

RESEARCH

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Implementation of Islamic Religious Education Textbooks Based on Religious Moderation Using the Project-Based Learning (PjBL) Model in Higher Education

Arsyadani Mishbahuddin^{1*}, Ririn Gusti² and Vira Afriyati³

***Correspondence:**

Arsyadani Mishbahuddin
arsyadani@unib.ac.id

¹Guidance and Counseling Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Bengkulu, Bengkulu, Indonesia

²Non-Formal Education Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Bengkulu, Bengkulu, Indonesia

³Guidance and Counseling Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Bengkulu, Bengkulu, Indonesia

Abstract

Strengthening religious moderation in higher education is essential for preventing intolerance and promoting inclusive religious attitudes among students. This study aims to examine the implementation of a religious moderation-based Islamic Religious Education textbook using the Project-Based Learning (PjBL) model, analyze students' responses, and identify challenges encountered during the learning process. Employing a qualitative case study design, the research was conducted at the University of Bengkulu involving Islamic Religious Education lecturers and students. Data were collected through classroom observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, and analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data validity was ensured through source, technique, and time triangulation. The findings indicate that the textbook implementation was carried out through three stages: planning, project implementation, and authentic assessment. The integration of religious moderation values with PjBL encouraged active student participation, collaboration, contextual understanding, and the internalization of values such as tolerance, inclusivity, anti-violence, and respect for local culture. However, several challenges emerged, including lecturers' limited familiarity with PjBL, time constraints, limited learning facilities, and students' varying openness to diversity. This study contributes to the development of contextual Islamic Religious Education learning by integrating moderation-oriented teaching materials with project-based pedagogy.

Keywords: Higher Education; Islamic Religious Education; Project-Based Learning; Religious Moderation; Textbook.

Introduction

The issue of religious radicalism and intolerance remains a serious challenge in higher education in Indonesia. Several studies have revealed that some students exhibit exclusivist tendencies and less inclusive religious practices, influenced by the penetration of transnational ideologies and textual understandings of religion (Afwadzi & Miski, 2021). Furthermore, recent research findings indicate that campus environments are not yet completely free from the spread of radical ideology, necessitating a more systematic educational strategy to prevent

the development of intolerant attitudes among students (Prasetyo et al., 2025).

In the context of an increasingly pluralistic and multicultural global society, strengthening religious moderation is an indispensable necessity. Religious moderation (*wasathiyah*) is defined as a religious attitude that prioritizes balance, tolerance, and the rejection of violence (Ainissyifa et al., 2024). In Indonesia, this concept has even been mainstreamed into national policy, particularly in the education sector. This emphasizes the strategic role of higher education institutions in instilling moderate values to maintain social integration and strengthen national unity.

As a compulsory subject, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) plays a crucial role in shaping the moderate character of students. PAI serves not only as a means of transmitting religious knowledge but also as a medium for internalizing inclusive Islamic values oriented toward the principle of *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (blessing for all the universe) (Rahmadhani, 2025). With the right pedagogical approach, PAI has the potential to be an effective instrument in building contextual and tolerant religious awareness.

However, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning practices in higher education still face several obstacles. One major issue is the dominance of conventional, teacher-centered learning approaches. This pattern tends to render students passive recipients, thus hindering their ability to develop critical thinking skills, social empathy, and dialogical skills, which are essential in the context of religious moderation (Nuhdi et al., 2025). Furthermore, the lack of a contextual approach to learning makes it difficult for students to connect Islamic Religious Education (PAI) material to the social realities they face. As a result, the values of religious moderation are not optimally internalized in everyday life. Empirical findings indicate that learning that only emphasizes cognitive aspects is not effective enough in shaping students' moderate attitudes (Hasanah et al., 2023).

As an alternative, the Project-Based Learning (PjBL) model offers a more participatory, collaborative, and experiential learning approach. Through PjBL, students are encouraged to learn through projects relevant to their social context (Gustina et al., 2025). In Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning, this model enables the integration of religious moderation values through activities such as tolerance campaigns, interfaith dialogue, and community service activities.

Various studies have shown that the application of PjBL in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning can improve students' critical thinking skills, social awareness, and tolerance (Basar & Saepulmilah, 2026). Furthermore, PjBL also encourages students to actively construct knowledge and internalize values through direct experience. Therefore, this model is considered relevant in addressing the challenges of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning in the contemporary era.

However, the implementation of PjBL in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning still faces limitations, particularly related to the availability of supporting teaching materials. Many lecturers still use conventional textbooks that do not systematically integrate the value of religious moderation and are not designed to support project-based learning (Rahmadhani, 2025). This condition hinders the optimization of PjBL implementation. Textbooks are a crucial component in the learning process, serving as structured guides for students. Therefore, the development of religious moderation-based Islamic Religious Education textbooks using the PjBL approach is an urgent need. Integratively designed textbooks not only present material but also facilitate project-based activities that encourage deeper internalization of values.

