

STRENGTHENING RELIGIOUS MODERATION THROUGH LEARNING AQIDAH MORALS: CASE STUDY AT SIDOARJO HIGH SCHOOL

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Abstract:

Contemporary global developments characterized by the strengthening of identity polarization, increasing religious extremism, and social fragmentation demand a paradigm transformation in the learning of Islamic Religious Education, especially in the subject of Aqidah Akhlak. The learning approach, which is still dominated by normative-dogmatic patterns, is considered not optimal in fostering critical awareness, social empathy, and moderate attitudes of students. This research aims to explore in depth the implementation of pedagogical innovation of Aqidah Akhlak as a strategy to strengthen religious moderation at the secondary school level, with a case study at Sidoarjo High School. This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data collection was carried out through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and study of learning documents, while data analysis used the interactive model Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. The results of the study show that pedagogical innovations that integrate reflective, dialogical, contextual, and authentic experience-based approaches are able to significantly transform the practice of learning Aqidah Akhlak. This transformation is reflected in the dynamics of classroom interaction that is more dialogical, collaborative, and egalitarian, as well as the increasing internalization of religious moderation values in students. Students show the strengthening of pluralistic awareness, social empathy, conflict resolution skills, and inclusive attitudes in social life. These findings confirm that Aqidah Akhlak pedagogical innovation has the potential to become a strategic framework in strengthening religious moderation at the secondary education level and makes an important contribution to the development of a humanistic and transformative paradigm of moderate Islamic pedagogy in responding to the socio-religious challenges of the 21st century.

Keywords: *Aqidah Akhlak, Religious Moderation, Islamic Education.*

Introduction

Contemporary global dynamics, characterized by the intensification of identity polarization, the escalation of religion-based extremism, and increasing social fragmentation, have positioned religious education in a role that is both crucial and problematic (Hefner, 2009).¹ Religious education is no longer sufficient as a mere medium for the transmission of doctrinal beliefs; rather, it is required to function strategically in shaping generations who demonstrate strong religious commitment while simultaneously embodying moderate, tolerant, and inclusive worldviews.² The

¹ Hefner, *Islamic schools, social movements, and democracy in Indonesia*. (n.d.). Retrieved February 20, 2026, from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/286987985_Islamic_schools_social_movements_and_democracy_in_Indonesia

² Azra, H. (2018). Islamic Education in Indonesia. In H. Daun & R. Arjmand (Eds.), *Handbook of Islamic Education* (Vol.

tension between strengthening religious identity and the demands of social integration presents a fundamental challenge for Aqidah Akhlak learning, particularly within multicultural societies and the digital era. At this level, Aqidah Akhlak instruction must undergo transformation through pedagogical innovation, technological integration, and humanistic approaches oriented toward reinforcing humanitarian values and social harmony.³

The reinforcement of religious moderation has become an integral component of national education policy in response to growing social complexity and cultural diversity.⁴ Religious moderation is not merely understood as accommodative or compromise-based attitudes, but rather as a manifestation of faith emphasizing justice, balance, inclusivity, and social welfare orientation. In this context, Aqidah Akhlak learning that integrates theological dimensions and Islamic ethics holds strategic potential as a medium for internalizing moderation values among students.⁵ However, efforts to optimize this role continue to face considerable challenges, particularly due to the dominance of conventional pedagogical approaches that are normative-dogmatic, teacher-centered, and insufficiently contextualized to students' social realities. Consequently, the internalization of moderation values tends to remain superficial, failing to penetrate the affective and social praxis dimensions deeply.⁶

The realities of multicultural and digital societies demand a reorientation of pedagogical paradigms in religious education, especially within Aqidah Akhlak instruction. Learning practices that remain dominated by normative-dogmatic approaches, one-way transmission, and minimal contextual reflection tend to be ineffective in fostering critical awareness, social empathy, and dialogical competencies among students. As a result, the internalization of religious moderation values frequently stagnates at the level of formal cognitive understanding and fails to translate into inclusive and transformative social practices.⁷ Therefore, pedagogical innovation in Aqidah Akhlak oriented toward reflective, dialogical, and contextual approaches becomes an urgent necessity in responding to the socio-religious challenges of the 21st century.

