



Assessing Religious Literacy in Indonesian Secondary Education and Its Implications for Religious Moderation

Noer Hidayah^{1✉}, Akhiarul Waro Wardani², Wahidul Anam³, Mona Addeq⁴

¹Universitas Islam Negeri Syekh Wasil, Kediri, Indonesia; noer_hid@uinkediri.ac.id

²Universitas Islam Negeri Syekh Wasil, Kediri, Indonesia; wardaniahmad25@uinkediri.ac.id

³Universitas Islam Negeri Syekh Wasil, Kediri, Indonesia; wahidulanam_74@uinkediri.ac.id

⁴ESLSCA University, Egypt; mona.addeq@eslscu.edu.eg

ABSTRACT

Religious moderation is a national priority for preventing conflicts rooted in religious differences, yet empirical studies that map the multidimensional structure of religious literacy among Indonesian adolescents remain limited. This study addresses this gap by examining the level and profile of religious literacy among senior high school students in Kediri City. A quantitative survey design was used, drawing on structured questionnaire data from students at MAN 1 Kediri City and SMAN 4 Kediri City, and the analysis employed descriptive statistics and profile analysis to differentiate between normative and critical-interpretive competencies. The results show that 86.3 percent of students demonstrate high to very high religious literacy, particularly in respecting religious diversity, supporting religious freedom, and applying ethical values in daily life. Lower performance appears in higher-order competencies such as recognizing religion-based violence, interpreting sacred texts within socio-political contexts, and engaging in interfaith dialogue, indicating that students possess strong normative understanding but weaker analytical and dialogical skills. These findings suggest that current educational practices effectively cultivate basic attitudes of tolerance but do not sufficiently strengthen competencies needed to navigate complex religious issues in plural societies. The study concludes that targeted interventions are required to enhance critical-interpretive dimensions of religious literacy and recommends integrating structured interfaith dialogue activities, contextual text interpretation exercises, and critical reflection modules to support national religious moderation agendas in secondary education.

ABSTRAK

Penguatan sikap moderasi beragama merupakan salah satu upaya strategis pemerintah untuk memitigasi konflik yang timbul akibat perbedaan keagamaan. Literasi beragama berperan sebagai kompetensi dasar dalam menumbuhkan moderasi tersebut. Penelitian ini mengkaji tingkat dan profil literasi beragama siswa sekolah menengah atas di Kota Kediri dengan menggunakan pendekatan survei kuantitatif yang melibatkan siswa MAN 1 Kota Kediri dan SMAN 4 Kota Kediri. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa 86,3% siswa memiliki tingkat literasi beragama tinggi hingga sangat tinggi, khususnya dalam aspek penghormatan terhadap keberagaman agama, penegakan kebebasan beragama, serta penerapan nilai-nilai etika dalam kehidupan sehari-hari. Namun demikian, masih terdapat kelemahan yang signifikan pada kompetensi tingkat lanjut, seperti kemampuan mengidentifikasi kekerasan berbasis agama, menafsirkan teks keagamaan dalam konteks sosial-politik, keterampilan berdialog lintas agama, serta

OPEN ACCESS

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received: 08-02-2025

Accepted: 31-12-2025

KEYWORDS

Religious literacy index, religious moderation, Quantitative survey, Indonesia, Secondary education.

KATA KUNCI

Indeks literasi beragama; Moderasi beragama; survei kuantitatif; Indonesia; Pendidikan menengah

kemampuan mengevaluasi secara kritis gerakan keagamaan dari perspektif kemanusiaan. Penelitian ini menyajikan kebaruan empiris dengan memetakan literasi beragama tidak hanya sebagai sikap umum, tetapi sebagai konstruk multidimensi yang membedakan antara pemahaman normatif dan kompetensi kritis-interpretatif pada remaja. Temuan ini berkontribusi secara teoretis terhadap konseptualisasi literasi beragama sebagai fondasi moderasi beragama yang terukur serta memberikan implikasi kebijakan bagi perancangan intervensi pendidikan yang terarah untuk memperkuat agenda moderasi beragama di jenjang pendidikan menengah.