Several previous studies have examined religious moderation, the PjBL model, and Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning separately. However, studies specifically integrating these three aspects through textbook implementation are still relatively limited (Hasanah et al., 2023; Gustina et al., 2025). This indicates a research gap that needs to be filled through more comprehensive studies.

In the context of this research, the research location was determined at the University of Bengkulu. This location selection was based on several academic considerations. First, the University of Bengkulu has a diverse student background that reflects the conditions of a multicultural society, making it relevant to study the implementation of religious moderation in a real context. Second, as a state university in the Sumatra region, the University of Bengkulu has unique socio-religious dynamics, thus providing an opportunity to study the internalization of religious moderation values contextually. Third, this institution has implemented Islamic Religious Education learning as a compulsory course, thus allowing for empirical testing of the project-based learning model in an authentic setting. Thus, the selection of the University of Bengkulu as a research location has theoretical and practical relevance in assessing the effectiveness of integrating religious moderation-based textbooks with the PjBL model.

Based on the description, the problem formulation in this study includes: (1) how the implementation of Islamic Religious Education textbooks is based on religious moderation using the PjBL model in higher education, (2) how students' responses to this implementation are, and (3) what obstacles are faced in its implementation. This formulation is designed to obtain a complete picture of the effectiveness and challenges of implementing this learning model.

This study aims to describe the implementation of the textbook, analyze student responses, and identify obstacles and solutions in the implementation of Islamic Religious Education textbooks based on religious moderation using the PjBL model. Theoretically, this research is expected to enrich the scientific body of knowledge related to the integration of religious moderation in Islamic Religious Education learning. Practically, this research is expected to contribute to lecturers, students, and higher education institutions in developing innovative, contextual learning that is oriented towards strengthening moderate character.

Method

This research employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive case study design, aiming to examine in-depth the implementation process of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) textbooks based on religious moderation through the Project-Based Learning (PjBL) model in higher education. The qualitative approach was used because it can comprehensively reveal the meaning, dynamics of the process, and the experiences of the research subjects in a natural context (Rukajat, 2018). Meanwhile, the case study design was chosen to obtain a detailed and contextual picture of the ongoing learning practices, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study (Sinaga, 2025).

This research was conducted at the University of Bengkulu as the research location. The research subjects consisted of lecturers teaching Islamic Religious Education (PAI) courses and students attending the course. Subjects were selected using a purposive sampling technique, which involves selecting informants based on certain criteria relevant to the research objectives, such as involvement in the use of textbooks based on religious moderation and experience in project-based learning. The number of informants in this study was 3 Islamic Religious Education (PAI) lecturers

and 15–20 students, selected representatively to obtain in-depth and varied data. This number is considered adequate in qualitative research because it is oriented towards data depth (data saturation) rather than population size (Sinaga, 2023).

Research data was collected through three main techniques: observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation studies. Observations were conducted to directly observe the implementation of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning using the PjBL model in the classroom. In-depth interviews were used to explore the views, experiences, and responses of lecturers and students regarding the use of religious moderation-based textbooks. Documentation was used to supplement the data in the form of learning tools such as lesson plans (RPS), textbooks, and student project results. The use of these three techniques was intended to obtain comprehensive data through a triangulation process, thereby increasing the validity of the research findings (Nababan & Putri, 2022).

Data analysis was conducted using the Miles and Huberman interactive analysis model, which includes three main stages, namely data reduction, data presentation (data display), and drawing conclusions and verification. The analysis process takes place simultaneously from the data collection stage until valid and credible results are obtained (Miles & Huberman, 1994). To ensure the validity of the data, this study applies triangulation techniques, which include source triangulation (comparing data from lecturers and students), technical triangulation (observation, interviews, and documentation), and time triangulation. Thus, the research results are expected to have a high level of credibility, validity, and reliability.

Results

Implementation of Religious Moderation-Based Textbooks with PjBL

The implementation of the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) textbook based on religious moderation using the Project-Based Learning (PjBL) model is carried out through three main stages: planning, implementation, and evaluation. During the planning stage, lecturers design Semester Learning Plans (RPS) by integrating religious moderation values such as tolerance, non-violence, and national commitment into learning outcomes. The textbook serves as a primary reference, containing not only conceptual material but also guidelines for implementing projects based on socio-religious issues.

During the implementation phase, the learning process employs a PjBL approach that focuses on student engagement as the center of learning. Students are divided into groups and given project assignments related to religious moderation practices, such as a tolerance campaign through social media, the production of interfaith educational videos, and observation activities in multicultural communities. These activities enable students to connect theoretical concepts with real-world practice.

