

Analysis of Intra-Religious Tolerance as a Manifestation of Religious Moderation among Master's Students of Islamic Religious Education

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ABSTRACT: Intra-religious tolerance refers to the attitude of respecting and accepting differences in religious interpretations, worship practices, and organizational affiliations within the same religious community. In the Islamic context, intra-religious tolerance represents an important manifestation of religious moderation that enables internal diversity among Muslims to be managed through dialogue and mutual respect. This study aims to analyze students' understanding of intra-religious tolerance, its manifestation in social interactions, and the challenges influencing its implementation among Master's students of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at UIN Sunan Kalijaga. This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and documentation involving four second-semester Master's students of Islamic Religious Education selected through purposive sampling. The data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that students perceive intra-religious tolerance as the ability to maintain personal religious convictions while respecting differences among fellow Muslims. Such tolerance is manifested through open dialogue, academic collaboration, and harmonious social relationships despite differences in schools of thought, religious traditions, and organizational affiliations. The most significant finding of this study indicates that religious differences do not automatically lead to conflict. Instead, challenges arise when such differences are accompanied by exclusivist attitudes, absolute truth claims, and group pressures that limit openness to alternative perspectives. These findings suggest that the successful implementation of intra-religious tolerance is determined more by how individuals interpret and negotiate differences than by the differences themselves. This study contributes to the discourse on religious moderation by demonstrating that intra-religious tolerance constitutes a concrete manifestation of the principles of *tasamuh* (tolerance), *tawasuth* (moderation), and *tawazun* (balance) within the context of Islamic higher education.

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is characterized by religious, cultural, ethnic, and social diversity, making social harmony an important foundation for national cohesion. In such a plural society, differences in religious beliefs and practices have the potential to enrich social life, yet they may also generate tensions if not managed appropriately. Therefore, religious moderation has emerged as an important paradigm for maintaining peaceful coexistence and preventing conflicts arising from religious differences [1]. Religious moderation

is not merely understood as a middle position between opposing viewpoints but as an approach that promotes balance, justice, inclusiveness, and respect for diversity while maintaining commitment to religious teachings [2]. Consequently, strengthening religious moderation has become an important agenda within educational institutions, particularly Islamic higher education institutions, which play a strategic role in shaping students' religious perspectives and social attitudes [3], [4].

One important dimension of religious moderation is intra-religious tolerance. Unlike interreligious tolerance, which concerns relationships between followers of different religions, intra-religious tolerance refers to attitudes of respect, acceptance, and openness toward differences that exist within the same religious community. In the Islamic context, such differences may involve variations in religious interpretations, schools of thought, organizational affiliations, and ritual practices. Differences regarding the recitation of qunut, the number of rak'ahs in tarawih prayer, methods of religious preaching, and other religious traditions frequently become areas where attitudes of tolerance are tested. Therefore, the ability to appreciate diversity within Islam is considered an important manifestation of religious moderation in contemporary Muslim societies [5].

The importance of intra-religious tolerance becomes increasingly relevant within higher education settings, where students from diverse religious, cultural, and organizational backgrounds interact intensively. As future educators, researchers, and community leaders, students of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) are expected not only to possess a comprehensive understanding of Islamic teachings but also to demonstrate the ability to engage constructively with differing religious viewpoints [3]. This expectation is particularly relevant for Master's students of Islamic Religious Education at UIN Sunan Kalijaga, whose academic environment brings together students with diverse educational experiences, religious orientations, and organizational affiliations, creating a dynamic space for encountering and negotiating religious differences.

Previous studies have examined religious moderation and tolerance in Islamic educational settings from various perspectives. Fitriani found that Islamic Religious Education plays a crucial role in fostering both interreligious and intra-religious tolerance in plural societies. The study emphasized that tolerance should not only be directed toward followers of different religions but also toward differences among Muslims themselves, highlighting the importance of intra-religious tolerance as a foundation for social harmony [5]. Similarly, Ismail et al. significantly influence the development of moderate religious attitudes and openness toward diversity. The study revealed that religious understanding serves as an important foundation for cultivating moderation and tolerance among Muslim students [6].

