

## RELIGIOUS MODERATION STRATEGY IN THE VIRTUAL ERA AND ITS IMPLICATION TO IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

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### ABSTRACT

Technology use in education is important to transfer knowledge and solve problems especially during the pandemic situation. Unfortunately, the development of technology has not brought the positive assurance for religious moderation discourse amongst Muslims in Indonesia. One of the risks facing students during independent online learning is that they are exposed to vulnerable and extreme radical teachings. The present study investigated the school's strategies to safeguard religious moderation policy during online learning. It applied qualitative method using case study. The findings show the application of religious moderation strategies have brought positive impact on educational quality. The strategies required cooperation among several parties including teachers, students, and parents. Their strategic partnership is pivotal element to increase educational quality.

Keywords: Quality of Education, Religious Moderation, Tolerance

### ABSTRAK

*Pemanfaatan teknologi sangat penting dalam mentransformasikan pengetahuan dan memecahkan masalah, terutama di masa pandemi Covid-19. Namun, perkembangan teknologi belum dapat memberikan jaminan positif bagi keberhasilan pembelajaran, terutama wacana moderasi beragama di kalangan umat Islam Indonesia. Hal ini disebabkan metode pembelajaran mandiri online menjadikan peserta didik rentan terekspos dengan materi ajar yang ekstrim dan radikal. Penelitian ini menganalisis strategi pihak sekolah untuk mengawal kebijakan moderasi beragama dalam kegiatan pembelajaran online. Penelitian ini berlokasi di Yayasan Pesantren Islam Al-Azhar (YPIA) dengan pendekatan kualitatif dan studi kasus. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan penerapan strategi moderasi beragama berimplikasi positif terhadap kualitas pendidikan. Strategi moderasi beragama membutuhkan kerjasama antara guru, peserta didik dan orang tua, dan kerjasama ini juga merupakan elemen yang sangat penting dalam peningkatan kualitas pendidikan, karena kualitas hanya akan tercapai jika tidak ada koneksi dan kerjasama yang kuat antara guru, peserta didik, dan orang tua.*

*Kata Kunci: Kualitas Pendidikan, Moderasi Beragama, Toleransi*

## INTRODUCTION

One of the functions of education is to adequately prepare learners for life in the future society, and enable them to respond to challenges that they will face (Lubis, 2008). While preparing the future, today, massive development in the communication technology is giving parents and educators uneasy challenge as internet connection becomes faster, cheaper and more accessible for everyone regardless age restriction. In addition, to facilitate the need of industrial revolution 4.0, artificial intelligence (AI) has been commonly utilized in all aspects of life including teaching and learning. With regard to education and AI, Tau et al. (2019) noted that those challenges must be taken to consideration. Starting from the premise that nothing can replace a teacher, the use of robots and other artificial intelligence instruments in the classroom or instead of the classroom, does not cease to have dangers that must be considered in depth.

As consequence of the advent of information technology, children are exposed with digital tools in their early age, hooked on being online. At the end, new generation was produced, a generation that seems increasingly connected to their networks and technological instruments, but increasingly disconnected from their neighbors, their families and even themselves (Tao et al., 2019). On the other hand, the access to knowledge and information becomes unlimited, as online search engines provide everything they need. Consequently, transferring knowledge becomes less priority in 21st century education, as new century demanded new road map of education which focused on developing soft skills.

The Covid-19 pandemic has been a serious crisis, as almost no accurate prediction of the end of it. In short, the pandemic entails essential changes in all aspects of humans' life, and one of those aspects that faced drastic change, without adequate preparation for it, is that education. Teachers, students, parents, schools, communities and policy makers were suddenly put in inconvenient positions, as standard operation procedures of teaching and learning process were forced to change overnight. While, on the other hand, the positive side of education in the era of pandemic is the fact that it provides the more efficient teaching and learning activities, and indirectly drills teachers to get used to their role as facilitators, as independent learning took place which enables students to access variety of learning resources through the use of search engines. Nevertheless, many education experts are worried that the use of information and communication technology in education could lead to the process of dehumanization, alienation and de-spiritualization (Rusli, 2014). The process of sending those threats could happen faster if the use of technology in education neglects religious and moral values as well as teachers' supervision.

Given the fact about the trend of information and communication technology above, it comes to our attention that the easy access to technology today has facilitated the needs of students to variety of resources and learning materials, including Islamic Studies. On the other hands, these resources that are accessed could tarnish the way students understand their religion. It could give serious threat to students' religious moderation, as they are exposed to radicalism and intolerance. This trend needs rapid intervention from teachers, experts and policy makers in Islamic education institutions. A survey by *Pusat Pengkajian Islam dan Masyarakat* (PPIM) UIN (*Universitas Islam Negeri/State Islamic University*) Jakarta (2017) indicated the big influence of internet in seeding intolerance amongst Z generation, as the study found that students without internet access have relatively shown more tolerant and moderate attitudes compared to those who are with internet access, while majority of Indonesian students have access to the internet.

