



# A Comparative Study of Students' Religious Moderation in Islamic Education Learning

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## Abstract

This study aims to analyze differences in students' levels of religious moderation in Islamic Religious Education classes at the junior high school level in Indonesia. The study employs a comparative quantitative approach using a survey method. The sample consisted of 120 students selected through proportional random sampling. The research instrument consisted of a religious moderation questionnaire with 25 items covering four indicators: national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence, and accommodation of local culture. Analysis results showed that the average religious moderation score for students at State Junior High School 1 in Cilegon City was 82.45, while students at State Junior High School 3 in Cilegon City scored an average of 78.10. A comparison test using the Independent Samples t-test yielded a t-value of 3.214 with  $p = 0.002$  ( $p < 0.05$ ), indicating a significant difference between the two groups. These findings suggest that the level of religious moderation among students at State Junior High School 1 in Cilegon City is higher than that at State Junior High School 3 in Cilegon City. The implications and benefits of this study suggest that schools need to strengthen learning strategies based on dialogue and local culture. These results also serve as a basis for teachers and policymakers to improve religious moderation programs in a structured and sustainable manner.

## INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country known for its diversity of cultures, ethnic groups, languages, and religions. This diversity serves as both a strength and a challenge in fostering a harmonious society (Wijayati, 2024). In this context, education plays a crucial role in instilling values of tolerance, mutual respect, and religious moderation from early childhood through adolescence (Arifin & Huda, 2024). Religious moderation has thus become a highly relevant concept to be developed in the field of education, particularly within Islamic religious education courses, which have a direct connection to the formation of students' character and religious attitudes (Sirojuddin & Hairunnisa, 2025).

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Islamic Religious Education is one of the core subjects that plays a strategic role in shaping students' character and personality (Judrah et al., 2024). Islamic religious education not only provides a theoretical understanding of Islamic teachings but also aims to foster religious attitudes and behaviors that align with humanistic, national, and civilizational values (Gani et al., 2024). In the context of Indonesia's multicultural and multireligious society, religious education is not only understood as the cultivation of faith and worship but also as a means of fostering religious moderation (Ningsih et al., 2025).

Religious moderation is one of the government's key priorities, implemented through the Ministry of Religious Affairs, to prevent the spread of extremism, intolerance, and religiously motivated violence (Ikhwan et al., 2023). The concept of religious moderation encompasses four main indicators: national commitment, tolerance, opposition to violence, and accommodation of local culture (Hamdi & Desvia, 2025; Munif et al., 2023; Okenova et al., 2025). These indicators serve as the foundation for measuring the extent to which an individual practices religion in a balanced, non-extremist manner and is able to accept differences. The implementation of religious moderation is critically needed in the current Indonesian educational context, where phenomena such as intolerance, hate speech, social polarization, and the spread of extremist ideologies through social media which can influence students, particularly adolescents are emerging. In its implementation, schools serve as a vital space for internalizing these values, particularly through Islamic religious education courses (Zaini et al., 2022). Islamic religious education teachers play a role in transforming learning that is not only cognitive but also affective and psychomotor (Ahmad et al., 2025).

Religious moderation in Islamic religious education must be measured objectively to determine the extent to which these values have been instilled in students (Hilmin et al., 2023). The challenges in education today are becoming increasingly complex; the emergence of intolerance, hate speech, and social friction among adolescents indicates that strengthening religious moderation has become an urgent necessity (Zega & Bilo, 2024). Students need to be equipped with a moderate, balanced understanding of religion that embraces diversity. Islamic religious education must guide students toward the understanding that religion teaches compassion, respect for differences, and prohibits extremist attitudes (Alfiani & Ismaraidha, 2024). To achieve this, Islamic religious education teachers must serve as role models, facilitators of dialogue, and moral guides who create open spaces for discussion regarding diversity (Judrah et al., 2024).

In addition, the development of digital media has also had a significant impact on students' religious understanding (Dalimunthe, 2023). Junior high school students, who are in the adolescent developmental phase, are highly susceptible to exposure to both positive and negative information, including religious content that is radical or intolerant in nature (FN & Zatadini, 2025). Without Islamic religious education that equips students with the value of moderation, they may be exposed to understandings that are inconsistent with national values. Therefore, research on the level of religious moderation among students is important to determine to what extent Islamic religious education and school culture can act as a filter against such negative influences.