7, pp. 763–780). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-64683-1_32

³ Zakiya, N., Ali, M. A., & Badriyah, L. (2025). Upaya Guru Dalam Penanaman Nilai Toleransi Antar Umat Beragama Dalam Materi Aqidah Akhlak Di Sekolah Negeri. *Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Keguruan*, 3(9), 1272–1281.

⁴ Badriyah, L. (2025). Harmony in Diversity: Islamic Perspectives on Student Perceptions and Engagement in Interfaith Dialogue on Campus. *FALASIFA: Jurnal Studi Keislaman*, 16(02), 165–177. <https://doi.org/10.62097/falasifa.v16i02.2809>

⁵ Rahmat, E., Solahudin, D., Kusnawan, A., & Azis, R. (2025). Globalizing Religious Moderation: Indonesia's Experience of Religious Moderation for the ASEAN and Global Contexts. *TEMALI: Jurnal Pembangunan Sosial*, 8(2). <https://doi.org/10.15575/jt.v8i2.45139>

⁶ Saada, N., & Magadlah, H. (2021). The meanings and possible implications of critical Islamic religious education. *British Journal of Religious Education*, 43(2), 206–217. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2020.1785844>

⁷ Tkáčová, Hedviga, and Daniel Slivka. 2024. Civic Engagement, and the Prevention of Religious Radicalism: Together for an Inclusive Future (A View of Empirical Evidence). *Religions* 15(1):1. doi:10.3390/rel15010001.

Empirical studies specifically examining the role of pedagogical innovation in Aqidah Akhlak learning to strengthen religious moderation at the secondary school level remain limited, particularly within the context of Islamic education in Indonesia. Most existing studies focus primarily on religious education policies or general character education, thus failing to provide a comprehensive understanding of innovative pedagogical practices in Aqidah Akhlak instruction and their impact on shaping students' moderate attitudes.⁸ This situation reveals a significant research gap that necessitates rigorous and contextualized empirical investigation.

The limited scope of existing studies highlights the urgent need to develop alternative pedagogical frameworks capable of bridging the gap between the normative ideals of Aqidah Akhlak instruction and the increasingly complex and dynamic social realities. Pedagogical innovation can no longer be narrowly defined as mere diversification of instructional methods; rather, it must be directed toward reconstructing learning paradigms that holistically integrate cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions. Reflective-critical, dialogical, and experiential pedagogical approaches have proven effective in enhancing pluralistic awareness, social empathy, and students' conflict resolution capacities within diverse contexts.⁹ Accordingly, Aqidah Akhlak learning should be developed as a transformative pedagogical space that facilitates deep, contextual, and sustainable internalization of religious moderation values.

Within the landscape of Islamic education in Indonesia, Aqidah Akhlak learning occupies a distinctive epistemological and pedagogical position by integrating theological, ethical, and social dimensions into a holistic value framework (Kurniawan et al., 2024).¹⁰ Consequently, pedagogical innovation in Aqidah Akhlak holds strategic significance as an instrument for strengthening religious moderation that is firmly rooted in Islamic intellectual traditions while remaining adaptive to global dynamics. Pedagogical approaches emphasizing cross-perspective dialogue, social-problem-based learning, and critical utilization of digital technologies are considered effective in expanding students' intellectual horizons, sharpening social competencies, and reinforcing national consciousness and universal humanitarian values.¹¹

⁸ Ananda Indri Anisya, Juliani, Nur Hikmah, Sulistia Safitri, Tiara Melysa Br. Sembiring, & Mhd Aslam Fikri Lubis. (2025). Innovative Islamic Religious Education Curriculum Model to Improve Religious Understanding in Schools. *Journal of Contemporary Gender and Child Studies*, 4(1), 266–273. <https://doi.org/10.61253/jcgcs.v4i1.291>