During the project, students demonstrated strong collaboration, communication, and problem-solving skills. The textbook served as scaffolding, helping students understand the project process, from problem identification to final report preparation. The lecturer acted as a facilitator, actively providing guidance and feedback throughout the process.

The evaluation phase is conducted using an authentic assessment approach that encompasses the process and results of student projects. Assessment encompasses cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects, such as critical thinking skills, moderate attitudes, and the quality of the resulting product. Furthermore, student self-reflection is used as an additional instrument to measure the level of internalization of the value of religious moderation.

Student Response

Research findings indicate that the majority of students responded positively to the use of a religious moderation-based textbook using the PjBL approach. Students considered the textbook to be more contextual, applicable, and easier to understand than conventional teaching materials currently used. In terms of strengthening moderation attitudes, students experienced an increased awareness of the importance of tolerance and inclusiveness. This was reflected in changes in their perspectives on religious and cultural diversity. They also demonstrated greater openness in discussions and an ability to appreciate differing perspectives.

Furthermore, student participation in learning has increased significantly. Students have become more active and enthusiastic in participating in lectures because the project-based approach provides a more realistic and meaningful learning experience. Group discussions, project presentations, and collaborative reflections are indicators of increased student engagement in the learning process.

The summary of student responses can be presented as follows:

Table 1. The summary of student responses

Aspect	Key Findings
Perception of textbooks	More contextual, applicable, and easy to understand
Moderation attitude	Increasing tolerance, inclusivity, and anti-violence attitudes
Learning engagement	Active, collaborative, and enthusiastic participation in learning

Regarding textbook perceptions, students' assessments that the materials were more contextual, applicable, and easy to understand indicate that the textbooks adhere to the principles of contextual teaching and learning (CTL). This approach does not present material abstractly but rather relates it to students' real-life contexts. This condition allows for meaningful learning, where students are able to link religious concepts with everyday life practices. In addition, the systematic presentation of material based on real cases also helps reduce cognitive load, making it easier for students to process information.

In the dimension of religious moderation, the increase in tolerance, inclusivity, and anti-violent sentiment demonstrated by students indicates a process of value transformation. This phenomenon can be explained through social learning and transformative learning theories. Through project-based learning activities involving discussion, collaboration, and reflection, students not only passively receive knowledge but also engage in a dialogical process that allows for the exchange of perspectives. This interaction encourages the development of perspective-taking skills, namely the ability to understand another party's point of view, which is an important foundation for tolerance. Thus, the value of moderation is not only understood normatively but also experienced through authentic and reflective learning experiences.

Meanwhile, in terms of learning engagement, increased active participation, collaboration, and student enthusiasm demonstrate the successful implementation of student-centered learning principles. The PjBL model inherently demands comprehensive student involvement in every stage of learning, from planning to project evaluation. This aligns with student engagement theory, which emphasizes the importance of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement as indicators of learning success. In this context, students become more motivated because the learning process is authentic and provides space for exploration and creativity. Furthermore, group work activities in projects also strengthen social interaction and collaboration, which are essential elements in knowledge construction according to the social constructivism perspective.

Thus, these three aspects, namely positive perceptions of teaching materials, strengthening

moderate attitudes, and increasing learning involvement, are components that are mutually integrated and mutually reinforcing. Contextual textbooks provide the foundation for developing a deep understanding, which then encourages the internalization of moderation values, ultimately reflecting students' active engagement in learning. This confirms that integrating religious moderation-based teaching materials with the PjBL model is an effective approach to producing holistic learning, encompassing cognitive, affective, and social dimensions.

Obstacles in Implementation

Although the implementation went well overall, this study also identified several challenges. Pedagogically, some lecturers were still unfamiliar with the PjBL model, necessitating an adaptation process in managing project-based learning. Furthermore, differences in students' collaborative abilities also posed challenges to group dynamics.

From a technical perspective, challenges include time constraints in project implementation, limited access to learning resources, and a lack of supporting facilities such as digital media. Some students also experience difficulty managing their time between project work and the demands of other courses.

Meanwhile, from a cultural and psychological perspective, some students still tend to be exclusive and less open to differences. This indicates that the process of internalizing the values of religious moderation requires ongoing time and cannot be achieved instantly.

Overall, the results of this study indicate that the implementation of Islamic Religious Education textbooks based on religious moderation using the PjBL model is effective in improving students' understanding and moderate attitudes. However, improvements in pedagogical, technical, and cultural aspects are needed for optimal implementation.

Discussion

The implementation of a religious moderation-based Islamic Religious Education (PAI) textbook through the Project-Based Learning (PjBL) model in this study demonstrates strong alignment with the theoretical foundation of PjBL. Conceptually, PjBL emphasizes experiential learning that engages students in real-world problem exploration, collaborative work, and product creation (Thomas, 2000). The results of this study indicate that students not only understand the concept of religious moderation at the cognitive level but are also able to apply it in real-world activities such as tolerance campaigns and interfaith dialogue.

