

## Strengthening Religious Moderation through Multicultural Learning for STAI Ibnurusyd Kotabumi Students in the Digital Era

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### Abstract

This study aims to analyze the strengthening of religious moderation through multicultural learning for students at STAI Ibnurusyd Kotabumi in the digital era. This research is motivated by the increasing challenges of intolerance, radicalism, and the spread of unverified religious information through digital media that influence students' mindsets. The research approach uses a descriptive qualitative method with data collection techniques through observation, interviews, and documentation. Research informants consisted of lecturers and students involved in the multicultural learning process on campus. The results of the study indicate that: first, the implementation of multicultural learning is carried out through the integration of values of tolerance, respect for diversity, open dialogue, and the use of digital media in the learning process. Second, supporting factors for strengthening religious moderation include institutional commitment, the role of lecturers, a harmonious academic environment, and the use of digital media as an educational tool. Meanwhile, inhibiting factors are low student digital literacy, the negative influence of social media, and the persistence of exclusive religious understanding. Third, multicultural learning has positive implications for increasing students' attitudes of tolerance and religious moderation. Students become more open to differences, able to think critically about digital information, and develop social awareness in maintaining harmony in a pluralistic society. This research confirms that multicultural learning is an effective strategy for strengthening students' religious moderation in the era of digital transformation.

### Keywords

Religious Moderation, Multicultural Learning, Students, Digital Era, Higher Education



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## INTRODUCTION

The development of the digital era has brought about significant changes in various aspects of society, including education. Digital transformation not only impacts communication patterns and information access but also shapes the thinking, attitudes, and behavior of the younger generation in understanding social and religious life (Burbules et al., 2020; Susanto & Syahrudin, 2024). Higher education as an educational institution has an important responsibility in shaping the character of students so that they are able to face global challenges without losing national and humanitarian values (Jamaludin et al., 2022). One effort that can be made is through strengthening religious moderation in the learning process. Religious moderation is a crucial concept in maintaining a balance between religious understanding and pluralistic social life, thereby creating a harmonious, tolerant, and peaceful society (Husna & Thohir, 2020; Sajdah et al., 2025; Susanto et al., 2023).

In general, Indonesia is a country with a very high level of diversity, both in terms of religion, culture, language, and ethnicity. This diversity is both a national strength and a challenge in maintaining social unity (Ismah, 2021; Wekke, 2017). In the context of education, diversity requires a learning approach that instills the values of tolerance, mutual respect, and openness to differences. Multicultural learning is one such educational approach that places diversity as a crucial part of the learning process. Through multicultural learning, students not only acquire academic knowledge but are also shaped into individuals with social awareness, an inclusive attitude, and the ability to coexist peacefully in a pluralistic society (Effendi, 2021; Ridho et al., 2022).

Social facts show that current developments in digital technology have both positive and negative impacts on people's lives, particularly students. Easy access to social media and digital information is often exploited to spread narratives of intolerance, hate speech, radicalism, and religious-based provocation (Hasan, 2025). This situation has led to social polarization and a weakening of tolerance among the younger generation. Many students readily accept religious information from digital media without adequate verification, potentially giving rise to exclusive and extreme religious beliefs. This phenomenon demonstrates the urgent need to strengthen religious moderation in higher education institutions to face the challenges of the digital era. (AlGerafi et al., 2023; Susanto & Kiftiyah, 2025).

The reality on the ground shows that students at STAI Ibnurusyd Kotabumi come from diverse social, cultural, and religious backgrounds. In the learning process, this diversity requires

an educational approach that fosters harmonious interactions and mutual respect among students. However, some students still have a textual understanding of religion, are less open to differing views, and tend to accept digital information instantly without critical consideration. Furthermore, learning in higher education sometimes focuses on cognitive aspects and does not optimally develop the values of tolerance and religious moderation contextually (Winata et al., 2020). This condition is a challenge for lecturers and educational institutions in creating learning that is adaptive to the development of the times while being able to build moderate character in students.

Based on these conditions, the main problem in this research is how strengthening religious moderation can be implemented through multicultural learning for students in the digital era. Other issues include the suboptimal integration of religious moderation values into the learning process, the limited use of educational digital media, and students' low awareness of how to respond to diversity wisely (Fita Mustafida, 2020; Naim, 2016). If this situation is not addressed, the potential for intolerance and social conflict based on differences could increase in academic settings and the wider community. As a solution, multicultural learning is seen as an effective strategy for strengthening students' religious moderation. This learning emphasizes the importance of respect for diversity, open dialogue, social cooperation, and anti-discrimination in the educational process. Lecturers have a crucial role in integrating the values of religious moderation through collaborative learning methods, interactive discussions, case studies, and the positive use of digital media. Furthermore, the wise use of digital technology can be directed as an educational tool to broaden students' horizons about the importance of tolerance and peaceful coexistence in a multicultural society. Thus, learning is oriented not only toward the transfer of knowledge but also toward the development of moderate and humanistic student character.