⁹ Memon, N. A., & Abdalla, M. (Eds.). (2025). *Teacher Education for Islamic Education and Schooling*. MDPI. <https://doi.org/10.3390/books978-3-7258-4800-3>

¹⁰ Kurniawan, W., Nurahman, M. A., & Junaidi, J. (2024). Innovation in learning akidah and akhlak for Gen Z at MA Hamzanwadi NW Pancor. *Edusoshum: Journal of Islamic Education and Social Humanities*, 5(1), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.52366/edusoshum.v5i1.125>

¹¹ Maulana, M. N. A., Maslani, Maesak, C., Lubis, A., & Taufiqurrahman. (2025). Utilization of Interactive Digital Teaching Materials in Aqidah Akhlaq Learning at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. *Journal of Innovation and Research in Primary Education*, 4(3), 1111–1117. <https://doi.org/10.56916/jirpe.v4i3.1940>

Furthermore, the local educational context of secondary schools in Sidoarjo reflects a social configuration that represents the complexity of Indonesia's multicultural society on a micro scale. The intensity of cross-religious, cultural, and socio-economic interactions necessitates adaptive, inclusive, and dialog-based pedagogical approaches. Senior high schools, as strategic arenas for youth character formation, require Aqidah Akhlak instructional designs that transcend normative-instructional patterns toward reflective-transformative approaches, enabling the development of students who possess not only strong religious commitment and moral integrity but also moderate, tolerant, and inclusive social awareness.

Based on this framework, the present study aims to examine in depth how pedagogical innovation in Aqidah Akhlak is implemented as a strategy for strengthening religious moderation at the secondary school level, through a case study at a senior high school in Sidoarjo. The focus is directed toward analyzing instructional design, pedagogical practices, classroom interaction dynamics, and their impact on the development of students' moderate attitudes, tolerance, and openness. This study is expected to contribute theoretically to the development of moderate Islamic pedagogical paradigms and practically by offering an applicable, contextual, and relevant model of Aqidah Akhlak learning for addressing the socio-religious challenges of the 21st century.

Research Method

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore in depth the implementation of pedagogical innovation in Aqidah Akhlak as a strategy for strengthening religious moderation at the secondary school level. The qualitative approach was selected as it allows for contextual and holistic exploration of meanings, processes, and social dynamics.¹² Research participants included Aqidah Akhlak teachers, students, school principals, and educational stakeholders at a senior high school in Sidoarjo. Data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis, including lesson plans, teaching modules, assessment instruments, and learning activity records. This methodological triangulation aimed to generate comprehensive, in-depth, and valid data related to instructional design, pedagogical practices, and classroom interaction dynamics.

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, encompassing data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing conducted iteratively and

¹² Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (Fourth Indian edition). PHI Learning Private Limited.

continuously.¹³ Data credibility was ensured through source, method, and time triangulation, as well as member checking procedures. Through these analytical processes, the study aimed to produce a rich description and critical interpretation of the effectiveness of pedagogical innovation in Aqidah Akhlak in shaping students' moderate, tolerant, and inclusive attitudes, while formulating a contextual, applicable, and relevant learning model for addressing 21st-century socio-religious challenges.

Findings and Discussion

1. Transformation of the Aqidah Akhlak Pedagogical Paradigm in the Context of Religious Moderation

The findings indicate that the implementation of pedagogical innovation in Aqidah Akhlak learning has triggered a fundamental paradigm shift, not only at the methodological level but also within epistemological and pedagogical praxis dimensions.¹⁴ The transformation from normative-dogmatic instruction toward reflective, dialogical, and contextual approaches signifies a shift from mere transmission of religious knowledge to the holistic formation of students' ethical, social, and spiritual consciousness.¹⁵ This shift aligns with contemporary Islamic education paradigms emphasizing the integration of cognitive, affective, and social praxis dimensions as the foundation for strengthening religious moderation.

