation primarily focuses on providing education and vocational training to orphans and underprivileged children in the Potroyudan area of Jepara. The institution is located at Jl. KH. Wahid Hasyim No. 123, Potroyudan Subdistrict, RT 03/RW 01, Jepara District, Jepara Regency, Indonesia. As an organization, Yayasan Al-Ishlah has the vision of "*creating foster children who are pious, skilled, and possess noble character (akhlakul karimah) with a spirit of independence.*" The foundation's mission is to provide formal education for foster children, develop religious education, equip them with practical skills, establish economic enterprises that support the foundation's activities, and foster a positive mindset and outlook among foster children. While the objectives of Yayasan Al-Ishlah are to improve access to education for children, to create a generation with noble character who love their nation and homeland, to help eradicate poverty and reduce homelessness, enabling underprivileged children to live equally with others.

To manage the foundation and to implement its vision, mission, and objectives, the Board of the Al-Ishlah Foundation was established. The

management of the foundation comprises religious scholars (ulama), community leaders, academics, youth, and women from the Potroyudan area of Jepara, who share a deep concern for the welfare of orphans and the underprivileged in their community. Those who serve on the board are individuals with strong social commitment and a sincere sense of dedication, as they receive no financial compensation from the foundation. In fact, to ensure the foundation's sustainability, they work voluntarily with the local community to raise funds for the foundation's construction and activities. Given the unstable national economic conditions and the decline in moral values caused by the lack of adequate moral and vocational education for the younger generation, greater attention is needed to improve the quality of education in a more structured and focused manner. Economically disadvantaged youth, particularly those from underprivileged backgrounds (*dbu'afa*) and orphans, require special attention to help them become self-reliant. In this regard, LKSA Al-Ishlah seeks to play an active role in empowering these vulnerable groups by providing access to formal, non-formal, and religious education. Through these efforts, the foundation aims to support government programs focused on poverty reduction and human development, while fostering the growth of an independent, moral, and skilled younger generation.

The Al-Ishlah Foundation was established on March 31, 1999. The foundation was established in response to the multidimensional crisis that struck Indonesia at the time, which significantly impacted the living conditions of the people. Among those most impacted by the crisis were the *dbu'afa* (the underprivileged). Their hardships increased as mass layoffs occurred and job opportunities became increasingly scarce. In connection with this situation, there was an unused building owned by the Jepara Branch of *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU) and the *Al-Islam Foundation*, located at Jl. KH. Wahid Hasyim No. 123, Jepara. Motivated by a sincere desire to help alleviate the burden of the poor and underprivileged, and with the permission of the NU Jepara Branch and the Al-Islam Foundation to utilize the building, the Al-Ishlah Foundation was officially established. As a follow-up to its establishment, the foundation began managing the Educational Dormitory/ Al-Ishlah Orphanage for Orphans and Underprivileged Boys (*Asrama Pendidikan/Panti Asuhan Yatim dan Dbu'afa Putra Al-Ishlah*). Due to limited space and facilities, the foundation currently operates an orphanage

specifically for boys. Through this initiative, Al-Ishlah Foundation continues to serve as a social and educational institution dedicated to improving the welfare, education, and future independence of orphans and underprivileged youth in the Jepara region.

The main duty of the Al-Ishlah Foundation is to improve the welfare of orphans and the underprivileged (*dhul'afa*) in the Potroyudan area, Jepara, especially foster children in their childhood and teenage years, through the following efforts, such as improving the living standards of the poor, developing educational opportunities, assisting and alleviating the financial burden of education for orphans and the poor, providing foster children with skills as a means of livelihood, and supporting government programs in realizing development in the fields of religion, social welfare, and the economy. At the same time, the management of Al-Ishlah Foundation is responsible for implementing activities that support the main mission of the foundation, including guiding and nurturing foster children, monitoring the development of each foster child, fulfilling the needs of foster children, ensuring the achievement of the foundation's objectives, and maintaining and managing the foundation's assets properly.

