



Promoting Religious Moderation: What Students of Islamic Studies Program Can Do

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Abstract: Higher Education students are considered objects of strengthening religious moderation. At the same time, students have the potential to be involved in mainstreaming religious moderation. This paper aims to show the moderate potential of Islamic students and their role in mainstreaming religious moderation, both in knowledge, reasoning, and awareness of religious moderation. In addition, this study also reveals the role and position of Islamic students as part of the demographic bonus in promoting religious moderation in Indonesia. This research was conducted with a current embedded design, mixing quantitative and qualitative simultaneously. The research data comes from Islamic study program students' responses, which are confirmed through interviews. The results of this study indicate that Islamic study program students have a high potential for knowledge (availability of information and reasoning) and awareness (value system, positive perspective, and behavioral consistency) of religious moderation. Thus, they are identified as fulfilling the criteria of being moderate students. Their role in mainstreaming religious moderation has clear objectives, strategies, and distinctive action patterns. Their potential and role can be maximized as part of the demographic bonus to counteract the flow of radicalism and extremism in their circles.

Keywords: demographic bonus; potential; role; students; religious moderation

INTRODUCTION

The role of students as actors of peace is an often overlooked but important element in the discourse of religious moderation in Indonesia. Traditionally, students are seen as ignoring their significant potential and thus become involved in various radicalism and extremism. Yet, they also have the potential to be developed and utilized as agents of positive change. Educational institutions, particularly universities, play an important role in developing and empowering young people by fostering a culture of peace and global citizenship (Akkari & Maleq, 2020). UN Security Council Resolution 2250 emphasizes the role of education in supporting young people in peacebuilding (Berents, 2022). Such a regenerative approach to education can effectively prepare young people to address global challenges (Lopes Cardozo, 2022). Countries can create more advanced peacebuilding strategies by recognizing and harnessing their unique perspectives and capabilities. Religious moderation is crucial for peacebuilding by

fostering tolerance, understanding, and collaboration among many religious communities. This methodology underscores universal principles, including love, justice, compassion, and mutual respect, to avert disputes arising from ethnic, racial, or cultural disparities (Arifand et al., 2023; Bachrong & Karim, 2022). In Indonesia's multicultural society, religious moderation is achieved by cooperating with the government, religious leaders, and communities to foster an inclusive, harmonious, and violence-free environment (Wijayati, 2024). Moreover, education on balance, tolerance, and equality principles is essential for combating extremism and fostering secure and harmonious communities (Mahmud, 2022; Muchtar, 2016). Through strategic methodologies and indigenous knowledge, religious moderation serves as a crucial foundation for global peace initiatives. Youth involvement in religious peacebuilding necessitates increased focus to guarantee their inclusion and empowerment. Consequently, youth empowerment emerges as a crucial tool to promote peace and harmony in varied countries.

The demographic bonus phenomenon is characterized by a higher proportion of the productive-age population than the non-productive-age population (Adriani & Yustini, 2021). If properly guided, this demographic segment can foster peace and tolerance in Indonesia's diverse society (Achmad et al., 2024). Religious moderation, rooted in the concept of *tawasuth* (moderation), is essential to maintaining a peaceful, compassionate, and tolerant nation (Arifinsyah et al., 2020; Kawangung, 2019; Subchi et al., 2022). This requires a strategic approach to ensure stability and social cohesion by harnessing the potential of the young population, particularly those who focus on Islamic studies. The method for equipping Islamic students in religious moderation is a holistic approach that prioritises tolerance, inclusivity, and critical thinking. Moderation ideals such as justice, balance, tolerance, and nonviolence are integrated into the curriculum and reinforced by extracurricular programs to help students apply these values daily (Muhsin et al., 2024; Shalahuddin et al., 2024). Practical strategies, such as using religious texts that advocate moderation and debate, are expected to assist students in internalising the values of religious moderation (Afwadzi et al., 2024a; Ali et al., 2021). By utilizing educational strategies and the active participation of Islamic students, Indonesia is expected to optimize its demographic bonus.