Epistemologically, conventional one-way transmission approaches tend to position students as passive recipients of religious doctrines, limiting opportunities for critical reflection and contextualization of Islamic teachings within dynamic social realities. In contrast, dialog- and reflection-based pedagogical innovations encourage active student engagement in meaning construction through critical discourse, social interaction, and authentic.¹⁶ This approach reinforces meaning-making learning, oriented toward developing critical religious reasoning and contextual ethical awareness.

The implementation of problem-based learning, reflective discussions, and socio-religious case studies effectively integrates Islamic monotheistic values and ethics with

¹³ Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (Third edition). SAGE Publications, Inc.

¹⁴ Marlina, R., Cahyadi, R. A. W., Hidayat, M., & Hambali, I. (2024). *Innovative Approaches Of Islamic Religious Education Teachers To Enhance Student Learning Enthusiasm*. 9.

ISLAMIKA. <https://ejournal.stitpn.ac.id/index.php/islamika/article/view/5444>

¹⁵ Maulidi, R., Badriyah, L., & Masnawati, E. (2024). *Transformasi Model Pembelajaran dalam Meningkatkan Kualitas Pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI): Studi Kasus di SMA Al-Muslim Sidoarjo* |

¹⁶ Babacan, M. (2025). The Impact of Religious Socialization on the Crisis of Faith: The Case of Young Turks in Türkiye. *Religions*, 16(10), 1297. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16101297>

everyday life realities. Through these approaches, students not only understand Islamic teachings conceptually but also translate them into socially oriented attitudes and action)¹⁷. Reflective processes cultivated through discussion facilitate transformations in students' perspectives, attitudes, and behaviors, enabling Aqidah Akhlak learning to function as a sustainable medium for value internalization.

Moreover, students' active engagement in open dialogue and problematization of socio-religious issues significantly enhances higher-order thinking skills, social empathy, and moral decision-making capacities. These competencies are particularly relevant within multicultural contexts, where students must demonstrate social sensitivity, openness to diversity, and harmonious relational skills.¹⁸ Consequently, Aqidah Akhlak learning evolves beyond individual piety toward fostering inclusive social piety.

The integration of digital technology further expands learning spaces and dynamics. The utilization of online platforms, educational social media, and interactive multimedia facilitates cross-perspective dialogue, collaborative learning, and critical digital literacy.¹⁹ In this context, digital spaces are positioned not merely as technical tools but as strategic pedagogical media for cultivating reflective awareness and safeguarding students against narratives of intolerance and extremism.

Furthermore, pedagogical innovation in Aqidah Akhlak reflects efforts to reconstruct Islamic education paradigms that position students as active subjects in meaning-making processes. Teachers' roles shift from information transmitters to learning facilitators, dialogue partners, and moral-spiritual mentors.²⁰ Such dialogical and participatory pedagogical relationships foster critical awareness, inclusivity, and social responsibility. Broadly, this pedagogical transformation carries strategic implications for strengthening religious moderation in Indonesia, potentially cultivating adaptive, tolerant Muslim generations committed to peace and social justice.

2. Dialogical Interaction Dynamics and the Internalization of Religious Moderation Values

¹⁷ Damayanti, E., Yuliyanti, R., Najiah, M., & Nulhakim, L. (2023). Improving Critical Thinking Skills in Thematic Learning with the Help of Problem Learning Models. *Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan IPA*, 9(7), 276–282. <https://doi.org/10.29303/jppipa.v9i7.3689>

¹⁸ Jamaluddin, W. (n.d.). *Implementation of Religious Moderation Based on Inclusive Theology and Dialogue in Indonesia: Opportunities and Challenges*.