From an implementation perspective, the planning, implementation, and evaluation stages conducted in this study align with the PjBL syntax, which encompasses project determination, activity planning, implementation, and reflection (Lutfiyatun et al., 2023). The textbook serves as a systematic guide that integrates material with project activities, thus bridging the gap between theoretical and practical aspects. This confirms that the success of PjBL implementation is strongly influenced by a well-structured learning design.

The connection between the research findings and the theory of religious moderation also appears significant. From an Islamic educational perspective, religious moderation emphasizes the principle of *wasathiyah*, which encompasses balance, tolerance, and rejection of extremism (Purnamasari, 2026). In the context of this research, these values are not only conveyed conceptually but also internalized through contextual project activities. This makes the learning process more meaningful because students directly experience the process of internalizing values.

The results of this study demonstrate that the Project-Based Learning (PjBL) model is effective in fostering moderate attitudes in students. This finding is consistent with research by Gustina et al.

(2025), which states that project-based learning can improve social empathy, tolerance, and collaborative skills. Furthermore, Mazumi et al. (2025) also emphasized that Project-Based Learning (PjBL) contributes to increased social awareness and inclusive attitudes in the context of religious moderation learning.

Compared with previous studies, this research excels in integrating textbooks, religious moderation values, and the PjBL model. Most previous research tends to examine these aspects separately, either from the learning model or the moderation values perspective (Basar & Saepulmilah, 2026). Therefore, this study makes a novel contribution by integrating these three components into a comprehensive learning framework.

Conceptually, the findings of this study confirm that textbooks serve not only as sources of information but also as pedagogical instruments capable of guiding active learning processes. Religious moderation-based textbooks integrated with PjBL serve as scaffolding, helping students understand and systematically implement the value of moderation (Husni, 2026).

A critical analysis of the research findings shows that successful implementation is not solely determined by the learning model but also influenced by the readiness of human resources. Lecturers' competence in managing project-based learning is a key factor in the success of PjBL implementation (Benawa & Wardhani, 2024). Furthermore, students' readiness to work collaboratively also determines the effectiveness of the learning process.

Furthermore, the obstacles identified in this study demonstrate that learning innovation is not without challenges. Limited time, facilities, and heterogeneity in student backgrounds are factors that can hinder the optimal implementation of PjBL. This finding aligns with research by Kurnia et al. (2025), which asserts that the implementation of PjBL in Islamic education requires systemic support from educational institutions.

In a broader context, the results of this study reinforce the urgency of transforming Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning from a normative approach to a more contextual and applied one. The PjBL model enables students to connect Islamic teachings with the social realities they face, thereby making learning more relevant to everyday life (Rahmadhani, 2025).

The theoretical implication of this research is to strengthen the concept of integration between religious moderation and innovative learning models in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) studies. This research shows that internalizing the value of moderation is not sufficient through lectures alone, but requires authentic and participatory learning experiences. This contributes to the development of values-based Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning theory. This research has implications for various parties. Lecturers are required to improve their competence in designing project-based learning, students are encouraged to be more active and reflective in the learning process, and educational institutions need to provide adequate policy support and facilities to support innovative learning.

Thus, this study confirms that implementing Islamic Religious Education textbooks based on religious moderation using the PjBL model is an effective strategy in shaping students' moderate character. The integration of teaching materials, learning models, and moderation values is a key factor in creating learning that is not only informative but also transformative.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the qualitative research that has been conducted, it can be emphasized that the implementation of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) textbooks based on religious moderation with the Project-Based Learning (PjBL) model in higher education can improve the quality of learning as a whole, covering the cognitive, affective, and social aspects of students. The results of

the study show that the integration of structured textbooks with the PjBL approach encourages students to be more active, collaborative, and able to internalize the values of religious moderation, such as tolerance, inclusivity, and anti-violent attitudes, through contextual learning experiences.

Theoretically, this study reinforces the view that the process of internalizing the value of religious moderation cannot be achieved solely through a cognitive approach, but requires authentic, project-based learning experiences as part of transformative learning. From a social and cultural perspective, the results of this study emphasize the importance of strengthening religious moderation in higher education as a preventative measure against radicalism and intolerance, while also supporting the creation of harmony in a pluralistic society.

In an academic context, this research contributes to the development of an innovative and integrative Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning model, particularly in combining teaching materials, religious moderation values, and project-based learning strategies. However, this research is still limited in terms of location coverage and the relatively limited number of subjects, so generalization of the results requires caution. Therefore, further research is recommended to expand the scope of the study, test the effectiveness of the model through a quantitative approach, and develop digital-based teaching materials to support the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) more optimally in various higher education contexts.

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