Studies on religious moderation among Islamic students have explored university students as objects of religious moderation (Aflahah et al., 2023; Afwadzi et al., 2024b; Kawangung, 2019; Khasanah et al., 2023; Manshur & Husni, 2020; Nasir & Rijal, 2021). Minimal research places Islamic students as proactive actors and their strategies in voicing religious moderation, especially from the perspective of optimizing the demographic bonus. Research on diverse moderation among university students has at least examined three crucial aspects. *First*, a study that examines the strengthening of religious moderation in universities aimed at counteracting radicalism and extremism (Khoirunnissa & Syahidin, 2023; Noor, 2023; Rahmat, 2023; Sugiarti & Roqib, 2021). The study found that the concept of religious moderation by students has been accepted and applied and is seen as being able to become the antithesis of radicalism and extremism. *Second*, research that presents patterns and models of internalizing religious moderation to

students - which is understood as the concept and strategy of instilling religious moderation values in students (Anwar & Muhayati, 2021a; Nisar & Ismail, 2022; Rahman & Murniyetti, 2023). *Third*, a study on the importance of the role and position of students in promoting religious moderation concludes that students need to take part in fighting the strong currents of extremism (Afwadzi & Miski, 2021; Nafi'a et al., 2022; Rahman & Murniyetti, 2023). The study failed to reveal the significant potential of Islamic students as a demographic bonus that can be optimized for the future of religious moderation in Indonesia.

This research seeks to demonstrate the positive potential of Islamic students in promoting religious moderation. It answers two questions: *first*, what is the potential for religious moderation among Islamic students? This question focuses on the availability of information, the level of reasoning, and Islamic students' awareness of religious moderation. *Second*, what is the role of Islamic students in promoting religious moderation? This question mainly concerns the motivation, strategies, actions, and challenges of diverse moderation among Islamic students. This research is based on the argument that moderate values must continue to find space in society. In addition to anticipating the growth of the seeds of radicalism, it is also helpful for developing moderate actors. The anxiety of the state and society in the face of radicalism is the basis for students to play an active role through religious moderation campaigns. At the same time, the low level of community immunity to the influence of radicalism has caused the religious moderation campaign not to run as it should. Inclusive, moderate, and tolerant ideas have been defeated by ideas that promote violence and intolerance that are deliberately reproduced in various media. Thus, the role and function of students in building a peaceful, tolerant, and respectful society is urgently needed.

Recent studies have shown that religious moderation solves the problem of radicalism and other religious conflicts. Arifinsyah et al. (2020) state that religious moderation incorporates inclusiveness, tolerance, compassion, and moderation. The ideas are considered important for building inter-religious and intra-religious relations. Dodego & Witro (2020) state that religious moderation is a valuable idea that can create a tolerant, peaceful, and harmonious atmosphere in a multicultural society. Thus, religious moderation has a strong foundation to continue to be promoted, especially by young Muslim intellectuals.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study used a *concurrent embedded design*, a mixture of quantitative and qualitative approaches (Almeida, 2018). The study involved students of Islamic studies programs at UIN Imam Bonjol Padang. Quantitative data were collected from 1,933 active students in five Islamic programs in 2023, constituting a sample of 15%, or 296 students. Aspects of students' experiences and *idiosyncratic verbal* expressions were the source of qualitative data from in-depth interviews of Muslim students. In addition, this study also used data from various sources, including the study program curriculum, student activity documents, student papers, and their social media posts. The Bogor Message version of the concept of religious moderation was used in this study. The Bogor Message is a form of *ijma'*

(consensus) among Islamic scholars, providing a common ground for Muslims around the world to engage in religious moderation (Ramadhan, 2022), namely: (1) *tawassuth* (middle way), (2) *i'tidâl* (straight and firm), (3) *tasamuh* (tolerant), (4) *syûra* (deliberation), (5) *ishlâh* (reform), (6) *qudwah* (role model), and (7) citizenship (Latifa et al., 2022; Ramadhan & Syauqillah, 2018). Theoretically, the seven characteristics of religious moderation above are considered firm. The unstructured interview method was used to explore the role of students in mainstreaming religious moderation.