¹⁹ Akmal, M. N., Arianto, A., & Badriyah, L. (2025). Pengaruh Pemanfaatan Aplikasi Youtube dalam Mata Pelajaran PAI sebagai Media Pembelajaran Inovatif pada Era Digital. *Ar-Rasyd: Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam*, 4(1), Article 1. <https://doi.org/10.61094/arrusyid.2830-2281.15>

²⁰ Bayhaqi, H. N., Ilham, M., & Badriyah, L. (2024). Kompetensi Guru PAI dalam Kurikulum Merdeka di Era Digital. *PANDAWA*, 6(3), 128–136.

The implementation of pedagogical innovation in Aqidah Akhlak learning has exerted a significant impact on classroom interaction dynamics, fostering a more dialogical, participatory, and egalitarian learning environment. The pedagogical relationship that emerges is no longer hierarchical but collaborative, positioning teachers as facilitators of learning and students as active agents in the construction of knowledge.²¹ This interactional pattern cultivates an inclusive classroom climate that promotes openness, social empathy, and mutual respect, which constitute the fundamental pillars of religious moderation.

Empirical findings indicate that cross-perspective dialogue facilitated in Aqidah Akhlak instruction substantially enhances students' capacity to comprehend differences constructively. Discussions addressing contemporary socio-religious issues such as interfaith tolerance, social justice, and digital ethics stimulate the development of critical and reflective thinking skills. This process not only enriches cognitive understanding but also deepens ethical awareness and social responsibility as members of a multicultural society. Such pedagogical practices reinforce the internalization of moderation values by integrating moral reasoning with social consciousness.

Experiential learning strategies, including social projects, interfaith dialogue simulations, and field studies, further contribute to the effective internalization of religious moderation values. Through direct engagement in real-world social interactions, students experience tolerance not merely as an abstract concept but as a lived reality. This approach aligns with experiential learning theories emphasizing the transformative role of authentic engagement in enhancing empathy, social sensitivity, and conflict resolution competencies.

From the perspective of critical pedagogy, dialogical interaction within Aqidah Akhlak instruction provides reflective spaces that allow students to critically interrogate, reinterpret, and contextualize religious teachings through a humanistic lens.²² This process is crucial in preventing rigid religious interpretations that may foster exclusivism and intolerance. Consequently, the internalization of religious moderation transcends formal cognitive acquisition, evolving into inclusive moral awareness and transformative social praxis.

Moreover, dialogical classroom dynamics significantly contribute to strengthening social cohesion within the school environment. Students demonstrate increased collaborative capacity across religious, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds, manifested through

²¹ Memon, N. A., & Abdalla, M. (Eds.). (2025). *Teacher Education for Islamic Education and Schooling*. MDPI. <https://doi.org/10.3390/books978-3-7258-4800-3>

²² Putri, A. N. C., Syafe'i, M., & Iman, M. (n.d.). *The Importance of Religious Literacy in Critical Thinking and Creativity in Junior High School Students*.

collective activities emphasizing respect, solidarity, and social justice. These findings affirm that dialogue-based religious education possesses substantial potential in cultivating social harmony and mitigating identity fragmentation in multicultural societies.

3. Impact of Pedagogical Innovation on the Formation of Students' Moderate Attitudes

One of the most salient findings of this study is the substantial positive impact of pedagogical innovation in Aqidah Akhlak instruction on the development of students' moderate, tolerant, and inclusive dispositions. Empirical data reveal marked improvements in pluralistic awareness, social empathy, and behavioral tendencies oriented toward collective well-being. Students not only comprehend the conceptual foundations of religious moderation but are also capable of actualizing these values within their everyday social interactions.²³

Within this framework, religious moderation is conceptualized not as a compromise that dilutes religious identity, but rather as an authentic manifestation of faith grounded in principles of justice, balance, inclusivity, and universal humanity. Innovative pedagogical approaches enable students to reflect upon Islamic theological and ethical teachings contextually, fostering an awareness that diversity represents a divine ordinance (*sunnatullah*) that must be approached with wisdom and tolerance.²⁴

These findings resonate with previous studies demonstrating that reflective-critical pedagogical models in Islamic education significantly enhance inclusive attitudes and mitigate radical tendencies.²⁵ Similarly, the integration of theological, ethical, and social dimensions within religious instruction has been shown to contribute meaningfully to the cultivation of moderate and humanistic religious character. Dialogical and problem-based Aqidah Akhlak learning effectively improves students' conflict-resolution skills, equipping them to respond constructively to differing perspectives and social tensions.