Other studies have highlighted various factors influencing religious moderation and tolerance in Islamic higher education. Qomusuddin et al. found that educational experiences, social interactions, cooperation, empathy, openness, and acceptance of differences significantly contribute to the formation of students' moderate religious orientations [7]. Similarly, Zulkifli et al. demonstrated that students' religious tolerance is influenced not only by religiosity but also by socioeconomic backgrounds and patterns of social interaction within educational environments [8]. Collectively, these studies indicate that religious moderation and tolerance are multidimensional phenomena influenced by cognitive, social, educational, and environmental factors.

Despite these important contributions, existing studies predominantly focus on religious moderation in general, interreligious tolerance, students' religiosity, educational experiences, or institutional efforts to promote moderation. Comparatively little attention has been given to

intra-religious tolerance, particularly regarding how Muslim students understand, negotiate, and practice differences in religious interpretations and ritual practices within their everyday social interactions. Furthermore, studies specifically examining Master's students of Islamic Religious Education remain relatively scarce. As a result, empirical understanding of how tolerance among fellow Muslims is manifested within postgraduate Islamic education settings is still limited.

The novelty of this study lies in its focus on intra-religious tolerance as a manifestation of religious moderation among Master's students of Islamic Religious Education at UIN Sunan Kalijaga. Unlike previous studies that primarily examine religious moderation at the conceptual, institutional, or interreligious level, this study specifically investigates how postgraduate students understand, practice, and negotiate differences among fellow Muslims in their academic and social interactions. By focusing on postgraduate students who are prospective Islamic educators and scholars, this study offers a more contextual and empirical understanding of the dynamics of religious moderation within Islamic higher education.

Accordingly, this study seeks to answer the following research questions: How do Master's students of Islamic Religious Education understand intra-religious tolerance?, How is intra-religious tolerance manifested in their daily social interactions?, What challenges influence the implementation of intra-religious tolerance among Master's students of Islamic Religious Education?

Based on these research questions, this study aims to analyze intra-religious tolerance as a manifestation of religious moderation among Master's students of Islamic Religious Education at UIN Sunan Kalijaga. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of religious moderation studies by providing empirical insights into how tolerance among fellow Muslims is understood, practiced, and negotiated in higher education settings. In addition, the findings are expected to offer practical recommendations for strengthening inclusive and contextual Islamic education within Islamic higher education institutions.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive design to explore intra-religious tolerance as a manifestation of religious moderation among Master's students of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta. A qualitative approach was selected because it enables an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, perceptions, and social interactions related to religious differences within the same religious community [9]. The participants consisted of four second-semester Master's students of Islamic Religious Education selected through purposive sampling [10]. The inclusion criteria were: (1) active Master's students enrolled in the PAI program, (2) actively involved in academic and social interactions within the campus environment, (3) having experience interacting with fellow Muslims from different organizational or religious backgrounds, and (4) willingness to participate in the study. The exclusion criteria included students who were not actively engaged in campus activities during the research period or had limited experience interacting with individuals from different Islamic backgrounds. To obtain diverse perspectives, participants were selected from different organizational

affiliations, including Muhammadiyah, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), and students who had experience interacting with groups representing different Islamic orientations.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and documentation [11]. Semi-structured interviews were conducted online and lasted approximately 60 minutes for each participant. The interview protocol focused on three main themes: (1) participants' understanding of intra-religious tolerance, (2) their experiences in interacting with fellow Muslims who held different religious views and practices, and (3) the challenges and strategies involved in maintaining tolerance in everyday interactions. Prior to the interviews, participants were informed about the objectives of the study and provided their voluntary consent to participate.

Participant observation was conducted during classroom discussions, collaborative academic activities, and student organizational activities. Field notes were used to document interaction patterns, responses to differing religious opinions, and forms of tolerance demonstrated during social interactions. Documentation was used as supporting data to complement information obtained through interviews and observations.