Four indicators were used: (1) knowledge of goals; (2) intellectual strategies and cognition; (3) actions based on awareness, expertise, and skills; and (4) knowledge of the external world (implications) of supporting and inhibiting factors. The data is interpreted by considering the demographic bonus context that determines the role of university students in mainstreaming religious moderation. The demographic dividend is regarded as a strategic advantage for the younger generation, particularly university students, who constitute most of the working-age population during this phase. In a nation experiencing a demographic dividend, like Indonesia, students possess a unique chance to foster an inclusive and tolerant society by promoting religious moderation. This situation presents an optimal opportunity to facilitate societal transformation, as the substantial number of working-age individuals can serve as the primary catalyst.

RESEARCH RESULTS and DISCUSSION

Moderate Potential of Islamic Students

Knowledge about religious moderation

Generally, the Muslim students we surveyed and interviewed know and understand religious moderation. They understood religious moderation before they entered Islamic universities. Only 9.7% did not know about religious moderation before entering university. In contrast, 90.3% have obtained information from various sources, such as school lessons, socialization, and social media. When studying in higher education, they gained knowledge of religious moderation while studying in Islamic study programs. They learned a lot about religious moderation from relevant courses, such as interpretation of mass organizations, actual issues in the study of the Qur'an, interpretation of political verses, sociology of religion, religion, and cultural and state relations, religion and radicalism, morals and social ethics, religion and social theory, religion and peace studies, religion and multiculturalism, globalization and conflict studies, religion, and local traditions, strategies for managing religious diversity, and dialogue. In addition, activities such as discussion forums, research, seminars, student organization activities, literacy (books and journals), social media, leadership training, and several other student activities have increased students' knowledge. Students also use scientific journals and available books to improve their religious moderation literacy.

Higher education, especially in study programs focusing on Islamic studies, helps students acquire knowledge and understanding of religious moderation, covering curriculum, academic culture, and study skills. Many studies (such as Anwar &

Muhayati, 2021b; Chadidjah et al., 2021; Purwanto et al., 2019) prove that universities contribute to forming moderate students who adopt various approaches. Purwanto et al. (2019) showed that almost every Islamic student received comprehensive and all-encompassing religious moderation materials through multiple courses and subjects. Universities have a significant impact in shaping students into influential individuals who can drive transformation. Therefore, students have the potential to become actors in promoting peace and tolerance in Indonesia's diverse society.

Educational institutions can potentially instil a moderate religious perspective among Indonesian Muslim communities (Huber et al., 2022). This can be achieved through education that teaches tolerance, interfaith cooperation, and a deeper understanding of religious teachings. However, some educational institutions do not have the ability or opportunity to implement a curriculum that includes such values. In addition, other things outside of academic institutions influence a person's religious beliefs. For example, an Islamic school in Indonesia could incorporate lessons on religious tolerance into its curriculum. This could include religious activities and interfaith discussions with students of different religions.

The environment is another factor that has strengthened knowledge and awareness of religious moderation among Islamic students. Religious moderation seems to have found a place and flourished in student discussion spaces. This indirectly accelerates students' potential knowledge of the need for religious moderation. This is reinforced by the availability of moderate religious knowledge that students obtain from many sources, such as books, journals, social media, and websites. Thus, Islamic students have become more open. They have also become more skilful in expressing their opinions and engaging in polite discussions on religious issues. In addition, by having extensive access to information about religious moderation, students are increasingly motivated to continue learning and developing their understanding of the values of religious moderation.

Students' moderate behavior is not only directed at themselves but also at others. They apply the values of moderation in their personal lives and strive to influence others around them to follow the same path. This shows that the knowledge and attitudes of Islamic studies students can have a far-reaching impact in building a more moderate and inclusive society. For example, some Islamic studies students with in-depth knowledge of religious teachings and moderate understanding have been active resource persons in public discussions on spiritual issues. They have also become mentors for their peers to practice moderation daily. In addition, they have become preachers, choosing themes of tolerance, peace, and unity for their sermons.