Then, programs in the social sector aim to improve the welfare of orphans and the underprivileged in Potroyudan, Jepara. These include monthly donations for orphans, providing scholarships for orphans, giving assistance to victims of natural disasters, and conducting regular health check-ups for foster children. In the education sector, programs in this field aim to enhance skills and education as provisions for the future, such as enrolling foster children in formal education (elementary to university level), providing training courses, tutoring, and private lessons (language, computer, sewing, electronics repair, driving, etc.), and organizing seminars on education and entrepreneurship. Religious education is also a vital aspect of Al-Ishlah's mission. Activities include commemorating Islamic holidays, holding *Majlis Doa Anak Yatim* "Asmaul Husna," collecting and distributing *zakat*, *infaq*, and *sadaqah*, and conducting spiritual excursions (*tadabbur alam*) with the orphans. The foundation also actively builds partnerships to strengthen its social impact through collaborating with community groups, partnering with government social institutions, coordinating with related government agencies, and conducting comparative studies with successful social organizations. While promoting economic independence and sustainability, Al-Ishlah runs several

economic initiatives, including establishing a cooperative as the foundation for a future sharia-based financial institution and developing a bottled water business named Sakato Water.

According to the latest data, the Al-Ishlah Foundation currently has 61 foster children, comprising 42 boys and 19 girls. The children under the foundation's care can be categorized according to several factors. Most of the children come from underprivileged backgrounds and various regions. However, the majority originate from villages or sub-districts within Jepara Regency. The majority of them are neglected children whose parents are unable to provide for them financially. Some were admitted because they lost one or both parents (*orphans*). Not all foster children reside in the dormitory. Some live outside the orphanage for various reasons, such as still living with their parents or grandparents. This diversity of background illustrates the foundation's inclusive approach in supporting children from various regions and conditions, ensuring that each child receives proper education, care, and moral guidance in accordance with the foundation's mission.

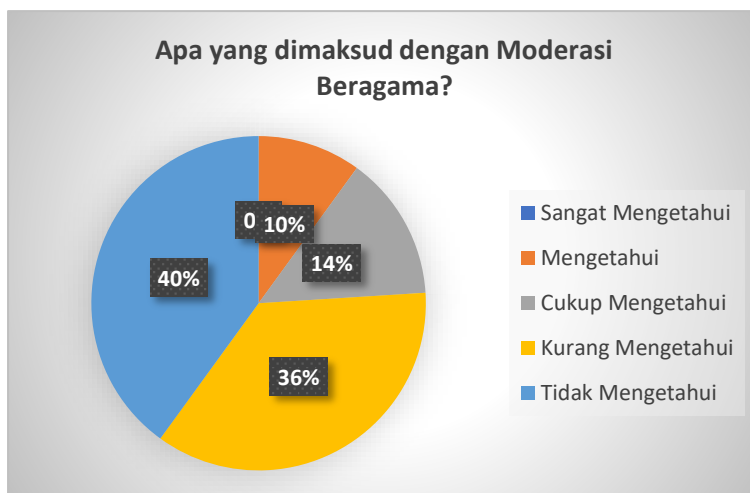
Instilling the Values of Religious Moderation among Orphans and the Underprivileged in Jepara

The implementation of this research-based community service program was carried out through a series of activities centered at LKSA Al-Ishlah Jepara and conducted continuously from September to October 2024. The series of activities included a pre-test, training sessions, and a post-test. The pre-test was conducted to assess the participants' initial understanding of Religious Moderation. At the same time, the post-test was administered to evaluate the extent of their understanding after completing the training sessions. To measure the participants' competence and insight regarding the values of Religious Moderation, five key questions were formulated as instruments in the pre-test. These questions were designed to evaluate how well the participants understood and internalized the principles of Religious Moderation throughout the mentoring process. This structured approach ensured that the program not only provided theoretical knowledge but also encouraged reflection and practical application of moderation values in daily life, particularly among orphans and underprivileged youth under the care of Yayasan Al-Ishlah Jepara. These questions were designed with specific purposes and significance to assess the participants' competence in

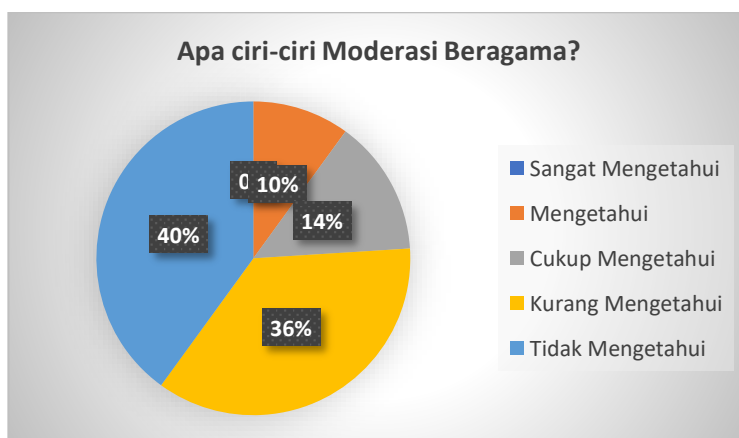
understanding Religious Moderation and its implementation in daily life. The results of the pre-test on participants' competence regarding Religious Moderation, which consisted of five fundamental questions administered to 50 participants, are presented as follows:

NO	Questions	SM	M	CM	KM	TM	Total
		4	3	2	1	0	
1	What is meant by Religious Moderation (<i>Moderasi Beragama</i>)?		5	7	18	20	50
2	What are the characteristics of Religious Moderation?		5	7	18	20	50
3	What is meant by extremism in religion?		3	5	10	32	50
4	What are the impacts of extremism in religion?		3	5	10	32	50
5	How can Religious Moderation be implemented in daily life?		5	7	15	23	50

Results and Analysis of the Pre-Test on Participants' Understanding of Religious Moderation for the first question, **"What is meant by Religious Moderation?"** shows that participants' answers varied considerably. The majority did not know about Religious Moderation, accounting for 36% (18 participants). Meanwhile, 40% (20 participants) were categorized as lacking knowledge, 14% (7 participants) were fairly knowledgeable, and only 10% (5 participants) were categorized as knowledgeable. None of the participants was classified as very knowledgeable about Religious Moderation. The following chart illustrates these findings:



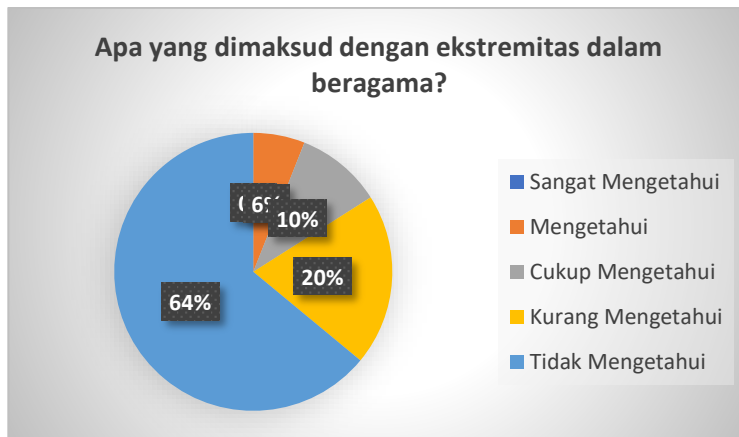
For the second question, **“What are the characteristics of Religious Moderation?”**, Similar to the responses to the first question, the summary of answers for this item also showed a wide variation among participants. The majority did not know the characteristics of Religious Moderation, totalling 36% (18 participants). Meanwhile, 40% (20 participants) were categorized as lacking knowledge, 14% (7 participants) were fairly knowledgeable, and only 10% (5 participants) were knowledgeable. None of the participants reached the very knowledgeable category. The following chart illustrates these findings:



Regarding the third question, **"What is meant by extremism in religion?"**

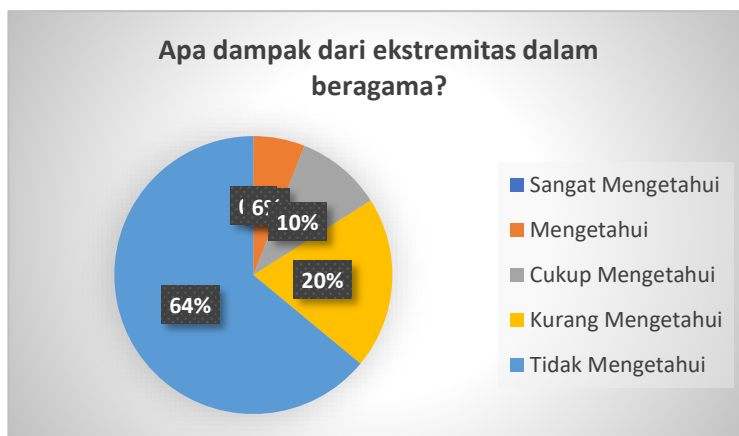
From the summary of responses to this question, it was found that

participants' answers varied significantly. The majority of participants (64%, 32 participants) were unaware of religious extremism. Meanwhile, 20% (10 participants) were categorized as lacking knowledge, 10% (5 participants) were fairly knowledgeable, and only 6% (3 participants) were knowledgeable about religious extremism. None of the participants was classified as very knowledgeable. The following chart presents these results:



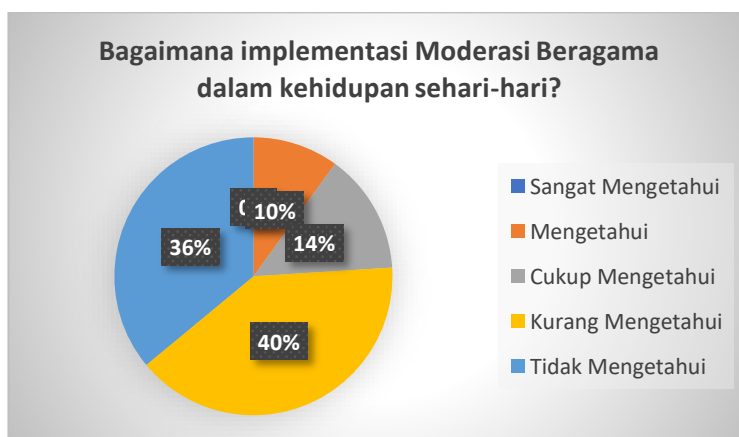
The fourth question is **"What are the impacts of extremism in religion?"**

Similar to the results of the third question, the participants' responses to this question also varied. The majority did not know about the impacts of religious extremism, with 64% (32 participants) being unaware. Meanwhile, 20% (10 participants) were categorized as lacking knowledge, 10% (5 participants) were fairly knowledgeable, and 6% (3 participants) were knowledgeable regarding this issue. None of the participants was categorized as very knowledgeable. The following chart illustrates these findings:



Fifth, how can Religious Moderation be implemented in daily life?

From the summary of responses to this question, it was found that the participants' answers also varied, similar to the previous questions. The majority did not know about the implementation of Religious Moderation, amounting to 36% (18 participants). Meanwhile, 40% (20 participants) were categorized as lacking knowledge, 14% (7 participants) were fairly knowledgeable, and 10% (5 participants) were knowledgeable about the implementation of Religious Moderation in daily life. None of the participants was classified as very knowledgeable. The following chart illustrates these results:



Understanding the Concept of Religious Moderation

The training material on Religious Moderation in this community service program was delivered by a qualified speaker, Mrs. Azzah Nor Laila, a

lecturer at the Nahdlatul Ulama Islamic Institute (UNISNU) Jepara. The initial stage focused on providing participants with a clear understanding of the concept of religious moderation — namely, practicing religion without extremism (either radical or liberal) while prioritizing balance and harmony. The training emphasized three key aspects: **Balance** (*Tawazun*), which involves adopting a wise attitude in balancing religious texts (*nash*) with social context; **Justice** (*I'tidal*), which involves being fair toward oneself and others, avoiding bias or partiality; and **Tolerance** (*Tasamuh*), namely respecting differences and promoting peaceful coexistence with people of different beliefs and backgrounds. Through this foundational understanding, participants were encouraged to apply these principles in their daily interactions, fostering a moderate, inclusive, and harmonious approach to religious life.

Rumusan

Moderasi Beragama

Moderasi Beragama menurut kamus bahasa:

- Bahasa Indonesia:** 1. pengurangan kekerasan dan 2. penghindaran keekstreman.
- Bahasa Latin:** ke-sedang-an (tidak kelebihan dan tidak kekurangan).
- Bahasa Inggris:** core (inti, esensi), standard (etika).
- Bahasa Arab:** wasath atau wasathiyah, yang memiliki padanan makna dengan kata *tawassuth* (tengah-tengah), *i'tidal* (adil), dan *tawazun* (berimbang).

“Cara pandang, sikap, dan praktik beragama dalam kehidupan bersama dengan cara mengejawantahkan esensi ajaran agama – yang melindungi martabat kemanusiaan dan membangun kemaslahatan umum – berlandaskan prinsip adil, berimbang, dan menaati konstitusi sebagai kesepakatan berbangsa”

Indikator

Moderasi Beragama

Keberhasilan Moderasi Beragama dalam kehidupan masyarakat Indonesia dapat terlihat dari tingginya empat indikator utama berikut ini serta beberapa indikator lain yang selaras dan saling berkaitan:

<p>1. Komitmen kebangsaan</p> <p>Penerimaan terhadap prinsip-prinsip berbangsa yang tertuang dalam konstitusi: UUD 1945 dan regulasi di bawahnya</p>	<p>2. Toleransi</p> <p>Menghormati perbedaan dan memberi ruang orang lain untuk berkeyakinan, mengekspresikan keyakinannya, dan menyampaikan pendapat. Menghargai kesetaraan dan sedia bekerjasama.</p>
<p>3. Anti kekerasan</p> <p>Menolak tindakan seseorang atau kelompok tertentu yang menggunakan cara-cara kekerasan, baik secara fisik maupun verbal, dalam mengusung perubahan yang diinginkan</p>	<p>4. Penerimaan terhadap tradisi</p> <p>Ramah dalam penerimaan tradisi dan budaya lokal dalam perilaku keagamaannya, sejauh tidak bertentangan dengan pokok ajaran agama</p>