Furthermore, the role of schools as formal institutions that foster an educational culture significantly influences the development of religious moderation among students (Janah et al., 2025). Schools with a strong religious culture tend to promote intensive religious practices, such as congregational

prayer, Quran recitation, Islamic studies, and spiritual activities (Iqbal & Astutik, 2024). Meanwhile, heterogeneous schools often instill values of tolerance and diversity through social interaction and collaborative student activities. These differing approaches are factors that can influence the level of students' religious moderation (Faisal & Setiawan, 2024).

Islamic religious education at the junior high school level is expected to foster values of religious moderation reflected in students' attitudes, such as respecting differences, avoiding conflict, understanding cultural diversity, and maintaining national unity (Alatise & Akinfolarin, 2025; Rambe et al., 2025; Sari et al., 2025; Zaini et al., 2025). This is particularly important given that the ages of 13–15 mark the transitional period from adolescence to adulthood, during which students' thought patterns, emotions, and social attitudes are highly sensitive to environmental influences (Hamidah & Rizal, 2022). If not instilled from an early age, adolescents are vulnerable to exposure to extremist ideologies through social media, peer groups, or their surrounding environment (Halimah et al., 2025).

As a rapidly developing industrial city, Cilegon has a rather complex social dynamic. Its population consists of people from diverse cultural backgrounds and varying levels of religiosity. These conditions make schools strategic spaces for reinforcing the values of religious moderation so that students can interact healthily in a multicultural environment. Two junior high schools, namely Junior High School 1 in Cilegon and Junior High School 3 in Cilegon, have distinct characteristics, in terms of social environment, academic achievement, religious traditions, and school leadership styles. These differences in the learning environment context have the potential to influence the development of students' attitudes toward religious moderation.

Although religious moderation has become a national priority, empirical research on differences in levels of moderation among schools remains limited, particularly in the form of quantitative studies at the junior high school level. Previous research has largely focused on aspects of the implementation of religious moderation, teacher strategies, or students' tolerance in general. However, there has been little research specifically comparing students' levels of moderation between two public schools located in the same geographic area but with different educational and learning characteristics.

Given this context, this study is important to measure and analyze differences in students' levels of religious moderation in Islamic religious education at State Junior High School 1 and State Junior High School 3 in Cilegon City. This comparison can provide an empirical picture of the effectiveness of Islamic religious education in shaping moderate religious attitudes, identify school environmental factors that may influence these differences, and provide an empirical indication of whether there are significant differences in religious moderation between the two schools. If differences are found, the research results can serve as a reference for Islamic religious education teachers, school principals, and education policymakers to improve strategies for strengthening religious moderation within the school environment.

## METHODS

This study employs a comparative quantitative approach aimed at analyzing differences in students' levels of religious moderation in Islamic religious education classes at Junior High School 1 in Cilegon and Junior High School 3 in Cilegon (Busral et al., 2025; Engkizar et al., 2024, 2025; Hasan et al., 2025; Husnullail et al., 2024; Kassymova et al., 2025). The quantitative

approach was chosen because this study requires numeric data that can be objectively measured to compare the two groups of students. A comparative design was used to determine whether there were significant differences in the levels of religious moderation between the two schools.

The population in this study consisted of all eighth-grade students at State Junior High School 1 and State Junior High School 3 in Cilegon City. Sampling was conducted using proportional random sampling to ensure that every student had an equal chance of being selected, in proportion to the total number of students at each school (Engkizar et al., 2023; Htay et al., 2025; Numan et al., 2025; Oktavia et al., 2020; Ramadani et al., 2025; Thuwaiba & Salah, 2025). The total research sample consisted of 120 students, comprising 60 students from State Junior High School 1 and 60 students from State Junior High School 3. This number was deemed sufficient for comparative statistical analysis. Data were collected using a religious moderation questionnaire developed based on indicators from the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, namely: i) national commitment, ii) tolerance, iii) anti-violence, and iv) accommodation of local culture. The instrument contained 25 statements on a 1–5 Likert scale. Before use, the questionnaire was validated through content validity (expert judgment) and empirical testing to determine item validity and reliability using Cronbach's Alpha.