The factors mentioned above contribute to developing the potential of moderate students. These factors indicate students' receptivity to learning from many sources of information, including curiosity, open-mindedness, and efforts to increase knowledge of religious moderation. As a result, the future of religious moderation is highly dependent on the development of knowledge and experience that involves a gradual and continuous process. Internalizing the principles of religious moderation in the education system is an important aspect of promoting

moderate attitudes. Through inclusive and open learning, students will become better equipped to deal with the emerging issues of radicalism and extremism. Therefore, efforts to build a more moderate and harmonious future regarding beliefs must start through the development of knowledge, both formally and through environmental support.

Reasoning for Religious Moderation

The survey results of the level of religious moderation reasoning based on the seven indicators above, students of Islamic study programs have religious moderation reasoning which is classified as very good 57% and 41% good, 1.4% not good, and 0.5% very bad. Seven indicators identify the level of religious moderation reasoning of Islamic students. This can be seen from the answers to the questions that have been prepared following the seven indicators of religious moderation:

Indicators	Students' Reasoning
<i>Tawassuth</i> (having an attitude of taking the middle ground and going straight by the truth)	<i>Tawâsuth</i> murni berasal dari ajaran Islam. Untuk mencapai <i>wa ma arsalnaka illa rahmatan lil alamin</i> itu ya kasih sayang, salah satunya ya <i>tawâsuth</i> (Arbi, 2022) kan <i>khairu umur aushatuha</i> , sebaik-baik nya urusan yang benar itu adalah pertengahan (Arbi, 2022)
<i>I'tidâl</i> (understanding excessive attitude in religion can have a negative impact)	Kita tidak boleh kaku dalam memahami Islam, tapi juga tidak liberal. Hal ini sering menimbulkan konflik di masyarakat, buhkan saling menyalahkan antar kelompok masyarakat yang berbeda pendapat (Dasrul, 2022) Merasa diri lebih baik dari yang lain dalam beragama seringkali menimbulkan konflik berbagai elemen masyarakat; saling menghina, merendahkan dan sebagainya. Hal ini akan merugikan, (Dasrul, 2022)
<i>Tasamuh</i> (tolerant attitude, open and respectful of differences)	Muslim sejati itu adalah muslim yang mampu menghargai perbedaan. (Alhafizh, 2022) Perbedaan bukanlah penyebab permusuhan, perbedaan justru menjadikan kita lebih terbuka (Zahid Putra, 2022).
<i>Shura</i> (understanding deliberation as a way to solve problems)	Tujuan musyawarah adalah mencapai kebenaran sehingga dengan demikian tidak terjadi saling menyindir, menyalahkan atau mengkafirkan satu sama lain (Mayora, 2022).
<i>Ishlâh</i> (understanding and practicing goodness for the peace of life together)	"kita harus baik kepada semua manusia tanpa memandang agama, suku atau bangsa (Dinilhaq, 2022)

	seorang muslim harus meneladani Allah dalam hal berbuat baik kepada semua manusia, baik muslim maupun non-muslim. (Putra W. E., 2022)
<i>Qudwah</i> (being a good example for others)	umat Islam sudah memberikan contoh yang baik kepada umat agama lain, bahwa Islam itu agama damai. Ini juga terkait dengan pencitraan Islam di mata non-muslim. Kalau dengan umat sendiri saja sudah ada konflik, bagaimana umat agama lain bisa mengakui bahwa Islam itu cinta damai” (al-Aziz, 2022)
<i>muwâthahanah</i> (recognition of state, nation, and local culture)	“Kalau kita tidak punya komitmen kebangsaan otomatis kalau tidak ada rasa cinta kita terhadap sebuah negara dan tidak sesuai dengan tanggungjawab dan tugas kita sebagai warga negara yang wajib mencintai untuk menjalankan aturan yang berlaku” (Dani, 2022)

The data above shows that Muslim students appear to be moderate in their reasoning. They see religious moderation as logical, rational, critical, and argumentative. Nonetheless, logical reasoning is not enough to be an actor of religious moderation because of their role as facilitators who are also responsible for solving problems. The ability to solve the issues and negotiate is essential in informal reasoning theory (Sadler & Zeidler, 2005). Religious moderation is a value idea that directs attitudes and behaviors with the aim of resolving religious and national conflicts. According to the Ministry of Religious Affairs Team (2019), religious moderation aims to reduce attitudes, views, and behaviors that are more conservative or liberal. In this case, informal reasoning is needed to resolve conflicts and resolve them.