Nilai-Nilai Moderasi Beragama

Tawassuth Moderate	I'tidal Fairness	Tasamuh Tolerant
Syuro Consensus	Islah Public Benefit	Qudwah Noble initiative
Muwaththanah Nationality	Al-La 'Unf Anti Violence	I'tiraf al-'Urf Culture Friendly

Relasi Agama dan Budaya

Penyelarasan relasi agama dan budaya

Apresiasi terhadap ekspresi budaya berbasis nilai agama, pengembangan literasi khazanah budaya, dan pelestarian situs dan perayaan keagamaan dan budaya memperkuat toleransi

Relasi Agama dan Budaya

- Apresiasi Budaya:** Penghargaan atas keragaman budaya yang merupakan wujud dari implementasi pengalaman agama
- Literasi Budaya:** Pengembangan literasi khazanah budaya bernafas agama
- Pelestarian Budaya:** Pelestarian dan optimalisasi produk budaya berbasis agama untuk menegajhterakan umat
- Dialog Lintas Agama dan Budaya:** Penguatan dialog lintas agama dan budaya
- Tafsir Keagamaan:** Pengembangan tafsir keagamaan berperspektif budaya
- Perayaan Keagamaan dan Budaya:** Pemanfaatan perayaan keagamaan dan budaya untuk memperkuat toleransi

The next stage is discussion and enrichment of understanding, which are also needed to broaden the participants' understanding of religious moderation. Discussion-based learning activities were conducted using social phenomena. Participants were shown images or illustrations representing religious situations in society and were asked to interpret and discuss them in groups (Lubis & Siregar, 2021). This activity aimed to develop critical thinking, social empathy, and awareness of the importance of maintaining a

moderate attitude in responding to differences. The next stage involved a simulation exercise, where participants engaged in role-playing activities that represented life in a pluralistic society (Harianto, 2018). They acted as teachers and students, employees and employers, community leaders, or ordinary citizens from different religious and belief backgrounds. Through this simulation, participants were able to internalize and practice the values of religious moderation directly within realistic social contexts. This activity also aimed to shape them into agents of religious moderation, capable of promoting tolerant, fair, and balanced attitudes within their respective communities (M. Jakfar, 2016; Nasrowi, 2020).

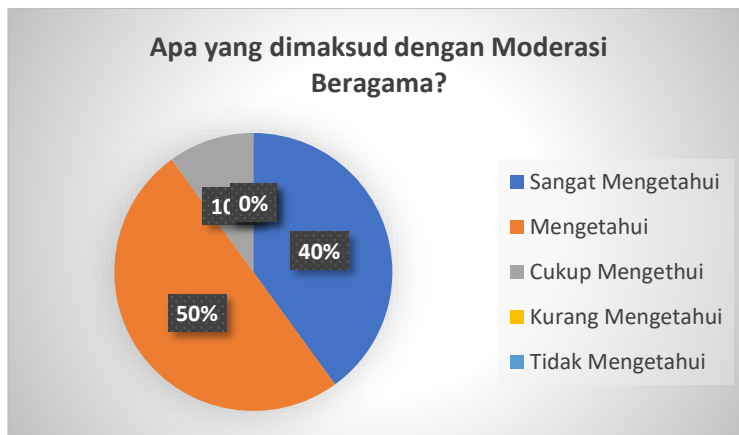
In this section, we present the outcomes of the mentoring program conducted with the participants regarding their competence and understanding of Religious Moderation. The post-test was administered after the training sessions to assess the extent of improvement in participants' comprehension and awareness of the concepts, principles, and practical implementation of religious moderation in daily life. The following are the questions given to the participants during the post-test.

NO	Questions	SM	M	CM	KM	TM	JH
		4	3	2	1	0	
1	What is meant by Religious Moderation (<i>Moderasi Beragama</i>)?	20	25	5			50
2	What are the characteristics of Religious Moderation?	20	25	5			50
3	What is meant by extremism in religion?	20	20	7	3		50
4	What are the impacts of extremism in religion?	20	20	5	5		50

5	How can Religious Moderation be implemented in daily life?	30	20				50
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1. What is Meant by Religious Moderation?