In the local context of Sidoarjo, complex social dynamics provide a fertile environment for the practical application of religious moderation. Intensive cross-cultural and interfaith interactions serve as a social laboratory in which students actively practice tolerance and inclusivity. As strategic institutions for youth character formation, senior high schools play a

²³ Najamudin, Abduh, M., & Hidayat, S. (2025). Integrative approach for education of Akidah Akhlak and active tolerance in diverse communities: A comparative analysis of pedagogical strategies and social cohesion results. *Edukasi Islami: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 14(3). <https://doi.org/10.30868/ei.v14i03.9080>

²⁴ Dharin, Abu. (2025). Enhancing character development through Aqidah Akhlak education in Islamic elementary schools: A case study from Central Java. *Al-Isblah: Jurnal Pendidikan*, 17(2). <https://doi.org/10.35445/alishlah.v17i2.7252>

²⁵ Memon, N. A., & Abdalla, M. (Eds.). (2025). *Teacher Education for Islamic Education and Schooling*. MDPI. <https://doi.org/10.3390/books978-3-7258-4800-3>

critical role in embedding moderation values through reflective and transformative Aqidah Akhlak pedagogy. These findings underscore the necessity of contextualized religious education to ensure that moderation values are internalized meaningfully and enacted within real-life social practices.

Collectively, this study demonstrates that pedagogical innovation in Aqidah Akhlak instruction constitutes a highly strategic model for strengthening religious moderation at the secondary education level. This model holds not only national relevance but also global significance in addressing the challenges of extremism, identity polarization, and social fragmentation in the digital age.

Conclusion

This study concludes that pedagogical innovation in Aqidah Akhlak learning plays a pivotal role in reconstructing instructional paradigms from normative-dogmatic approaches toward reflective, dialogical, and contextual pedagogies. This paradigm shift enhances the quality of learning processes while strengthening the holistic integration of students' cognitive, affective, and social praxis dimensions. Through innovative pedagogical strategies, Aqidah Akhlak instruction effectively cultivates ethical, spiritual, and social consciousness aligned with the core principles of religious moderation. The findings further demonstrate that participatory, dialogical, and egalitarian classroom dynamics significantly contribute to the reinforcement of tolerance, social empathy, openness, and conflict-resolution capacities among students. Through problem-based learning, cross-perspective dialogue, and authentic experiential engagement, students not only acquire conceptual understanding of religious moderation but also internalize these values within everyday social practices. This underscores the imperative to conceptualize religious moderation as a lived social praxis rather than a merely normative construct.

Moreover, the integration of digital technologies into Aqidah Akhlak pedagogy expands dialogical spaces, enriches learning resources, and strengthens students' critical digital literacy. This approach serves as a strategic mechanism to counteract extremist and intolerant narratives prevalent in digital ecosystems, while simultaneously optimizing technology as a medium for nurturing moderation values. Overall, pedagogical innovation in Aqidah Akhlak learning characterized by reflective, dialogical, contextual, and experiential orientations emerges as a strategic pedagogical model for strengthening religious moderation in secondary education. This model holds significant relevance not only for the Indonesian context but also globally, in addressing the challenges of identity polarization, religious extremism, and social fragmentation in

the digital era. Therefore, systematic and sustainable pedagogical reform in Aqidah Akhlak instruction should be positioned as a strategic priority within the development of contemporary Islamic education that is moderate, humanistic, and transformative.

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