Informal reasoning requires dialogical argumentation. When a person can associate the argument and the problem at hand, including seeing the problem as a solution through various perspectives, they have a reflection of argumentation (Sadler & Zeidler, 2005). In addition, Sadler and Zeidler divided informal reasoning into three categories: rationalistic, emotive, and intuitive. The rationalistic type of informal reasoning relies on logical reasons or arguments. Intuitive informal rationale is related to positive affective responses that encourage one to solve problems. In contrast, dynamic reasoning is a concern for others and is characterized by a focus on the problems faced by others. To function as actors of religious moderation in Indonesia, university students need all three types of informal reasoning: rationalistic, passionate, and intuitive. These three types of reasoning are necessary because many religious and national problems require proper negotiation and resolution.

Religious Moderation Awareness

Understanding who we are and how we behave according to our abilities is called awareness. Students' awareness of the importance of applying the values of

religious moderation is very high, 42.2 percent, very high, 55.1 percent, low 1.8%, and very low 0.8 percent. The results of confirmation through interviews with Islamic students can be seen in the following table:

Indicators	Students' Awareness
Value System	moderasi itu hanya istilah baru. Sebenarnya istilah itu sudah ada dalam Al-Quran, <i>ummatan wasathan</i> (Hartono, 2022) “Saya sering sampaikan ayat di Juz 2, <i>wa kaza lika ja’alnakum ummatan wasathan</i>. Bagaimana sih menjadi wasatha dalam Islam, cara berfikir kita gak <i>tasyaddud</i>, juga tidak <i>tasahul</i> (Arbi, 2022) “Menurut Rafi, moderasi beragama merupakan suatu paham dan sikap keagamaan yang tidak ekstrem, menjunjung tinggi prinsip <i>tasâmuh</i> dengan memahami kapan mesti bersikap inklusif dan kapan mesti bersikap eksklusif. Moderasi beragama menghendaki anti kekerasan, <i>wasathiyah</i>, dan menghargai perbedaan, baik di internal agama masing-masing maupun dengan pemeluk agama yang berbeda” (Dinilhaq, 2022)
Positive outlook	harus tetap jaga persatuan dan kesatuan, walau kita beda paham, beda mazhab fiqh misalnya, selagi tidak menyalahi tuntunan kan ga apa-apa. Yang penting kan harus rukun, damai, hubungan sesama harus dijaga dengan baik.” (Ihsan, 2022) saya sepakat dengan berbagai program moderasi beragama dengan catatan jangan sampai terjebak pada pluralisme agama” (Dinilhaq, 2022)
Consistency of behavior	Arbi menanamkan kepada anak-anak, walaupun ada yang berbeda dari orang lain yang tidak sesuai dengan prinsip kita, jangan langsung kita salahkan. (Arbi, 2022) Saya juga membuka banyak ruang diskusi sesama kawan-kawan mahasiswa. Agar kita sama-sama memperbaiki umat ini. Sebab itu menyelesaikan masalah tidak bisa kita sendiri, butuh juga bantuan orang lain. (Ihsan, 2022) Kita hidup di Indonesia. Maka kita harus mencintai Indonesia dan merawat kebinekaannya supaya tidak terjadi konflik yang akan merusak persatuan NKRI. Beragam suku bangsa dan agama. Itu disatukan semuanya dengan negara Indonesia”. (Putra W. E., 2022)