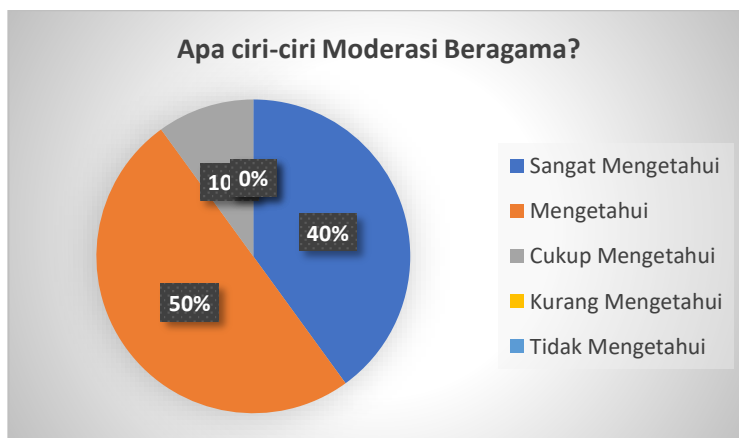
The results of this question indicate that 40% of the participants (20 people) were categorized as Highly Knowledgeable about the meaning of Religious Moderation, while the majority, 50% (25 people), were categorized as Knowledgeable. The remaining 10% (5 people) were categorized as Fairly Knowledgeable. When compared to the results of the pre-test, conducted before the training on the inculcation of Religious Moderation values, these findings show a significant improvement in participants' understanding of the concept of Religious Moderation. The following diagram illustrates the comparison:



2. What Are the Characteristics of Religious Moderation?

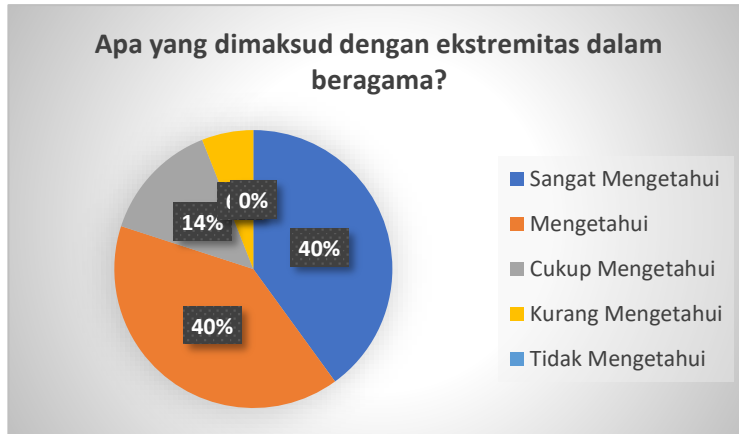
After the mentoring activities were conducted, the participants' responses to this question were distributed across three levels of understanding, similar to the results of the first question; (1) 40% (20 participants) were categorized as Highly Knowledgeable; (2) 50% (25 participants) were categorized as Knowledgeable, which represents the majority, and; (3) 10% (5 participants) were categorized as Fairly Knowledgeable. This data presents an interesting comparison to their condition prior to the mentoring activities, when the majority were Unaware or Less Knowledgeable about the Characteristics of Religious Moderation.

These results indicate a positive trend of improvement in participants' understanding of the traits of Religious Moderation. The following diagram illustrates the data:



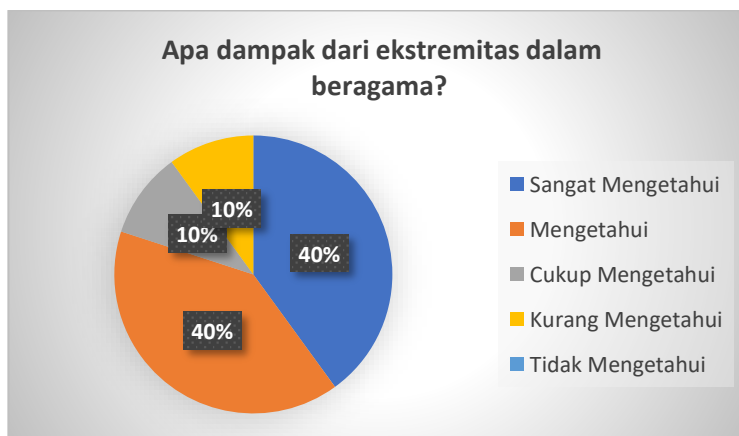
3. What is Meant by Extremism in Religion?