The urgency of this research lies in the importance of strengthening religious moderation in higher education as an effort to maintain social harmony in the digital age. This research is relevant due to the increasing challenges of intolerance and the spread of radicalism through digital media, which significantly influence the younger generation. Furthermore, higher education plays a strategic role in shaping the mindset and character of students as future intellectuals and agents of social change. Therefore, a learning model is needed that integrates multicultural values and religious moderation contextually, keeping pace with current developments.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the implementation of multicultural learning in strengthening religious moderation among students of STAI Ibnurusyd Kotabumi in the digital era,

to identify supporting factors and obstacles in the learning process, and to describe the implications of multicultural learning on the formation of students' moderate character. This study is expected to provide theoretical and practical contributions to the development of religious moderation-based education in higher education. The novelty of this study lies in the integration of multicultural learning with the strengthening of religious moderation in the context of digital transformation in Islamic higher education environments. This study not only discusses the concept of religious moderation normatively, but also emphasizes the implementation of learning that is adaptive to the development of digital media and students' social realities. In addition, this study provides a new perspective on multicultural learning strategies that can build students' moderate character through a collaborative, contextual, and digital technology-based approach.

## **METHOD**

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive approach. The qualitative approach was chosen because the study aims to deeply understand the process of strengthening religious moderation through multicultural learning among STAI Ibnurusyd Kotabumi students in the digital era (Creswell, 2018; Sugiyono, 2016). Through this approach, researchers can describe social phenomena, learning patterns, and interactions that occur in the academic environment in a more comprehensive and contextual manner. The research location was conducted at STAI Ibnurusyd Kotabumi, with research subjects including lecturers and students involved in a multicultural-based learning process. The selection of the research location was based on the diversity of student backgrounds and the institution's efforts to instill the value of religious moderation through academic activities. Research informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, namely selecting informants based on certain considerations according to the research needs. Informants consisted of lecturers teaching courses, active students, and academics who understand the implementation of multicultural learning on campus.

Data collection techniques were carried out through observation, interviews, and documentation. Observations were used to directly observe the learning process, student interactions, and the application of religious moderation values in academic activities. In-depth interviews were conducted with lecturers and students to obtain information regarding multicultural learning strategies, the use of digital media, and obstacles faced in strengthening religious moderation. Meanwhile, documentation was used to supplement the research data in the form of syllabi, teaching materials, activity photos, and other academic documents relevant to the

research. Data analysis techniques used the Miles and Huberman model, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions (Miles et al., 2014). Data reduction was performed by selecting and simplifying data according to the research focus. Next, the data was presented in descriptive narrative form for ease of understanding and analysis. The final stage was drawing conclusions based on the research findings systematically and objectively. To maintain data validity, this study employed source and technical triangulation techniques to enhance the validity and reliability of the data obtained.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Implementation of Multicultural Learning in Strengthening Religious Moderation of STAI Ibnurusyd Kotabumi Students in the Digital Era**

The implementation of multicultural learning in strengthening religious moderation in STAI Ibnurusyd Kotabumi students is carried out through a learning process that instills the values of tolerance, respect for diversity, inclusive attitudes, and dialogue between differences (B. Beribe, 2023; Bensaid & Machouche, 2019). In the digital era, learning does not only take place face to face in the classroom, but also through digital media which allows students to obtain information widely and quickly (Rahmawati & Sabiq, 2023; Uddin Ahmed Khondoker, 2024). Therefore, lecturers have an important role in guiding students to be able to filter information critically and not be easily influenced by intolerant or radical content that develops on social media.

Based on observations and interviews, the implementation of multicultural learning is carried out through several strategies. First, lecturers integrate the value of religious moderation into learning materials through discussions on cultural, religious, and social diversity in Indonesia. Students are encouraged to understand that differences are part of a social reality that must be respected and safeguarded together. Second, learning is conducted dialogically and collaboratively through group discussions, presentations, and case studies on religious and cultural-based social conflicts. This method provides space for students to express their opinions openly while learning to respect the views of others. Third, digital media is used as an educational tool to strengthen national insight and religious moderation through learning videos, educational social media, digital journals, and online discussion platforms. The implementation of multicultural learning is also evident in the lecturers' attitudes, who instill anti-violence and anti-discrimination values in academic interactions. Lecturers function not only as presenters but also as facilitators, building a culture of healthy dialogue and communication on campus. Students are encouraged to develop

critical thinking skills regarding digital information related to religious and social issues so they are not easily provoked by extremist narratives (Rantung, 2024). In addition, academic activities such as seminars, cross-cultural discussions, and group work also strengthen the social interactions of students who come from different backgrounds.