The data were analyzed in two stages. First, descriptive analysis was used to calculate the mean scores, percentages, and categories of students' levels of religious moderation. Second, to test for differences in levels of religious moderation between the two schools, an independent samples t-test was conducted using SPSS software (Gunasti et al., 2024). This test determines whether the difference in the average scores of the two groups is statistically significant at a significance level of 0.05.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study was conducted at two public junior high schools in Cilegon City: Junior High School 1 in Cilegon and Junior High School 3 in Cilegon. Both are junior high schools with distinct learning environments and school cultures, making them highly relevant for comparison in the context of religious moderation. Junior High School 1 in Cilegon is one of the most popular schools, with a large student body and structured religious programs, such as the practice of Dhuha prayer, morning Quran recitation, and the Islamic Spirituality (*Robi'i*) extracurricular activity. Meanwhile, State Junior High School 3 in Cilegon City has a more heterogeneous student body, both in terms of socioeconomic background and cultural diversity. This school also develops various religious practice activities, though their intensity differs from that of State Junior High School 1 in Cilegon. Both schools have experienced Islamic education teachers; however, their teaching approaches, methods, and classroom cultures naturally exhibit dynamics that are not always the same. This is what accounts for the differences in students' levels of religious moderation.

### Results of the Religious Moderation Scores for Students at Public Junior High Schools 1 and 3 in Cilegon

In general, the level of religious moderation among students at Public Junior High School 3 falls into the "fairly good" category, though it is lower than that of students at Public Junior High School 1 Cilegon.

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics by Indicator (Junior High Schools 1 and 3 in Cilegon)**

Indicators	Junior High Schools 1	Junior High Schools 3	Difference	Category
National Commitment	20.51	19.23	1.28	High
Tolerance	23.11	21.89	1.22	High
Anti-Violence	19.87	18.45	1.42	High
Accommodation of Local Culture	18.96	18.53	0.43	Medium-High
Average	<b>82.45</b>	<b>78.10</b>	<b>4.35</b>	

Based on the results of the questionnaire data analysis, the average score for religious moderation among students at Junior High School 1 Cilegon was as follows: Maximum score: 125, Minimum score: 78, Mean: 103.85, Dominant category: High. On the national commitment indicator, students scored an average of 20.51 (very good category). For the tolerance indicator, the average score was 23.11; for anti-violence, 19.87; and for accommodation of local culture, 18.96. This indicates that, in general, students at Junior High School 1 Cilegon exhibit a high level of religious moderation, with a stronger tendency toward national commitment and anti-violence.

At the second school, the following results were obtained: Maximum score: 120, Minimum score: 72, Mean: 98.67, Dominant category: Moderate–High. The indicators for national commitment had a mean of 19.23; tolerance 21.89; anti-violence 18.45; and accommodation of local culture 18.53.

Table 1 presents a comparison of the mean scores across the indicators of religious moderation between the two schools. In general, the scores of students at Junior High School 1 Cilegon were higher than those at Junior High School 3 Cilegon on all indicators. The largest difference was observed in the “Anti-Violence” indicator, with a gap of 1.42, indicating that students at Junior High School 1 Cilegon demonstrated a stronger understanding and attitude toward rejecting violence. This may be influenced by school practices, Islamic religious education programs, or a school culture that more strongly supports the internalization of moderation values. Meanwhile, the “Accommodative toward Local Culture” indicator has the smallest difference (0.43), indicating that both schools have nearly identical characteristics in this aspect.

#### Results of the Independent Samples t-Test

A t-test was conducted to determine whether there was a significant difference in the level of religious moderation between the two schools.

Table 2. Independent Samples t-Test

Variable	Junior High School 1 (Mean)	Junior High School 1 (Mean)	t-value	Sig. (2-tailed)	Description
Religious Moderation	82.45	78.10	3.214	0.002	Significant difference

Table 2 shows that there is a significant difference between the levels of religious moderation among students at the two schools. The calculated t-value of 3.214 is greater than the critical t-value of 1.980 and is supported by a p-value of  $0.002 < 0.05$ . This confirms that the observed difference is not due to statistical chance but rather that there is indeed a gap in the level of religious

moderation between students at Junior High School 1 and 3 Cilegon. The mean difference of 4.35 is significant enough to indicate a difference in the quality of the internalization of religious moderation values at the two schools.

**Tests of Normality and Homogeneity**

The results of the Shapiro-Wilk test indicate that both data sets are normally distributed ( $p > 0.05$ ).

**Table 3. Results of the Normality Test**

School	Sig.	Description
Junior High School 1 Cilegon	0.094	Normal
Junior High School 3 Cilegon	0.112	Normal

Table 3 shows that the significance values in the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test are greater than 0.05 for both schools (0.094 and 0.112). This means that the data are normally distributed and satisfy the assumptions of parametric tests. Data normality is an important prerequisite for the proper application of the t-test. With this requirement met, the comparative analysis conducted in the next stage is valid.