Before the mentoring program was implemented, the majority of participants were Unaware or Less Knowledgable about the concept of Religious Extremism. However, during and after the mentoring process, most participants showed a significant improvement in understanding—many even reached the Highly Knowledgable level. Specifically, after the mentoring, 40% (20 participants) were categorized as Highly Knowledgable, 40% (20 participants) as Knowledgable, 14% (7 participants) as Fairly Knowledgable, and 6% (3 participants) as Less Knowledgable. This represents a substantial improvement compared to the pre-test results, where the majority had little to no understanding of religious extremism. The following diagram illustrates the findings:



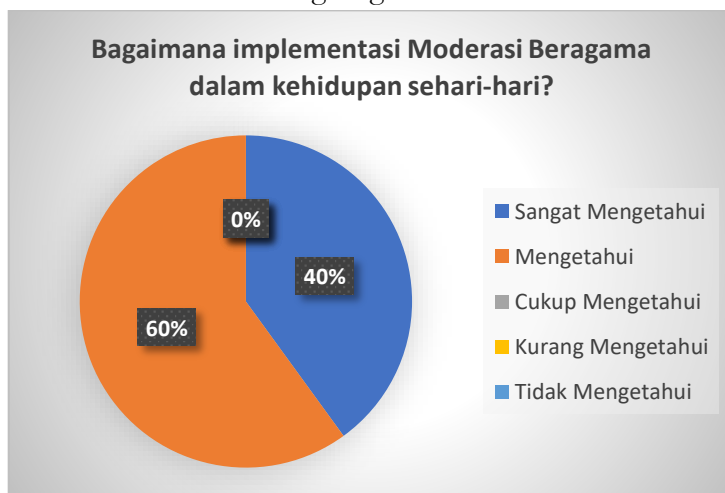
4. What are the Impacts of Religious Extremism?

Before the mentoring activities were carried out, the majority of participants were Unaware or Less Knowledgeable about the impacts of Religious Extremism. However, after the mentoring process, there was a significant positive shift in their understanding. Post-mentoring results show that 40% (20 participants) were categorized as Highly Knowledgeable, 40% (20 participants) as Knowledgeable, 10% (5 participants) as Fairly Knowledgeable, and 10% (5 participants) as Less Knowledgeable. This indicates that the mentoring activities successfully improved the participants' awareness of the dangers and negative effects of religious extremism, as reflected in the diagram below.



5. How is Religious Moderation Implemented in Daily Life?

The mentoring activities yielded very positive outcomes, enhancing participants' understanding of how to apply Religious Moderation in their daily lives. Before the mentoring (during the pre-test), most participants did not understand how to implement Religious Moderation in their everyday lives. However, after receiving training on the concept and values of moderation, their understanding of the concept and values improved significantly. The post-test results show that 40% (20 participants) were categorized as Highly Knowledgeable, and 60% (30 participants) were categorized as Knowledgeable about applying religious moderation in daily life. This indicates a strong positive transformation in their awareness and ability to practice moderation-based values in real social and religious contexts, as illustrated in the following diagram.



Discussion

The results of the mentoring and training program at LKSA Al-Ishlah Jepara demonstrated a significant improvement in participants' understanding and competence regarding the concept and application of Religious Moderation. The pre-test results showed that most participants had limited or no knowledge of religious moderation, its characteristics, and the dangers of extremism. However, after participating in the mentoring activities, which included discussions, simulations, and enrichment sessions, the post-test revealed a substantial increase in comprehension across all indicators. More than 80% of participants reached the "knowledgeable" and "highly

knowledgeable” categories in defining religious moderation, identifying its characteristics, recognizing religious extremism and its impacts, and applying moderation values in daily life. These findings indicate that the mentoring program effectively enhanced participants’ cognitive and practical grasp of Religious Moderation, fostering their ability to internalize and implement moderate attitudes within their social and religious environments.

The results indicating an increase in participants’ understanding of religious moderation also highlight the importance of recognizing the opposite tendencies that threaten social harmony—namely, religious extremism. A deeper comprehension of extremism is essential to strengthen participants’ awareness of the boundaries between balanced religious commitment and excessive rigidity. Therefore, understanding religious extremism becomes an important foundation for reinforcing the values of religious moderation in society.