Data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. During the data reduction stage, interview transcripts and observation notes were reviewed, selected, and organized according to the research objectives. The data were then coded manually through an open coding process to identify recurring ideas and patterns. Similar codes were subsequently grouped into broader categories related to students' understanding of intra-religious tolerance, forms of tolerance in social interactions, and challenges encountered in its implementation. The categorized data were presented in thematic displays to facilitate interpretation and comparison. Finally, conclusions were drawn by identifying relationships, patterns, and meanings emerging from the data.

To ensure the credibility of the findings, this study employed source triangulation, method triangulation, and member checking [12]. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from participants with different organizational backgrounds. Method triangulation was achieved by comparing findings derived from interviews, observations, and documentation. In addition, member checking was conducted by sharing interview summaries and preliminary interpretations with selected participants from different organizational affiliations to confirm the accuracy of the findings and ensure that the interpretations reflected their intended meanings. Participants' identities were anonymized throughout the study to maintain confidentiality and protect their privacy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Students' Understanding of Intra-Religious Tolerance

The findings indicate that Master's students of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at UIN Sunan Kalijaga understand intra-religious tolerance as an attitude of respecting, accepting, and appreciating differences in religious interpretations, ritual practices, and organizational affiliations among fellow Muslims. Participants viewed such diversity as an inevitable reality within the Muslim

community that should be approached wisely in order to maintain social harmony and prevent conflict.

P1 explained that differences within Islam are natural because they emerge from the diversity of Islamic schools of thought and intellectual traditions that have developed throughout Islamic history: "I tend to view differences as something natural because Islam itself consists of various schools of thought and intellectual traditions." (P1)

A similar perspective was expressed by P2, who emphasized the importance of respecting differences as long as they remain within the framework of Islamic teachings: "As long as it is still within the context of Islamic teachings, I prefer to respect those differences." (P2)

Meanwhile, P3 understood tolerance as the ability to maintain brotherhood among Muslims despite differences in schools of thought and religious organizations: "Tolerance in responding to differences in schools of thought and Islamic organizations among students means respecting one another, accepting different perspectives, and maintaining Muslim brotherhood." (P3)

Likewise, P4 emphasized that tolerance involves respecting the beliefs of others without creating conflict or imposing personal views on them: "Respecting other people's beliefs without interfering or creating conflict." (P4)

These interview findings were reinforced by observations conducted during classroom discussions, academic activities, and student interactions. The researcher observed that students from different organizational backgrounds were able to interact openly and demonstrate respect for diverse opinions. When disagreements arose concerning particular religious practices, students generally responded through dialogue and the exchange of arguments rather than through confrontation or mutual condemnation.

These findings suggest that students' understanding of intra-religious tolerance extends beyond a purely normative concept learned in academic settings and has become part of the way they perceive diversity in everyday life. Tolerance is not interpreted as an effort to eliminate differences or create uniformity in religious understanding. Rather, it is viewed as the ability to acknowledge and accept differences while maintaining one's own religious convictions. In this sense, students perceive diversity within Islam as a reality that can be managed through mutual respect, open communication, and constructive engagement.

From the perspective of *wasathiyah*, these findings reflect the implementation of the principle of *tasamuh* (tolerance), which emphasizes respect for differences without requiring individuals to abandon their religious identity or beliefs. Yusuf Al-Qaradawi argues that religious moderation encourages Muslims to adopt a balanced position in responding to diversity, thereby avoiding both extremism and exclusivism [13]. Furthermore, students' ability to maintain their own convictions while respecting alternative viewpoints reflects the principle of *tawazun* (balance) in social life [14]. Therefore, the understanding of tolerance demonstrated by the participants not only represents acceptance of diversity but also embodies the fundamental values of religious moderation embedded within the concept of *wasathiyah*.

The findings are consistent with the study of Fitri and Sudrimo, which found that students' levels of religious moderation are closely associated with their ability to accept diversity and establish inclusive social relationships [15].

The results also support Rambe et al., who argued that the internalization of religious moderation values plays an important role in shaping students' openness toward differences and their ability to adapt within plural environments [16]. In addition, Andriani et al. demonstrated that interactions within diverse campus environments contribute significantly to the internalization of religious moderation values among students [17].