The advent of Social Network Sites (SNSs) which are commonly known as social media has made the challenge more difficult, as SNSs have enabled students to views and traverse their list of connections made by others within the system (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

Consequently, the use of social media in the study about religious teachings could be uncontrollable, due to the possibility of exchanging ideas, opinions and understandings among the users. Hence, social medias, do not only provide learning ground where students can learn everything including religion, moreover, they also help dissemination of thoughts and ideologies.

According to Islam & Khatun (2015) there are two different ways of defining moderation; Western perspective and Islamic scholar perspectives. In the western perspective, 'moderation' is not a category, but a process. A process, like democracy, by which radical groups are given a chance to function in a democratic domain. As a result, they leave their revolutionary motto and their radical programs. They often move from anti-western to pro-western. The characteristic of the western enterprise of moderation merely a political one. For them, it has nothing to do with belief system or legal system. However, Islamic definition of moderation is not limited in a political arena. It is not just a position between militancy and decay but a temperate intellectual, legal, moral and behavioral approach includes all aspects of life.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs of Indonesia clarifies that religious moderation is not only a trait that is taught by Islam, but it is also taught by other religions. The ministry emphasizes that religious moderation should focus on three main characters namely; wisdom, purity, and courage. In the other words, religious moderation will always choose a middle way. Religious moderation can be easily implemented when individuals have adequate religious knowledge that enabled them to always be wise, resistant from disruptions and provocations and tolerant other people views. In addition, the ministry of religious affairs of Indonesia developed four indicators of religious moderation namely; national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence, and accommodative towards local cultures.

Indonesian Ulema Council notified two extreme groups known as right extreme (*tataruf yamini*) which is characterized with exclusivism, intolerance, rigid and tend to create hostilities. On the other hand, left extreme (*tataruf yasari*) is known as too permissive and liberal (Tambunan et al., 2019). The two groups above, are considered as not ideal and incompatible with the majority of Muslims in Indonesia, as well as the world. The Board of Ulema of Indonesia in its 9<sup>th</sup> National Congress therefore formalized 10 indicators of moderation, these indicators are: *Tawassut* (moderate choice), *tawâzun* (well balanced), *I'tidal* (straight), *tasâmuḥ* (tolerance), *musâwah* (egalitarian), *syurâ* (counsel), *iṣlah* (reform), *aulawiyah* (priority), *tatammur wa ibtikâr* (dynamic and innovative), and *tabaddhur* (being civilized).

To make the program of eradication of extremism and radicalism in this era more effective, Islamic education institutions need to develop religious moderation strategy that is applicable to be implemented through virtual teaching and learning activities. This strategy should focus on four traits that proposed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs; i.e., national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence and accommodative towards local cultures. In addition, ten indicators of moderation as advocated by the Indonesian Ulema Council should be internalized within all curricular and extra-curricular activities.

Understanding what quality means may vary between cultures and countries. UNESCO however, has put a guideline of quality of education which has to circulate around three principles: the need for relevance, equity of access and outcome, and proper observance of individual rights (UNESCO, 2004). Furthermore, UNESCO established a framework on variables of education quality that has five dimensions namely: (1) Learner Characteristic, (2) Context, (3) Enabling input, (4) Teaching and learning, and (5) Outcomes (UNESCO, 2004).

Lubis (2008) in his study investigated top leading secondary schools in Indonesia. It involved seven schools across provinces in Indonesia and found that all these leading schools have their own strategy to strengthen their position and quality as top leading schools. He,

therefore, summarized that in order to succeed and maintain the quality of education, an education institution needs to develop its own strategy.

In Indonesia, campaign on religious moderation has been massively done since last decade. Religious moderation in Indonesia has its own historical root. A study by Erwi Mahrus et al., (2020) concluded that those Islamic manuscripts of Sambas in West Kalimantan, including the manuscript by Maharaja Imam Sambas are filled with the messages of religious moderation education. The manuscript featured the principle of flexibility and renewal (*tajdid*), the principle of ease (*taysir*), and the principle of tolerance (*tasamuh*). The study also found that the madrasa founded by Maharaja Imam Sambas is the oldest Islamic education institution that promotes religious moderation in West Kalimantan.

Siswanto (2019) studied the values of Islamic moderation in the curriculum of Education in Indonesia through the textbooks of Islamic religious and Character education which is taught at the Senior High School level (SMA). The study showed that the concept of Islamic moderation was not explicitly mentioned, but reflected in a material whose substance contained the values of Islamic moderation. The values include tolerance, democracy, simplicity, justice, and harmony.