From the perspective of James A. Banks' multicultural education theory, the implementation of multicultural learning aims to create educational equality and build students' awareness of the importance of respecting cultural and social diversity (Banks, 2016). Banks explains that multicultural education is not only oriented towards knowledge transfer, but also towards changing students' attitudes and behaviors so they can live harmoniously in a pluralistic society. This theory is relevant to the implementation of learning at STAI Ibnurusyd Kotabumi, which emphasizes developing a tolerant, inclusive, and open attitude toward differences through contextual learning processes (Jason, 2023; Rafsanjani et al., 2025). In addition, the implementation of religious moderation in learning can also be analyzed using Vygotsky's social constructivism theory which emphasizes that learning occurs through social interaction and collaboration (Vygotsky, 1978). In the context of this research, students gain an understanding of religious moderation through dialogue, group discussions, and the exchange of social experiences throughout the learning process. An academic environment that supports open communication helps students develop a more moderate and humanistic understanding of diversity. Thus, multicultural learning not only enhances students' cognitive aspects but also shapes social character that is adaptive to the challenges of the digital era.

The results of implementing multicultural learning indicate that students have a better understanding of the importance of religious moderation in social life. Students become more open to differences, able to respect others' perspectives, and have an awareness of maintaining social harmony on campus and in the community. This demonstrates that multicultural learning is an effective strategy for strengthening religious moderation in the digital era full of social and information challenges.

### **Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in Strengthening Religious Moderation through Multicultural Learning for Campus Students**

Strengthening religious moderation through multicultural learning for university students is influenced by various interrelated supporting and inhibiting factors. In the context of higher education, the success of implementing religious moderation is determined not only by the

classroom learning process but also by the social environment, institutional policies, the use of digital technology, and the students' own character. At STAI Ibnurusyd Kotabumi, multicultural learning is a crucial strategy in fostering a tolerant and inclusive attitude amidst the diverse backgrounds of students.

Based on research findings, the primary supporting factor for strengthening religious moderation is the institution's commitment to creating a harmonious academic culture that is open to diversity. Campuses provide students with space for free discussion and respect for differing views in academic activities. Furthermore, the role of lecturers is crucial in fostering an understanding of religious moderation through a dialogical and humanistic learning approach. Lecturers not only deliver academic material but also instill values of tolerance, anti-violence, and respect for social and cultural diversity. Another supporting factor is the use of digital media as a learning tool, expanding students' access to information and insights into religious moderation. Through digital platforms, students can access journals, educational videos, online seminars, and other learning content that supports the development of moderate attitudes (Agusta & Pd, 2024; Danurahman et al., 2021). Digital-based learning also makes it easier for students to discuss and exchange ideas more broadly, without the constraints of time and space. Furthermore, the diversity of student backgrounds on campus provides social capital that fosters real multicultural interactions in everyday academic life.

However, strengthening religious moderation also faces several inhibiting factors. One major obstacle is the persistence of students with a textual understanding of religion and a tendency to be exclusive about differences. Some students readily accept religious information from social media without critical verification, making them vulnerable to narratives of intolerance and digital radicalism. This situation demonstrates that the uncontrolled flow of digital information can influence students' mindsets regarding social and religious diversity (Susanto, 2025; Wekke, 2017). Furthermore, students' limited digital literacy is also a hindering factor in strengthening religious moderation. Not all students have the ability to select valid and educational information in digital media. As a result, students are sometimes more easily provoked by provocative, discriminatory, and religiously hateful content. Another obstacle is the limited systematic integration of religious moderation values into some courses, thus hindering the optimal implementation of multicultural learning (Bulan et al., 2025; Rukayah et al., 2025).

In the perspective of Émile Durkheim's theory of social factors of education, education has

an important function in building social solidarity and maintaining social integration (Putri et al., 2023; Saepurokhman et al., 2025). Schools and universities serve as media for the formation of social values that can create social order and harmony. This theory is relevant to campus efforts to strengthen religious moderation through multicultural learning as a means of building solidarity among students from diverse backgrounds. Furthermore, Paul Gilster's digital literacy theory is also relevant in analyzing the factors supporting and inhibiting religious moderation in the digital era. Gilster explains that digital literacy is an individual's ability to understand, evaluate, and use digital information critically (Pomponio et al., 2020). In this study, students' digital literacy skills were a crucial factor in determining the success of strengthening religious moderation. Students who possess critical thinking skills regarding digital information tend to be better able to understand the value of tolerance and reject extremist narratives.