Theoretically, these findings strengthen the argument that intra-religious tolerance represents one of the concrete manifestations of religious moderation within Islamic higher education. The study demonstrates that students' understanding of tolerance extends beyond the cognitive level and develops into a framework for managing religious differences constructively. Moreover, the findings contribute to the literature on religious moderation by showing that the principles of *tasamuh* and *tawazun* are relevant not only to interreligious relations but also to fostering harmonious relationships among Muslims with diverse religious perspectives and practices.

Manifestations of Intra-Religious Tolerance in Students' Social Interactions

The findings reveal that intra-religious tolerance is not merely understood as a normative value but is also reflected in various forms of everyday social interaction within the academic environment. Such manifestations can be observed in the ways students respond to differences in religious practices, engage in discussions on religious issues, and establish social relationships with peers from diverse organizational and religious backgrounds.

The participants explained that differences in religious practices do not hinder social relationships or academic collaboration. Instead, such differences are often perceived as opportunities to learn from one another and broaden religious perspectives. As stated by P3: "For example, I perform eleven *raka'ahs* of *tarawih* prayer, while my friend performs twenty-three. That is not a problem. Usually, I ask about the basis for that practice, and my friend explains the supporting religious evidence." (P3)

This statement indicates that differences in religious practices are not met with rejection but are addressed through dialogue and constructive exchanges of arguments. A similar view was expressed by P2: "Even when there are differences, we usually treat them as topics for casual discussion rather than reasons to blame one another." (P2)

Furthermore, interactions with students from different organizational backgrounds were found to broaden participants' religious perspectives. P2 explained: "After frequently having conversations and exchanging ideas, I realized that many other perspectives are also reasonable and worth considering." (P2)

Likewise, P4 noted that continuous interaction with Muslims from various backgrounds fostered greater openness and reduced the tendency to judge others negatively. "At first, unfamiliar practices felt strange, and I was quick to judge them. However, after seeing and understanding the diversity of religious expressions among Muslims, I became more empathetic and less judgmental." (P4)

Tolerance was also evident in students' friendships and social relationships. Despite differences in schools of thought and organizational affiliations, participants

reported maintaining positive communication and cooperation without displaying discriminatory attitudes. As stated by P3: "We interact normally, spend time together, and often joke around without judging one another." (P3)

These interview findings were supported by observational data gathered during classroom activities and student engagements. The researcher observed that students from different organizational backgrounds actively collaborated on group assignments, participated openly in classroom discussions, and engaged in various academic activities without excluding particular groups. When disagreements emerged regarding religious issues, students generally adopted dialogical rather than confrontational approaches. These observations suggest that differences do not necessarily generate conflict; instead, they may serve as opportunities for mutual learning and intellectual enrichment.

Based on these findings, it can be understood that the manifestation of intra-religious tolerance extends beyond attitudes and is reflected in concrete social practices. Students demonstrated the ability to establish communication, cooperation, and harmonious social relationships despite differences in religious understanding. This finding indicates that tolerance develops through sustained social interaction and lived experience rather than solely through theoretical knowledge of religious moderation.

From the perspective of *wasathiyah*, these behaviors reflect the implementation of the principles of *tasamuh* (tolerance) and *tawasuth* (moderation). Students' willingness to respect differences and engage in open dialogue illustrates the practical application of *tasamuh*, while their balanced and non-extreme attitudes toward differing viewpoints demonstrate the principle of *tawasuth* [13], [14]. These findings suggest that religious moderation is not merely understood at a conceptual level but has been translated into everyday social practices. Consequently, intra-religious tolerance functions as a social mechanism that enables harmonious relationships within the diversity of the Muslim community.

The findings are consistent with the study of Andriani et al., which demonstrated that interactions within a plural campus environment contribute significantly to the internalization of religious moderation values among students [17]. Similarly, Umam and Koestanto emphasized that the implementation of religious moderation requires dialogical spaces that enable individuals to understand and appreciate differences constructively [18]. Rahmah and Amaludin further found that tolerant attitudes develop through intensive and continuous social interaction in diverse environments [19]. In addition, the findings support Caniago et al., who argued that the internalization of religious moderation values occurs not only through formal learning processes but also through everyday social experiences [20].