Introduction

Religious intolerance in Indonesia remains a critical challenge that affects social life and the stability of a diverse society. Data from the Setara Institute show that in 2021, multiple violations of Freedom of Religion and Belief (FoRB) were documented. State actors were primarily involved in cases of discrimination (25 cases), discriminatory policies (18 cases), and blasphemy (8 cases). Non-state actors were more frequently associated with acts of intolerance (62 cases), hate speech (27 cases), opposition to the establishment of places of worship (20 cases), blasphemy reports (15 cases), rejection of religious activities (13 cases), attacks (12 cases), and the destruction of places of worship (10 cases) (Setara Institute, 2022). These patterns indicate that intolerance continues to pose a substantial threat to social cohesion in Indonesia.

In response, the government has implemented various initiatives to reduce conflicts arising from religious differences, including the promotion of religious moderation. Religious moderation is intended to foster harmony, safeguard the nation from radicalism, and reinforce social cohesion. It is identified as a strategic objective in the National Medium-Term Development Plan 2020–2024, as stipulated in Presidential Regulation No. 18 of 2020.

Religious literacy has gained increasing recognition as a foundational element for strengthening religious moderation in plural societies. Prior research demonstrates that adequate religious literacy enables individuals to understand religious teachings contextually, engage respectfully with religious diversity, and resist extremist interpretations (Moore, 2014; Prothero, 2008; Walker et al., 2021). Within religious education, religious literacy extends beyond textual knowledge to include the ability to interpret religious values ethically and socially in contemporary contexts (Hannam et al., 2020; Marcus & Ralph, 2021).

Religious literacy equips individuals to critically examine the relationship between religion and social, cultural, and political dynamics, thereby reducing the potential for intolerance and conflict in diverse societies (Prothero, 2008; K. Soules, 2023). For religious literacy to be effective, it must be historically and culturally grounded and move beyond ritual knowledge toward fostering tolerance, moderation, and ethical engagement in public life (Altunkaynak, 2022; Wolfart, 2022). Empirical studies further show that higher levels of religious literacy are positively associated with attitudes of tolerance and social harmony (Hanafi et al., 2022; Sawan & Payong, 2023).

Conceptually, religious literacy encompasses cognitive and affective dimensions, including an understanding of sacred texts and religious traditions within their sociocultural contexts, as well as the capacity to critically interpret the religious dimensions of social and political issues (Marcus & Ralph, 2021; Moore, 2014). The development of these competencies requires systematic educational efforts through classroom instruction and habituation, with teachers playing a central role in creating

inclusive, reflective, and dialogical learning environments (Soules & Jafralie, 2021; Ubani, 2025).

Despite this theoretical clarity, studies on religious literacy in Indonesia have largely focused on conceptual analyses, curriculum reviews, or qualitative examinations of religious moderation discourse (Zuhdi & Sarwenda, 2020; Arifinsyah et al., 2020). Quantitative empirical research that measures students' religious literacy using structured instruments, particularly at the secondary education level, remains limited (Altunkaynak, 2022; Ubani, 2025). As a result, policymakers and educators lack robust evidence to evaluate the extent to which religious education has effectively cultivated religious literacy that supports moderation. Addressing this gap, the present study offers a quantitative assessment of religious literacy among senior high school students in Indonesia, providing empirical insights to inform curriculum development and evidence-based religious moderation policies.

The novelty of this study lies in its empirical contribution to religious education research through the development and application of a structured religious literacy instrument in Indonesian secondary schools. Unlike previous studies that emphasize normative frameworks or qualitative perspectives on moderation (Zuhdi & Sarwenda, 2020; Hanafi et al., 2022), this research provides measurable indicators of students' religious literacy across cognitive, ethical, and social dimensions. By identifying both strong and weak aspects of students' religious literacy, the study offers a data-driven foundation for evaluating religious education practices and strengthening policies that support religious moderation.

Methods

This study employed a survey-quantitative research method to address the research questions related to the religious literacy of high school students in Kediri City. The quantitative approach was chosen because the focus of this research is to measure and analyze the level of religious literacy among students in two schools representing faith-based and general public schools in Kediri. The research was conducted in two schools in Kediri City: SMAN 4 Kota Kediri, a general public school under the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia, and MAN 1 Kota Kediri, a faith-based school under the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia. These schools were selected as representative institutions in Kediri, possessing comparable educational quality and representing two types of schools with distinct characteristics.

The population of this study consisted of all students enrolled in the two schools. The total population at SMAN 4 Kota Kediri was 1336 students, while MAN 1 Kota Kediri had a total population of 1281 students. The study employed a sampling method. The sampling technique used was random sampling, ensuring that every individual in the population had an equal chance of being selected as a sample. The sample size was determined using Slovin's formula.