Husna & Thohir (2020) conducted a study in Public High School in Krembung, East Java. The results showed that the use of three main principles of moderation, such as *tawassuth* (middle); *ta'adul* (fair); and *tawâzun* (balanced) enables school to create a fair and peaceful environment, and to prepare future generation to develop their moderate views.

A study on dissemination of moderation in Islamic religious education through contextual learning by Winata et al., (2020) summarized 1) the implementation of Islamic religious education learning by using contextual learning models can improve students' cognitive aspects of Islamic moderation values. 2) the implementation of Islamic religious education learning by using a contextual learning model can improve students' affective aspects of Islamic moderation values. 3) implementation of Islamic religious education learning by using a contextual learning model can internalize Islamic moderation values to students.

*Yayasan Pesantren Islam* (YPI) Al-Azhar Jakarta is an Islamic Education institution established in 1952. Since its establishment, YPI Al-Azhar has been the hope of many Muslims in Indonesia to safeguard their *aqidah* and provide quality education. To date, YPI Al-Azhar is running 176 schools ranging from Pre-school to university level that is spread in 23 provinces across Indonesia. The number of schools under the auspices of YPI keep growing. This indicates that YPI Al-Azhar is accepted by Indonesians to meet their educational needs. Being strongly associated to the famous Buya Hamka, YPI Al-Azhar strives to integrate sciences and faith in its academic system as well as promotes Islamic life style. Since its establishment, YPI Al-Azhar has been committed to advocate religious moderation.

Research on religious moderation strategy in schools during virtual era and its implication to the quality of education is still scanty. There is a need to conduct a study concerning possible exposure of anti-moderation teachings through independent online learning activities. This present study seeks to investigate YPI Al-Azhar managements and parents' perception on quality of education and religious moderation. It tries to identify the strategy used by YPI Al-Azhar in advocating religious moderation in the virtual era, and to explore the implications of religious moderation strategy in improving the quality of education. This research aimed to investigate the management of YPI Al-Azhar and parents' perception on quality of education and religious moderation, the strategy used by the YPI Al-Azhar managements in advocating religious moderation in the virtual era, the implications of religious moderation strategy in improving the quality of education in YPI Al-Azhar.

## METHOD

This study is qualitative and applied case study approach. Case study was used due to the nature of this research and the need to acquire holistic interpretation on event, and situation under investigation. Dooley (2002) described case study as: “one method that excels at bringing us to an understanding of a complex issue and can add strength to what is already known through previous research”. Furthermore, Yin (1994) added that case study can be used to test and establish theory which enabled researcher to produce theory. In this study, the researchers attempt to explore the perceptions of YPI Al-Azhar management and parents’ perception on quality of education and religious moderation, to identify the strategy used by YPI Al-Azhar in advocating religious moderation in the virtual era. Semi-structured and open-ended interviews were applied to gain perceptions of individuals involved in this research.

Patton (2002) argues that the validity, meaningfulness, and insight of qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information richness of the study. For this study, open ended interviews with three individuals linked were conducted. The participants included personnel from YPI Al-Azhar management, and parent who is also an alumna of Al Azhar. In interviews, researchers strive to attain what Patton (1987) called as framework within, whereby respondents can express their understandings. The data collected were transcribed and analysed to generate the themes.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Perceptions on Quality of Education

Since its establishment in 1952, YPI Al-Azhar aimed at providing quality education that at least equal to that secular or non-Muslim schools. A senior figure in YPI Al-Azhar and he had very close relation with Buya Hamka who is the founding father of Al Azhar, stated that that the concern of YPI Al-Azhar is to provide quality education. At the time in the early 1950, educational institutions were dominated by Dutch institutions that do not give chance to Muslim children to gain education. He added: “Then some public figures like Syafruddin Prawiranegara dan Buya Hamka, gathered in South Jakarta, they agreed to respond the need of Muslim ummah to have institution that provides quality education, with ambition, that Islamic school has to have equal quality with Dutch or secular education institutions.” (Murni Djamal, Personal Communication, May,18 2021).

Hence, the impetus of establishment of YPI Al-Azhar was providing quality education for Muslim children. This aim was seen very important, especially, in the early post-independence period whereby many Muslims were still situated in the first and second types of Muslim education as indicated by Shah et al., (2015), which were focusing on either only religious education without general knowledge or strong religious education with minimum general education. The dream of Hamka at least, that YPI Al-Azhar could provide basic religious education with quality general education, if it was not what described by Shah et al., (2015) as combination of quality general education with a strong emphasis of Islam. The emphasis on quality education, therefore, cannot be sidelined in every policy issued by the management including, virtual learning and religious moderation policy.