Theoretically, these findings contribute to a broader understanding of intra-religious tolerance as a socially constructed practice shaped through interaction and shared experiences. The study demonstrates that the implementation of religious moderation in Islamic higher education is reflected not only in the acceptance of differences but also in students' ability to build inclusive, dialogical, and cooperative relationships with fellow Muslims from diverse religious backgrounds. Therefore, intra-religious tolerance can be understood as a concrete

manifestation of the principles of *tasamuh* and *tawasuth* within students' social lives.

Challenges in the Implementation of Intra-Religious Tolerance

Although the participants demonstrated a positive understanding of intra-religious tolerance and reported practicing it in their daily interactions, the findings indicate that its implementation is not entirely free from challenges. Several obstacles were identified in students' social interactions, particularly those related to exclusivist attitudes, truth claims, the sensitivity of religious issues, and the influence of social environments.

One of the most frequently mentioned challenges was the tendency of certain individuals or groups to regard their own religious perspectives as the only valid interpretation. Such attitudes may create social distance and hinder open dialogue among students. As explained by P1: "Sometimes there is a tendency toward exclusivism among certain groups, and this becomes a challenge in promoting religious moderation." (P1)

P1 further noted that differences in religious practices are generally not problematic unless they are accompanied by absolute and exclusive truth claims. "When those practices are brought into the realm of exclusive truth claims, that is usually where the potential for conflict begins to emerge." (P1)

This statement suggests that the main source of tension is not the existence of differences themselves, but rather how individuals interpret and respond to those differences. When a particular viewpoint is considered the only acceptable truth that everyone must follow, opportunities for constructive dialogue become increasingly limited, thereby increasing the likelihood of conflict.

A similar concern was expressed by P4, who identified self-righteous attitudes as a barrier to harmonious relationships. "Problems arise when people believe they are always right and are unwilling to be tolerant of others." (P4)

In addition to exclusivist truth claims, the sensitivity of religious issues also emerged as a significant challenge. Participants acknowledged that discussions concerning differences in schools of thought, religious practices, or Islamic organizations often require careful communication to avoid misunderstandings. P1 stated: "If we are not careful, discussions can easily turn into conflicts." (P1)

This finding indicates that tolerance requires more than simply accepting differences; it also demands communication skills that enable individuals to discuss sensitive issues in a constructive manner. Without such skills, discussions intended to foster mutual understanding may instead lead to unproductive disputes.

Another challenge concerns the influence of peer groups and organizational affiliations on students' perceptions of others. P2 explained: "Sometimes there is pressure from friends or certain groups that encourages us to adopt their way of thinking." (P2)

Likewise, P4 highlighted that excessive loyalty to a particular organization may reduce openness to alternative viewpoints. "Some people become too rigidly attached to the organization they belong to." (P4)

These findings indicate that the development of tolerant attitudes is influenced not only by individual factors but also by the broader social environment in which students interact. Strong group identities may strengthen

internal solidarity; however, they can also restrict openness toward perspectives originating from outside the group.

The interview findings were further supported by observational data collected during classroom activities and academic discussions. The researcher observed that students tended to be more cautious when discussing sensitive religious issues than when addressing other academic topics. In several instances, participants deliberately used neutral language and avoided statements that might offend members of other groups. These observations suggest that although tolerance is generally well established, students remain aware of the potential tensions that may arise when religious differences are discussed in greater depth.

Based on these findings, intra-religious tolerance can be understood as a dynamic process that is continuously negotiated through social interaction. Rather than being a fixed condition, tolerance represents an ongoing capacity that must be developed through communication, experience, and meaningful engagement with others. The ability of students to maintain harmonious relationships amid differences largely depends on their capacity to manage diversity wisely and avoid exclusivist attitudes that may obstruct dialogue.