Slovin's formula is :
$$n = \frac{N}{1+N.e^2}$$

Where:

n: Sample size

N: Population

e: Desired margin of error for the sample

Using Slovin's formula above, the sample size for each school is calculated as follows:

Table 1. Population and Sample of the Study

The Name of School	Population	The number of samples
MAN 1	1281	305
SMAN 4	1336	308

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to measure students' religious literacy across nine dimensions: understanding of religious scriptures; religious values and teachings; appreciation of religious pluralism; religious practices; interfaith dialogue skills; social and humanitarian interaction; critical evaluation of religious misuse (e.g., extremism and radicalism); understanding of religious freedom; and religious ethics and morality. These dimensions were operationalized into indicators and measured using 34 items.

The religious literacy questionnaire comprised favorable and unfavorable items rated on a 4-point Likert scale. The instrument demonstrated strong psychometric properties, with content validity confirmed by four experts (CVI = 0.98) and high internal consistency as indicated by a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.891. Data collection was carried out through Google Forms to facilitate the process of data gathering and organization. The collected data were then analyzed using Excel and SPSS software to obtain more accurate and structured results.

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques to provide an empirical profile of students' religious literacy levels. Descriptive analysis was considered adequate given the study's objective to map literacy levels rather than test causal relationships; nevertheless, this approach limits inferential generalization beyond the studied sample. The level of religious literacy is referred to as the religious literacy index, which is calculated using the following formula:

$$\text{Religious Literacy Index} = \frac{\text{Total Real Score}}{\text{Number of Data}}$$

Data analysis was conducted by categorizing students' religious literacy into five categories, with the following criteria:

Table 2. Categories and Criteria for Religious Literacy

Religious Category	Literacy	Interval Criteria
1.00 - 1.6		Very Low
1.61 - 2.2		Low
2.21 - 2.8		Medium
2.81 - 3.4		High
3.41 - 4		Very High

Results and Discussion

Following data collection, the dataset was processed to produce a detailed empirical profile of students' religious literacy across the two participating schools. As shown in Table 4, the distribution of religious literacy levels reveals a strong overall pattern: the majority of students at MAN 1 and SMAN 4 Kediri City fall within the high (69.23 percent) and very high (19.55 percent) categories. Only 11.22 percent of students are categorized as having medium literacy, and none are classified as low or very low. This distribution indicates that the student population generally demonstrates a solid grasp of religious concepts, values, and practices. The absence of students in the lower categories suggests that both schools have successfully cultivated foundational religious understanding through their curricular and extracurricular activities.

Table 3. Profile Of Students' Religious Literacy

Religious Literacy Category	Percentage
Very High	19.55%
High	69.23%
Medium	11.22%
Low	0%
Very Low	0%
Total	100.0%

These findings indicate that students generally possess a sound understanding of religious values and are able to apply them appropriately in daily life, including refraining from using religious teachings to justify negative attitudes or hostility toward followers of other religions. These results also imply that students are not only familiar with religious teachings but are able to apply them in ways that support positive social behavior. For example, students show the ability to refrain from using religious teachings to justify negative attitudes or hostility toward followers of other religions. This pattern reflects a broader tendency toward ethical and inclusive interpretations of religion, which is essential for fostering harmonious interfaith relations. The high proportion of students in the upper categories further suggests that religious education in these schools has effectively emphasized values such as respect, empathy, and social responsibility.

To provide a more nuanced understanding of students' competencies, religious literacy indices were calculated for each of the 34 measured aspects. These indices, presented in Table 5, offer a more granular view of students' strengths and areas requiring further development. Higher index values indicate stronger comprehension and internalization of the assessed aspect, while lower values point to areas where additional educational reinforcement may be needed.