Religious extremism refers to attitudes or actions that are excessively rigid in practicing religious teachings, exceeding the limits of moderation and balance encouraged by religion. This extremism often manifests in rigid, intolerant, or even violent behavior carried out in the name of religion, based on the belief that only their interpretation is correct and must be applied universally—often without considering the social or cultural context of the community (Faiq & Syakur, 2021). Religious extremism involves exclusive and rigid beliefs or practices, frequently characterized by rejection of differing views or groups. It can lead to intolerance, radicalism, or even acts of violence, all of which are justified as efforts to defend or promote a particular religious conviction. The causes of religious extremism often stem from a narrow understanding of religious teachings, social or political influences, or a sense of injustice felt by individuals or groups. Religious extremism is harmful because it disrupts social harmony and increases conflict between religious communities or within society at large (Djuyandi et al., 2018). Some characteristics of religious extremism include:

1. Excessive Fanaticism: Holding onto religious teachings in an extreme manner, believing there is only one correct way to understand the faith.
2. Intolerance: Rejecting differing opinions or interpretations within the same religion, and denying space for diversity.

3. Rejection of Moderation: Opposing the idea of balance or compromise in religious practice, insisting on strict adherence without flexibility.
4. Use of Violence: In some cases, religious extremism leads individuals or groups to use violence as a means to impose or enforce their beliefs on others.



This extremism contradicts the fundamental principles of religion, which generally teach compassion, peace, and mutual respect. Such extreme attitudes often arise from a narrow understanding or literal interpretation of religious texts without considering human values and diversity. As a result, they can trigger conflicts and tensions among followers of different religions (Helmy et al., 2021). By understanding the roots and manifestations of religious extremism, participants are better prepared to internalize and practice the values of moderation in their daily lives.

After understanding the basic concept of religious moderation, the next stage involves internalizing its values through education and social habituation. This process aims to ensure that moderation is not merely theoretical knowledge but also becomes an attitude and behaviour practiced in daily life. The steps taken include:

1. Formal and Informal Education: The values of religious moderation are introduced through various educational institutions, both formal (such as schools and universities) and informal (such as pesantren and family environments). These values are conveyed through lectures, discussions, and readings that foster a nuanced and contextual understanding of religion.

2. **Role Models from Religious and Community Leaders:** Religious leaders and community figures play an important role as role models in demonstrating moderate attitudes. Through their everyday behavior, which reflects justice, balance, and tolerance, they serve as concrete examples for society in implementing the values of religious moderation.
3. **Inclusive Religious Activities:** The implementation of moderation values is also carried out through inclusive religious activities that embrace diversity. These include interfaith dialogues, joint social activities, and problem-solving efforts based on deliberation and mutual respect.

The findings of this study align with and expand upon several previous works that also focused on strengthening religious moderation through mentoring and community-based education. Arifin et al. (2024) in *Mentoring Preachers and Quran Teachers to Strengthen Religious Moderation in the Border Region of Gorontalo, North Sulawesi* reported that structured mentoring significantly enhanced participants' understanding of tolerance, non-violence, and national commitment within a multicultural setting. Similarly, Bachmisd et al. (2024) in *Strengthening Religious Moderation Values among Children in Babakanmulya Village* demonstrated that cultural-based learning, such as integrating traditional arts into religious education, effectively fosters children's awareness of tolerance and harmony across different faiths. Meanwhile, Hefni & Uyun (2020) in *Pendampingan Kader Pesantren sebagai Aset Modal Sosial dalam Penguatan Moderasi Beragama* emphasized that empowering pesantren cadres through continuous mentoring builds sustainable moderate attitudes grounded in local social values.

Compared to these studies, the current research conducted at LKSA Al-Ishlah Jepara offers a broader perspective by targeting orphans and underprivileged youth, integrating formal, non-formal, and religious education as a holistic model of empowerment. This approach not only deepens cognitive understanding but also translates moderation values into practical behavior, highlighting the social inclusivity dimension that earlier studies did not fully explore. These findings reaffirm that fostering religious moderation requires continuous education and contextual mentoring, ensuring that its values are deeply embedded in both individual and community life.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the previous discussion, several key conclusions can be drawn before participating in the Religious Moderation training. The majority of participants did not understand the concept of Religious Moderation. After completing the series of training sessions, most participants gained a clear understanding of the values and practical implementation of Religious Moderation. They are now expected to disseminate and apply these values within their respective communities. Therefore, the training program on Religious Moderation should be continued and expanded to reach a broader group, especially among youth and community leaders. There should be ongoing mentoring and evaluation to ensure the participants consistently practice moderation values in their daily interactions. Collaboration among educational institutions, religious organizations, and community leaders is crucial to fostering a culture of tolerance, balance, and mutual respect in society.

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