Islamic students' statement that religious moderation is an understanding and spiritual attitude that is not extreme prioritizes the principle of *tasâmuh* (tolerance) and understands the context of when to be inclusive or exclusive reflects an experience of a rational and pragmatic value system in practicing religion. In this context, according to them, religious moderation is not just an abstract concept but

a framework that invites individuals to practice religion wisely. By adopting the principle of balance, they ask people to take a middle path that rejects fanaticism without sacrificing fundamental beliefs. In addition, this argument emphasizes the importance of *tasâmuh* or tolerance as the foundation of religious moderation. Tolerance does not mean sacrificing the principles of belief but understanding and respecting differences and the right of others to practice their religion in the way they believe. Herein lies the importance of being inclusive in situations that demand interfaith dialog and cooperation and to be exclusive when necessary to maintain the integrity of authentic religious beliefs and practices.

According to the interview findings, Islamic students concluded that "the multicultural Indonesian society requires religious moderation." This means they think religious moderation is important, acknowledge diversity, and recognize its importance for fostering tolerance, respect, and social harmony. The statements also show a strong understanding of Indonesia's social complexity. By supporting religious moderation, students realize that diversity must be recognized and valued. A perspective that supports religious moderation is not only a response to the fact that diversity exists but also an important strategy for maintaining social cohesion amid the challenges of globalization and increasingly complex social dynamics. Thus, an attitude that supports religious moderation is a positive perspective that becomes an asset for students to become actors of religious moderation.

Nonetheless, religious moderation among university students still faces many challenges when implemented, despite awareness and support about its importance. For example, there is a tendency for a small number of students to be unconvinced, especially among students with diverse religious backgrounds. This can occur due to the influence of a more dominant social environment or due to not fully understanding the concept of religious moderation. There are statements from Islamic students that religious moderation is only a secularism project aimed at the denial of religion. This statement reflects concerns about the potential negative impact of such moderation efforts. This view arises from the perception that religious moderation can be seen as an attempt to reduce religious intensity and commitment to achieve harmony with the values of secularism.

However, some Islamic students argue that religious moderation is not about weakening faith or diminishing religious values but rather about managing differences peacefully and inclusively. Religious moderation seeks to balance religious understanding and practice with respect for diversity and individual rights. Therefore, associating religious moderation with the project of secularism aimed at denying religion can be seen as narrowing the meaning and purpose of the concept of moderation itself. The challenge faced is ensuring that religious moderation can strengthen the quality of religion by encouraging critical and inclusive attitudes without sacrificing fundamental religious beliefs. This is important to ensure that religious moderation is not misunderstood as a threat to religious identity but as a tool to enrich and deepen religious understanding and practice in a multicultural society.

A high level of awareness about religious moderation supports the knowledge and reasoning abilities of students of Islamic studies programs. Awareness affects attitudes and behavior (Insko & Oakes, 1966). Awareness requires consistent behavior, a value system, and a positive perspective. Appreciating religious teachings, including beliefs, is the first and most important value system with which a value system can use its beliefs to make decisions about morality. A person's belief in something in the value system is related to the beliefs of others (King et al., 2006). Students understand that religious moderation is a value system that shapes attitudes, views, and behaviors, such as tolerance, justice, responsibility, integrity, compassion, peace, and so on.

The author believes that as a result of students' (adult) learning, critical consciousness emerges. This is the relationship between knowledge and consciousness. The critical consciousness sees the educational process as a way to know the source of problems as social systems and structures (Zamudio et al., 2009). In-depth consideration of the context of society and social structures and systems is carried out. Religion and differences cause religious and state problems, encouraging them to think critically. In addition, according to Freire's theory of consciousness, the learning process means giving students the space and opportunity to actively engage in real action in response to the inappropriateness of problematic social systems and structures (Gadotti & Torres, 2009).

A value system demands a belief that encourages a person to accept the idea of religious moderation as an integral part of their beliefs. This belief also relates to whether an idea has urgency or merit. Students' statements on religious moderation have shown that students have a moderate value system. The value system has also led students to different types of knowledge. This is related to subjective norms, which are students' views and beliefs. According to Teh et al. (2011), there is a tendency for people to share knowledge that they value positively. In my opinion, this is what encourages students to actively participate in mainstreaming religious moderation. That belief in the value system of religious moderation also impacts the awareness of sharing knowledge.