Table 4. Descriptive Analysis of Each Aspect of Religious Literacy

No	Measured Aspect	Index	Category
1	Students can identify actions that use religion as a justification for violence or intolerance.	2.65	Moderate
2	Students possess understanding/knowledge of social and political events during the time of scripture revelation or writing.	2.80	High
3	Students can discuss religious topics with adherents of other religions without feeling the need to judge or debate.	2.83	High
4	Students can evaluate whether a religious movement is being used for purposes contrary to moral and humanitarian values.	2.87	High
5	Students have an understanding of the moral messages or core teachings of the scripture passages they read.	2.87	High
6	Students possess an understanding/knowledge of the influence of social norms during the revelation of the Quran on certain teachings in scripture.	2.92	High
7	Students strive to understand the perspectives of adherents of other religions when discussing religious issues.	2.94	High
8	Students participate in charitable and social activities aligned with religious teachings.	2.96	High
9	Students have an understanding of the stories or historical context surrounding the revelation or writing of scriptures.	2.98	High
10	Students respect the principle that religious freedom includes the right to worship or not worship according to individual choices.	3.00	High
11	Students believe that religious extremism is a misuse of true religious teachings.	3.03	High
12	Students can discern accurate information based on religious teachings in the news or on social media.	3.03	High
13	Students feel comfortable interacting with people of different religions without prejudice.	3.07	High
14	Students can understand the cultural and social contexts of events involving religion before drawing conclusions.	3.09	High
15	Students use religious teachings to make important life decisions.	3.16	High
16	Students possess understanding/knowledge of religious teachings about moral ethics in human interactions.	3.17	High
17	Students possess understanding/knowledge of the concepts of compassion and care for others as taught by religion.	3.19	High

18	Students understand that the principle of religious freedom prohibits discrimination against individuals based on their religious beliefs.	3.20	High
19	Students strive to understand context before judging news or information related to religion.	3.21	High
20	Students strive to understand other religious perspectives without being judgmental.	3.22	High
21	Students believe that interfaith dialogue can enhance mutual understanding among adherents of different religions.	3.23	High
22	Students view social responsibility as part of practicing religious teachings.	3.25	High
23	Students feel that interfaith dialogue is an effective way to build harmony among religious communities.	3.26	High
24	Students understand how religious values shape their behavior and moral decision-making.	3.28	High
25	Students support interfaith dialogue to foster mutual understanding and strengthen tolerance.	3.32	High
26	Students apply religious values in their daily behavior.	3.33	High
27	Students understand the meaning behind the worship they perform.	3.33	High
28	Students understand that the freedom to worship is a fundamental human right that must be protected for everyone.	3.38	High
29	Students understand that religious diversity is an essential part of social life.	3.38	High
30	Students understand that every individual has the right to choose and hold different religious beliefs.	3.38	High
31	Students believe that mutual respect in communication with adherents of other religions is key to maintaining harmony.	3.41	Very High
32	Students uphold the principle of religious freedom in maintaining interfaith harmony.	3.43	Very High
33	Students can identify ethical values taught by religion.	3.46	Very High
34	Students can distinguish between actions that align with religious ethical teachings and those that do not.	3.49	Very High

The results show considerable variation across the different dimensions of religious literacy. The lowest index value, 2.65, corresponds to students' ability to identify actions that use religion as a justification for violence or intolerance. Although this score still falls within the moderate category, it highlights a relative weakness compared to other aspects. Students also scored lower on understanding the social and political contexts surrounding scripture revelation (index 2.80) and on engaging in non-judgmental interfaith discussions (index 2.83). These findings suggest that while students possess strong normative and ethical understanding, their critical-interpretive skills are less developed.

In contrast, the highest index values reflect areas where students demonstrate strong and consistent competencies. The top five aspects include the ability to distinguish between actions that align with religious ethical teachings (index 3.49), identify ethical

values taught by religion (index 3.46), uphold the principle of religious freedom (index 3.43), and maintain mutual respect in interfaith communication (index 3.41). These very high scores indicate that students have internalized key ethical principles and are able to apply them in interpersonal and social contexts. Such competencies are essential for promoting tolerance and maintaining harmony in a diverse society.

The overall pattern of results reveals a clear distinction between students' strengths and areas requiring improvement. On the positive side, students show a strong understanding of individual rights, mutual respect, religious freedom, ethical values, and the ability to differentiate between ethical and unethical actions. These competencies form the core of religious moderation and demonstrate that students are well-equipped to engage respectfully with religious diversity.

However, the lower-scoring aspects highlight important gaps that need to be addressed. Students require further development in identifying violence and intolerance in the name of religion, understanding socio-political contexts of scripture, engaging in interfaith discussions without judgment, evaluating religious movements from a humanitarian perspective, and interpreting moral messages in sacred texts. These areas are crucial for enabling students to navigate complex religious issues and respond critically to contemporary challenges.