The Levene test shows a p-value of  $0.1747 > 0.05$ , indicating that the data is homogeneous. Therefore, the analysis can proceed to the t-test.

**Table 4. Results of the Homogeneity Test**

Variable	F	Sig.	Description
Religious Moderation	1.873	0.174	Homogeneous

The significance value of the Levene test (0.174) is greater than 0.05, indicating that the variances of the data in both groups are homogeneous. This homogeneity means that both groups have similar data distributions, so the t-test is not biased by differences in variance. This condition allows researchers to compare the means of the two groups more accurately and reliably.

**Results of the t-Test**

The results of the independent samples t-test show:

**Table 5. Results of the independent samples t-test**

Value	Interpretation
Calculated t 3.214 > t-table 1.980	Ho rejected
Sig 0.002 < 0.05	There is a significant difference
Conclusion	The level of religious moderation at Junior High School 1 is higher

Table 5 shows that there is a significant difference between the levels of religious moderation among students at the two schools. The calculated t-value of 3.214 is greater than the critical t-value of 1.980 and is supported by a p-value of  $0.002 < 0.05$ . This confirms that the observed difference is not due to statistical chance but rather indicates a genuine disparity in the level of religious moderation between students at Junior High School 1 Cilegon and Junior High School 3 Cilegon. The mean difference of 4.35 is significant enough to indicate a difference in the quality of the internalization of religious moderation values at the two schools. Since  $p < 0.05$  and the calculated t-value > the critical t-value,  $H_0$  is rejected and  $H_1$  is accepted. It is therefore concluded that there is a significant difference in the level of religious moderation among students between Junior High School 1 Cilegon and Junior High School 1 Cilegon. This discussion elaborates on the research findings in depth by relating them to theory, context, and previous research results.

### **Differences in Levels of Religious Moderation Among Schools**

The research findings indicate that students at Junior High School 1 Cilegon exhibit a higher level of religious moderation compared to students at Junior High School 3 Cilegon. This difference is evident in the overall average scores and in each indicator of moderation.

Several factors may account for these differences. First, a More Structured School Culture. Junior High School 1 Cilegon has more regular and systematic religious programs, such as: morning Quran recitation sessions, congregational Dhuha and Zuhr prayers, *Robis* (Islamic Student Association) guidance, and moderation activities through discussions and thematic studies. These programs indirectly foster a stronger religious habitus among students, thereby contributing to higher levels of religious moderation.

Second, the factor of students' diverse social backgrounds. Junior High School 3 Cilegon has a more diverse student body. This diversity fosters a fairly high level of tolerance, but the consistency of religious practices may vary due to the heterogeneity of family backgrounds. Third, the factor of the Islamic education teaching approach. Islamic education teachers at State Junior High School 1 more frequently use discussion-based approaches, case studies, and the reinforcement of tolerance values in their teaching. Meanwhile, at State Junior High School 3, the teaching approach is more conventional and has not yet explicitly integrated the concept of religious moderation.

The findings of this study align with the theory of moderation developed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs (2019) and (Mubarok & Muslihah, 2022), which states that moderation is significantly influenced by: the learning environment, the instillation of religious values, teaching methods, and the involvement of Islamic education teachers.

Students at Junior High School 1 Cilegon who are accustomed to a structured religious culture tend to exhibit higher levels of religious moderation. This study also supports the findings of Fahmi, (2025), who found that the consistent integration of religious moderation into Islamic religious education has a positive impact on students' tolerance, commitment to the nation, and inclusive behavior.

### **CONCLUSION**

Based on the results of the data analysis, it was found that the level of religious moderation among students at both schools falls into the high category, though there is a significant difference between the two. The average religious moderation score for students at Junior High School 1 Cilegon was 82.45, while students at Junior High School 3 Cilegon had an average score of 78.10. These results indicate that students at Junior High School 1 Cilegon exhibit a higher level of religious moderation compared to those at Junior High School 3 Cilegon. Overall, this study concludes that the implementation of Islamic religious education at Junior High School 1 Cilegon is more successful in fostering moderate character among students than at Junior High School 3 Cilegon. This study implies that Islamic religious education significantly influences the development of religious moderation among students. Schools need to strengthen learning strategies based on dialogue and local culture. These results also serve as a basis for teachers and policymakers to improve religious moderation programs in a structured and sustainable manner.

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