Thus, strengthening religious moderation through multicultural learning requires support from institutions, lecturers, the academic environment, and students' digital literacy skills. Furthermore, challenges such as the influence of social media, low critical thinking skills, and exclusive religious understandings need to be addressed through more contextual, dialogical, and adaptive learning in the digital era.

### **Implications of Multicultural Learning on the Attitudes of Tolerance and Religious Moderation of Students in the Digital Era**

Multicultural learning has significant implications for fostering religious tolerance and moderation in students in the digital age. In the context of higher education, multicultural learning serves not only as a process of transferring knowledge but also as a means of developing social character that values cultural, religious, and worldview diversity. Amidst the rapid development of digital technology, students are exposed to a variety of information that can influence their mindset and social behavior. Therefore, multicultural learning is crucial for building student awareness, enabling them to be moderate, open, and resistant to narratives of intolerance and digital extremism.

Based on research findings at STAI Ibnurusyd Kotabumi, multicultural learning has positive implications for increasing student tolerance in both academic and social life. Students become more open to differences in opinion, culture, and religious understanding that develop on campus. Dialogic and collaborative learning interactions encourage students to learn to respect others' views without imposing their own beliefs. This creates a more harmonious, inclusive, and democratic

academic atmosphere. Another implication is seen in the development of students' religious moderation in responding to social and religious issues in digital media (Huda, 2010; Yusriyah & Khaerunnisa, 2024). Students begin to develop critical thinking skills regarding information circulating on social media, particularly regarding hate speech, radicalism, and religious-based conflict. Multicultural learning helps students understand the importance of verifying information and encourages them to use digital media wisely and responsibly. Furthermore, students become more aware that diversity is a social reality that must be maintained to create a peaceful society.

Multicultural learning also has implications for strengthening students' social character. Students demonstrate greater concern for their social environment, are able to collaborate with individuals from diverse backgrounds, and are aware of the importance of maintaining unity in a pluralistic society. Anti-violence and anti-discrimination attitudes begin to develop through a learning process that emphasizes humanitarian values and social justice. Thus, multicultural learning not only shapes students' academic abilities but also fosters a humanistic personality that is adaptive to social change in the digital age. From the perspective of Abraham Maslow's theory of educational humanism, education aims to develop human potential holistically, encompassing intellectual, social, and emotional aspects (Muazaroh & Subaidi, 2019; Widodo et al., 2023). Multicultural learning is relevant to this theory because it helps students develop empathy, respect for others, and social awareness in community life. Students are not only guided to understand academic material but also to become individuals capable of living harmoniously within diversity.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia's theory of religious moderation serves as an important foundation for analyzing the implications of multicultural learning. Religious moderation emphasizes fairness, balance, tolerance, and non-violence in understanding religious teachings. In this study, multicultural learning has been shown to strengthen indicators of students' religious moderation through attitudes of tolerance, national commitment, acceptance of local culture, and rejection of extremism. The contextual and dialogical learning process helps students understand religion in a more inclusive and relevant way to life in a pluralistic society. Thus, the implications of multicultural learning on students' attitudes of religious tolerance and moderation in the digital era show positive results. Students become more open, critical, tolerant, and have a better social awareness in facing the challenges of diversity amidst the development of digital technology. Multicultural learning is an effective educational strategy in developing a young generation that is moderate, humanistic, and capable of maintaining social

harmony on campus and in the wider community.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results of research on strengthening religious moderation through multicultural learning for STAI Ibnurusyd Kotabumi students in the digital era, it can be concluded that: first, the implementation of multicultural learning is carried out through the integration of values of tolerance, inclusive attitudes, respect for diversity, and the use of digital media in the learning process. Lecturers play an active role in building dialogic and collaborative learning so that students are able to understand the importance of religious moderation in a pluralistic social life. Second, supporting factors for strengthening religious moderation include institutional commitment, the role of lecturers, a harmonious academic environment, and the use of digital media as a means of education. Meanwhile, inhibiting factors include the persistence of exclusive religious understanding, low student digital literacy, and the negative influence of social media that contains narratives of intolerance and radicalism. These conditions pose challenges in the process of developing moderate attitudes in students in the digital era. Third, multicultural learning has positive implications for increasing students' attitudes of religious tolerance and moderation. Students become more open to differences, able to think critically about digital information, and have social awareness to maintain harmony in community life. Multicultural learning also contributes to shaping students' character that is humanistic, anti-violence, and adaptive to social developments in the era of digital transformation.

This study is limited by its scope, which was conducted only at STAI Ibnurusyd Kotabumi, so the results cannot be generalized to all universities. Furthermore, this study focused more on a qualitative approach, thus failing to measure the effectiveness of multicultural learning quantitatively. Therefore, future researchers are advised to expand the research location to various universities and use mixed methods to obtain more comprehensive results. Future research could also examine the influence of social media on the formation of students' religious moderation in more depth.

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