Overall, the results indicate that while students possess strong foundational religious literacy, targeted efforts are needed to strengthen higher-order competencies. These findings provide a valuable basis for designing educational interventions that reinforce existing strengths while addressing identified weaknesses, thereby supporting the broader goal of cultivating religious moderation among Indonesian youth.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal a consistently high level of religious literacy among students, particularly in the domains of ethical values, religious freedom, and interfaith respect. These strengths indicate that students have internalized core principles that support harmonious coexistence in a religiously diverse society. The ability to identify ethical values, uphold religious freedom, and maintain mutual respect in interfaith communication reflects a mature understanding of religion as a moral and social force. This pattern is consistent with the view that religious literacy encompasses not only cognitive knowledge but also affective and ethical dimensions that shape interpersonal behavior (Marcus & Ralph, 2021; Moore, 2014). The strong performance in these areas suggests that religious education in the participating schools has successfully emphasized values that encourage tolerance, empathy, and peaceful interaction across religious boundaries. Such competencies align with the broader expectation that religious education contributes to social harmony when it foregrounds ethical and inclusive values, as highlighted in prior scholarship on religious literacy and moderation (Hannam et al., 2020; Walker et al., 2021). These results, therefore, affirm that the normative and ethical components of religious literacy are being effectively cultivated within the school environment.

Despite these strengths, the data also highlight notable weaknesses that require careful attention. Students scored lower on identifying religion-based violence, understanding the socio-political context of sacred texts, and engaging in interfaith discussions without judgment. These findings suggest that while students are proficient in normative and ethical aspects of religious literacy, they struggle with critical-interpretive competencies. This gap reflects concerns raised in the literature that religious illiteracy often emerges when religious teachings are detached from their historical and social contexts (Prothero, 2008). Limited understanding of the socio-political background of scripture indicates that students may be learning religious

teachings in isolation from the contexts in which they emerged, which aligns with Moore's (2014) argument that religious literacy must include the ability to critically evaluate how religion is used in public and political discourse. The difficulty in recognizing the misuse of religion for violent or intolerant purposes further suggests that students may not yet possess the analytical tools needed to interrogate contemporary religious claims. This pattern implies that religious education in secondary schools may still prioritize doctrinal transmission over contextual and analytical engagement, limiting students' ability to respond to complex religious issues in modern society.

The persistence of these weaknesses has important implications. Without the ability to critically interpret religious teachings or evaluate how religion is used in public discourse, students may be more vulnerable to misinformation, simplistic interpretations, or manipulative narratives that exploit religious sentiment. This concern is particularly relevant in plural societies where religious issues frequently intersect with social and political tensions. The findings, therefore, underscore the need for religious education to balance normative instruction with critical inquiry, a balance emphasized in conceptual discussions of religious literacy that highlight the importance of both cognitive and interpretive competencies (Marcus & Ralph, 2021; Moore, 2014). Strengthening students' capacity to analyze religious issues within broader social, cultural, and political frameworks is essential for preparing them to navigate contemporary challenges such as extremism, intolerance, and digital misinformation. This need is further reinforced by studies showing that religious literacy contributes to tolerance and social harmony when it is contextualized and critically engaged (Hanafi et al., 2022; Sawan & Payong, 2023).

The results also reaffirm the conceptual understanding of religious literacy as a multidimensional construct that encompasses cognitive, ethical, and social competencies. Students' strong performance in ethical and social dimensions demonstrates that they are capable of applying religious values in daily life, engaging respectfully with others, and recognizing the importance of religious freedom. These competencies form the foundation of religious moderation and contribute to the cultivation of social cohesion, echoing the theoretical frameworks that position religious literacy as a key component of moderation (Altunkaynak, 2022; Wolfart, 2022). However, the weaker performance in critical-interpretive dimensions indicates that the cognitive component of religious literacy requires further development. This imbalance highlights the need for a more holistic approach to religious literacy that integrates ethical understanding with contextual interpretation and critical reasoning, as emphasized by scholars who argue that religious literacy must extend beyond ritual knowledge toward fostering tolerance, moderation, and ethical engagement in public life (Prothero, 2008; K. Soules, 2023).