The Role of Islamic Students in Mainstreaming Religious Moderation

Muslim students have the potential for knowledge, reasoning, and awareness of religious moderation. These three basic potentials are the main capital for them to become moderate Muslim students and, at the same time, play an active role as actors of religious moderation. This research has looked further into how Muslim students play a role in promoting religious moderation. Their goal of promoting religious moderation can prove this. First, strengthening straight, religious understanding. Religious moderation emphasizes the importance of substantive religious understanding. Substantive religious knowledge requires the application of Islamic values that have a positive impact on the benefit of living together (Salim et al., 2023). Islamic students are responsible for sowing the seeds of Islamic values, which are *rahmatan lil alamin*. According to Taufik (2022), *da'wah* is important for realizing a good and correct religious understanding of society through Sharia guidance. In addition, according to Arbi, it is important to straighten out religious

perspectives. Arbi (2022) said: *"I prefer it how young people, santri-santri. First, they must have a straight perspective on thinking so that after graduation, they will not take the wrong step."*

Second, spreading the message of peace. The Student Association of Religious Studies (HMP) is relatively active in voicing peace and love. Even according to the Management of HMP SAA, peace love has become the jargon of their organization. Mayora (2022) also mentioned: *"I have several non-Muslim friends. Through them, I want to explain the true face of Islam, which is peaceful, tolerant, and spreads love"*. Third, building togetherness, students have their way of building togetherness. They not only foster togetherness with their fellow Muslims but also with non-Muslims. HMP SAA has a work program called the Love Peace and Harmony Camp (KCDK). According to the management, this program involves participants from across religions. This program is carried out in the form of a two-day camp with interfaith discussion activities. Fourth, encouraging tolerance and harmony is the main vision of religious moderation. According to Dani (2022), having a sense of harmony in our spiritual lives and respecting diversity is important.

In addition to having goals, Islamic students also have strategies for promoting religious moderation. Mainstreaming religious moderation generally uses a pattern of socializing ideas, knowledge, and understanding of religious moderation, including opening spaces for dialogue. Scientific dialog has its function in building academic dynamics and developing students' scientific insights. Discussion rooms become a place for students to convey ideas or a light story to create togetherness and intimacy. Actual issues are not stale in the hands of students. They become interesting themes to talk about, even if only in a coffee shop. Alhafizh admitted that religious and national issues are routine topics discussed in limited forums. Dani said: *"We actively discuss cultural issues related to religious life and the state."* As academics, discussions about religious moderation are lectures on how the values of religious moderation can be understood and practiced in everyday life.

The role of Islamic students in voicing religious moderation is evident from several actions according to their potential, such as interacting with adherents of other religions, giving religious sermons, interfaith discussions, scientific and popular articles, and social media posts. For example, Alhafiz (2022) once wrote an article in the mass media titled *"Violence from a Religious Perspective; and Family-based Prevention of Wild Understanding: A Pillar for the Realization of Religious Moderation"*. Dinilhaq (2022) wrote about *Strengthening Multicultural Insight Through Interfaith Encounters in Public Spaces and Internalizing Religious Moderation Values in UKM T2Q*. Thus, students have understood their role as Muslims who understand and try to implement this noble vision. The values of the substance of religious teachings become an important component for performing roles in the interaction-symbolic paradigm (Anglin et al., 2022). They can be considered a role group that involves behaviors that meet desired, appropriate, and expected standards. Thus, Islamic students are the hope for the future of religious moderation, both for the wider community and their circles.

Demographic Bonus and Religious Moderation in Indonesia

The hope of religious moderation on Islamic students is the most important part of efforts to maximize the demographic bonus. With their moderate potential and role, Islamic students are expected to be agents of positive change among the youth population. They can be role models for other young people who practice tolerant religious teachings. They can invite their circles to participate in maintaining peace. They can spread ideas about religious moderation through means that are close to young people's lives, such as using social media. Thus, the threat of radicalization and extremism amid an exploding youth population can be anticipated by their circles.