From the perspective of *wasathiyah*, these challenges highlight the importance of applying the principles of *tawasuth* (moderation), *tawazun* (balance), and *tasamuh* (tolerance) in social life. Yusuf Al-Qaradawi argues that one of the defining characteristics of religious moderation is the ability to balance personal religious convictions with respect for diversity within society [13]. Exclusivist attitudes and excessive truth claims may shift individuals away from a moderate position and toward more extreme orientations that hinder social harmony [14]. Therefore, strengthening the values of *wasathiyah* is essential for fostering a more inclusive culture of dialogue within higher education institutions.

The findings of this study are consistent with those of Fitri and Sudrimo, who found that students' levels of religious moderation are not always expressed consistently across different social contexts, particularly when sensitive religious issues are involved [15]. The results also support Rambe et al., who argue that the internalization of religious moderation values is an ongoing process shaped by the social environments in which students interact [16]. Furthermore, Mahayudin and Hidayat emphasize that one of the greatest challenges in implementing religious moderation lies in maintaining inclusive attitudes amid increasingly complex social and cultural dynamics [21].

Theoretically, these findings suggest that intra-religious tolerance is influenced not only by an individual's religious understanding but also by social, psychological, and environmental factors that shape interactions with others. This study contributes to the literature on religious moderation by demonstrating that the primary challenge in fostering tolerance among fellow Muslims does not stem from differences themselves, but rather from the ways in which those differences are interpreted and negotiated in everyday social life. Consequently, efforts to strengthen religious moderation in higher education should focus not only on enhancing religious knowledge but also on cultivating dialogue, openness, and appreciation for the diversity that exists within the Muslim community.

CONCLUSION

This study examined intra-religious tolerance as a manifestation of religious moderation among Master's students of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at UIN Sunan Kalijaga. The findings indicate that participants understood intra-religious tolerance as an attitude of respecting, accepting, and appreciating differences in religious interpretations, ritual practices, and organizational affiliations among fellow Muslims. Rather than viewing diversity within Islam as a source of division, the participants generally perceived it as a natural reality that should be managed through mutual respect, dialogue, and the maintenance of Islamic brotherhood.

The study also found that intra-religious tolerance was manifested in students' daily social interactions. Differences in religious practices, organizational backgrounds, and religious perspectives did not prevent students from establishing friendships, engaging in academic collaboration, or participating in constructive discussions. Instead, these differences often became opportunities for dialogue, learning, and the expansion of religious perspectives. Observational data further demonstrated that students from diverse Islamic backgrounds were able to cooperate in academic activities and discuss religious issues without excluding or discriminating against one another.

Despite these positive findings, the implementation of intra-religious tolerance was not entirely free from challenges. The main obstacles identified in this study included exclusivist attitudes, absolute truth claims, the sensitivity of religious issues, and social pressures arising from organizational or peer-group affiliations. The findings suggest that tensions among fellow Muslims are not primarily caused by religious differences themselves, but rather by the ways in which those differences are interpreted, negotiated, and communicated in social interactions. Consequently, the development of intra-religious tolerance requires not only religious understanding but also openness, dialogue, and social engagement across diverse Muslim communities.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the literature on religious moderation by demonstrating that intra-religious tolerance constitutes a concrete manifestation of the principles of *tasamuh*, *tawasuth*, and *tawazun* within Islamic higher education. The findings further indicate that religious moderation should be understood not only as a framework for interreligious relations but also as a mechanism for managing diversity within the Muslim community itself.

This study has several limitations. First, the research involved only four participants from a single Master's program at one Islamic university, limiting the transferability of the findings to other contexts. Second, the study focused primarily on students' perspectives and experiences, without incorporating views from lecturers, administrators, or other stakeholders who may influence the development of intra-religious tolerance in higher education settings. Third, the findings reflect a specific institutional and cultural context, which may differ from those of other Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia.

Therefore, future studies are encouraged to involve a larger number of participants from different universities and academic disciplines, employ comparative approaches across institutions, and examine the role of lecturers,

curriculum, student organizations, and digital religious spaces in shaping intra-religious tolerance. Such studies would provide a broader understanding of how diversity within Islam is negotiated and managed in contemporary higher education environments.

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