The study's findings also resonate with the broader educational context in Indonesia, where national policies emphasize the importance of religious moderation, diversity, and social harmony. The alignment between students' strengths and policy objectives suggests that current curricular frameworks, such as the Merdeka Curriculum and the Pancasila Student Profile, are beginning to influence classroom practices in meaningful ways. These policies provide a strong foundation for embedding religious literacy within the broader goals of character education and civic development. However, the identified weaknesses indicate that policy implementation must be accompanied by pedagogical strategies that foster deeper analytical engagement with religious content. This need is consistent with the argument that teachers play a pivotal role in creating inclusive, reflective, and dialogical learning environments that support the development of both normative and critical dimensions of religious literacy (Soules & Jafralie, 2021; Ubani, 2025).

At the pedagogical level, the findings point to the need for instructional approaches that encourage students to critically analyze real-world issues related to religion.

Approaches such as Problem-Based Learning and Project-Based Learning offer opportunities for students to engage with complex religious and social issues through inquiry, collaboration, and reflection, as demonstrated in studies showing their effectiveness in enhancing critical thinking in religious education (Karim, 2023). Complementary strategies, such as the use of educational media and guided engagement with social media, can further support the development of critical religious literacy, particularly in an era where digital information plays a central role in shaping religious understanding. These strategies align with research showing that educational media can foster contextual interpretation and tolerance when used appropriately (Brooks et al., 2020; Usman et al., 2023).

Experiential learning initiatives also hold significant potential for strengthening students' religious literacy. Activities such as interfaith dialogue, interreligious discussions, and collaborative projects provide students with direct exposure to religious diversity and create opportunities for them to practice empathy, communication, and mutual respect. These approaches reflect the argument that religious literacy is not limited to formal instruction but is also shaped by school culture, teacher behavior, and daily interactions, as emphasized in studies on the hidden curriculum (Salim et al., 2024). Insights from the Focus Group Discussion highlight the importance of developmental considerations, suggesting that while elementary students require cautious and age-appropriate approaches, secondary students are ready for more explicit and critical engagement with interfaith issues. This observation aligns with the broader literature emphasizing the need for age-appropriate pedagogical strategies in religious education (Zuhdi & Sarwenda, 2020; Imamah & Lee, 2024). Teachers play a central role in facilitating these experiences, and the findings underscore the need for ongoing professional development to enhance teachers' competence and confidence in addressing interfaith topics.

Taken together, the findings of this study indicate that strengthening religious literacy requires an integrated and multi-layered approach. Curriculum design must incorporate both normative and critical dimensions of religious literacy, reflecting the conceptual frameworks that define religious literacy as a combination of cognitive, ethical, and interpretive competencies (Marcus & Ralph, 2021; Moore, 2014). Pedagogical innovation is needed to create learning environments that encourage inquiry, dialogue, and contextual interpretation. Teacher capacity building is essential for ensuring that educators are equipped to guide students through complex religious issues. Supportive policy frameworks must continue to reinforce the importance of religious literacy as a foundation for religious moderation and social cohesion, consistent with national priorities outlined in Indonesia's educational and religious policy documents.

Overall, the study demonstrates that religious literacy should be understood not merely as an educational outcome but as a strategic and multidimensional foundation for cultivating religious moderation within Indonesia's multicultural society. By identifying both strengths and weaknesses in students' religious literacy, this study provides a basis for enhancing religious education practices and for informing policies aimed at strengthening social harmony in a diverse nation. The findings reinforce the argument that religious literacy, when developed holistically, can serve as a measurable and impactful foundation for promoting moderation, tolerance, and ethical engagement in pluralistic contexts (Hanafi et al., 2022; Altunkaynak, 2022).

Conclusion

The study demonstrates that senior high school students in Kediri City possess predominantly high to very high levels of religious literacy, particularly in ethical understanding, respect for religious freedom, and interfaith communication. These findings directly answer the research question by showing that students have developed strong normative and ethical competencies that support religious moderation. At the same time, the results reveal weaker critical-interpretive skills, especially in identifying religion-based violence, understanding socio-political contexts of scripture, and engaging in non-judgmental interfaith dialogue.

This research is limited by its cross-sectional survey design, reliance on self-reported data, and focus on only two schools, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. Future studies should expand the sample to include more diverse educational settings, employ mixed-methods or longitudinal approaches, and incorporate qualitative data to capture how students internalize and practice religious literacy in everyday contexts.

Building on these findings, future research can explore targeted interventions that strengthen critical-interpretive competencies, examine the role of teachers and school culture in shaping religious literacy, and assess how curricular reforms influence students' attitudes toward moderation. Practically, the results support the integration of contextual text interpretation, interfaith dialogue activities, and reflective learning into religious education. Theoretically, this study reinforces the understanding of religious literacy as a multidimensional construct and highlights its strategic importance for promoting religious moderation and social cohesion in Indonesia's pluralistic society.