The demographic bonus has brought problems for countries. It is reported that the youth explosion in Nigeria has led to issues of unemployment, access to education, economic opportunities, HIV prevalence rates, increased poverty, and crime (Omoju & Abraham, 2014). In Pakistan, about 63 percent of the country's population consists of youth between 15 and 33. The large young population has threatened the country's social, political, economic, and educational resilience, where their engagement is viewed poorly (Hafeez & Fasih, 2018). In South Africa, the youth explosion has led to the risk of government threats, which have led to uprisings, demonstrations, and revolutions (Lebakeng & Matebese-Notshulwana, 2024). The youth explosion is believed to increase the risk of conflict due to low access to education, politics, and economics (Urdal, 2011). Weber (2019) states that the increase in youth and the problem of access to education is often the cause of increased political violence. (Korotayev et al., 2023) states that the youth population has become a predictor of increased terrorism. Thus, the demographic bonus is not only a problem but also a threat for countries that cannot properly manage the potential of youth.

Nonetheless, many countries have overcome demographic problems and the threat of radicalism by utilizing the potential of young people. Countries such as Jordan and Tunisia implement programs that promote tolerance and social skills, aiming to prevent radicalization among young people. The European Union designed job training and intercultural initiatives to reduce the risk of extremism (Lebakeng & Matebese-Notshulwana, 2024b). Economic empowerment through increased entrepreneurship and technological skills has become a way for many countries to cope with the demographic dividend and the threat of radicalism. Countries like Ethiopia and Kenya equate youth with the skills necessary for competitive job markets and increased industrial partnerships (Muchira et al., 2023). African countries implement digital skills training to prepare young people for the workforce (Tichafara Dinika, 2022). The state must implement policies to nurture young people's skills and character education and provide ample employment opportunities (Adriani & Yustini, 2021).. By implementing various programs, the country is free from the threat of radicalism and can maximize its demographic potential well.

In addition, compared to previous generations, young Indonesians who grew up in the era of modern technology have wider access to information. They are more open and critical and can see differences as strengths to be maximized (Firdaus &

Amin, 2024). Their mindset is strongly influenced by moderate religious education and intense religious discussion intent (Pajariantanto et al., 2023). As a result, they understand religion from a social and humanitarian perspective and a theological perspective, reinforcing a moderate attitude in daily life. Therefore, this demographic advantage can be fully utilized to build a more peaceful, harmonious, and just Indonesia, where diversity is seen as a strength and source of civilizational progress.

CONCLUSION

This research indicates that the capabilities of Muslim students play a crucial role in the development of moderate individuals. The capacity for knowledge, grounded in the accessibility of sufficient information and sound reasoning, bolstered by students' experiential learning, significantly enhances the comprehension and mastery of the concept of religious moderation. This aspect is reinforced by students' recognition of the significance of religious moderation, encompassing value systems, constructive viewpoints, and behavioural coherence. The aforementioned factors, the capacity for knowledge and the cultivation of awareness have motivated students to engage actively as proponents of religious moderation. Within Indonesia's demographic dividend framework, Muslim students, possessing their moderate potential, can contribute significantly to the discourse on religious moderation. Higher education serves as a platform for individuals to cultivate these principles, enabling them to become impactful catalysts for change and leverage the demographic dividend to foster social harmony and tolerance.

It is imperative for universities to systematically organise and enhance the existing potential, drawing upon research findings that illuminate opportunities to synergise the capabilities and consciousness of students in Islamic study programs as proponents of religious moderation. The movement for religious moderation among students has emerged as a fundamental component of the agenda for realising the tridharma of higher education. It is imperative for universities to develop a curriculum centred on religious moderation, equipping students with a nuanced understanding of their role in fostering and sustaining peace. This study is limited to the perspective of students of Islamic study programs and has not integrated with lecturers and institutions that organize study programs. In addition, the study is limited to analyzing Islamic study programs and has not been compared with other study programs. This method allows a comprehensive understanding of students' efforts to mainstream religious moderation.

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