References

- Altunkaynak, M. (2022). Evaluation of religious literacy skill levels in terms of various variables in religious education. *International Journal of Educational Spectrum*, 4(Special Issue), 131–146. <https://doi.org/10.47806/ijesacademic.1202458>
- Brooks, M. C., Cutler, K. D., Sanjakdar, F., & Liou, D. D. (2020). Teaching jihad: Developing religious literacy through graphic novels. *Religions*, 11(11), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11110622>
- Enstedt, D. (2022). A response to Wolfart's "religious literacy": Some considerations and reservations. *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, 70(1), 453–464. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700682-bja10079>
- Hanafi, Y., Saefi, M., Diyana, T. N., Ikhsan, M. A., Faizin, N., Thoriquttyas, T., & Murtadho, N. (2022). Students' perspectives on religious moderation: A qualitative study into religious literacy processes. *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies*, 78(1), 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v78i1.7638>
- Hannam, P., Biesta, G., Whittle, S., & Aldridge, D. (2020). Religious literacy: A way forward for religious education? *Journal of Beliefs and Values*, 41(2), 214–226. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13617672.2020.1736969>
- Karim, M. (2023). Efektivitas model problem based learning dalam meningkatkan ketrampilan berpikir kritis siswa dalam pembelajaran PAI di Indonesia: Sistematisa literatur review dan meta-analisis 1M. *Tadarus: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 11(2), 11–22.
- Marcus, B. P., & Ralph, A. K. (2021). Origins and developments of religious literacy education. *Religion and Education*, 48(1), 17–36. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15507394.2021.1876498>

- Moore, D. L. (2014). Overcoming religious illiteracy: Expanding the boundaries of religious education. *Religious Education*, 109(4), 379–389. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00344087.2014.924765>
- Parker, S. (2020). Religious literacy: Spaces of teaching and learning about religion and belief. *Journal of Beliefs and Values*, 41(2), 129–131. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13617672.2020.1750243>
- Prothero, S. (2008). *Religious literacy: What every American needs to know—and doesn't*. HarperOne.
- Salim, N. A., Zaini, M., Wahib, A., Fauzi, I., & Asnawan. (2024). Fostering the moderate character of santri: An Effective hidden curriculum strategy in Islamic boarding schools. *Nazhruna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 7(2), 357–372. <https://doi.org/10.31538/nzh.v7i2.4676>
- Shaw, M. (2020). Towards a religiously literate curriculum: Religion and worldview literacy as an educational model. *Journal of Beliefs and Values*, 41(2), 150–161. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13617672.2019.1664876>
- Soules, K. (2023). *The imperative for religious literacy evaluation: Context, key insights, and recommendations*. The Aspen Institute.
- Soules, K. E., & Jafralie, S. (2021). Religious literacy in teacher education. *Religion and Education*, 48(1), 37–56. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15507394.2021.1876497>
- Ubani, M. (2025). Religious literacy as a literacy? Conceptual elaboration in a 21st century learning framework. *Religious Education*, 120(4), 386–402. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00344087.2025.2510741>
- Usman, U., Halifah, S., Abbas, A., & Syamsidar, S. (2023). Religious digital literacy in Islamic higher education: Student-perceived benefit. *Sosiohumaniora*, 25(1), 98–108. <https://doi.org/10.24198/sosiohumaniora.v25i1.41113>
- Walker, N. C., Chan, W. Y. A., & McEver, H. B. (2021). Religious literacy: Civic education for a common good. *Religion and Education*, 48(1), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15507394.2021.1876508>
- Wolfart, J. C. (2022). 'Religious literacy': Some considerations and reservations. *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, 34(5), 407–434. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700682-bja10074>
- Yasmin, F., & Nursobah, A. (2024). Development of Islamic religious education curriculum to prepare religious attitudes, moderate, inclusive, and cultured attitudes. *Jurnal Inovasi Pendidikan Agama Islam (JIPAI)*, 3(1), 66–78. <https://doi.org/10.15575/jipai.v3i1.30883>
- Zuhdi, M., & Sarwenda, S. (2020). Recurring issues in Indonesia's Islamic education: The needs for religious literacy. *Analisa: Journal of Social Science and Religion*, 5(1), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.18784/analisa.v5i1.1038>