As the concept of quality can be interpreted as a subjective concept based on values, or as an objective concept that is value and context – neutral (Malović & Malović, 2017), as a result, authors such as (Sheridan, 2007) advocate for quality access from an interactive perspective, attempting to overcome disagreements between understandings of quality as a subjective or objective concept by focusing on the connection between them and their interaction with one another. Hence, not 12 withstanding dissenting views on definitions of quality education between the management and parents, there always some points about

quality education that all agreed, one of them was the need of process in achieving quality education.

Quality education should be process oriented, which means, excellence should not be only the focus of outcome, but it has to be attributed to the process of education itself. One of the informants, who happens to be a parent and alumnus, defined quality education as a process of change that involved all aspects of development. She emphasized:

“About the quality of education, I believe that it has to be a process of change that is experienced by students, and it is called ‘quality’ in my opinion, referring to the change that is holistically visible in affective, psychomotoric and cognitive” (Nila, Personal Communication, May 17, 2021).

As the emphasis on quality in organization is important, many researchers in quality organization viewed the importance of management initiative in improving the quality (Schroeder et al. 2011). Therefore, the Chairman of YPI Al-Azhar Sobirin HS initiated the deliverance of quality education in his institution. He has his own definition of quality education as students’ empowerment in three aspects i.e. (1) economy (2) knowledge (3) faith (iman and Islam). The chairman then justified:

“This is inline with the command of Allah in QS Annisa: 9, we as management always strive to empower our students with these three aspects” (Sobirin, Personal Communication, May 17, 2021).

Many studies treat empowerment as both a process (Zimmerman, 1995; Rappaport, 1987; Hur, 2006) and an outcome (Maton, 2008). Hence, as process, YPI Al-Azhar strives to nurture the empowerment of economical aspect of students with all tools that students may need in their future, so when they graduate, they will be ready to contribute to community. In addition, empowerment of students’ intellectual and religious aspects is also considered as very important feature of YPI Al-Azhar. While as outcome, the success of empowerment can be seen in the success of the alumni, who many of them successfully reached the stage of what indicated by Prilleltensky et al. (2001) as “satisfy their needs”. This fact is agreed upon by all informants as Al-Azhar has successfully produced many alumni who positively contributed to society, as many of them become ministers, governors, and public figures.

When asked about the strategy in ensuring quality education, the Chairman responded with 3 important steps, firstly: organizational order, secondly: knowledge upgrading, and thirdly: maintaining facilities. The management is adamant that YPI Al-Azhar has been successfully able to maintain the quality of its product. The management stated that the indicator of quality education can be seen in the continuous enrolment of important people’s children. YPI Al-Azhar has the reputation as the choice of many important figures in the country, such as, the former president Soeharto, sent his grandchild to Al-Azhar.

### **Indicators of Moderation**

YPI Al-Azhar is one of the pioneers of moderation, as being influenced by the thought of Buya Hamka on Islam that was attributed with moderation. Drs. Murni Djamal noted:

“...encourage people to participate in promoting moderate Islam. It has been always reminded in his preaching and writings. The Islamic preaching and education that were promoted by Buya Hamka are filled with the message of moderation, so the outcome of Islamic education (that he promoted) is producing moderate Muslims, who are not too fanatic, but in the same time, ready to defend the honor of Islam... (Murni, Personal Communication, May 17, 2021).

Buya Hamka defined moderate Islam as being in the middle, between worldly life and hereafter, as moderate Muslim should not only focus on doing worship by neglecting his worldly needs. Moderation means balance between life and hereafter, a good moderate Muslim will not only be busy serving the rights of Allah, but also striving to be beneficial

human, who contributes to society (Ulinnuha et al. 2020). This view on moderation is also reflected in the vision of YPI Al-Azhar as shown in its official website, of being a leading modern Islamic *dakwah* and education institution that enlightens the life of society to be faithful, knowledgeable, charitable and pious and moving towards the dignity of Islam and Muslims. This vision indicated that YPI Al-Azhar strives to propagate balance as modern and moderate institution.

The view of moderation that underlined the establishment of YPI Al-Azhar fits the socio-political fact that Indonesia is a country with various Islamic streams and organizations. Notwithstanding all the differences, Al-Azhar holds no discrimination policy towards any Islamic group, it is always the melting pot of various Islamic mass organizations.

“Al-Azhar has always been able to accommodate all differences of opinions between NU and Muhammadiyah. It is clearly attributed as moderate Islam in words and actions, even with the fact that Buya Hamka was known as Muhammadiyah scholar. (Murni Djamal, Personal Communication, May 17, 2021).

The inclusiveness of YPI Al-Azhar to open to all members of society regardless of their political and religious views, matches all attributes of moderate Islamic organization, which according to Setara Institute has three characteristics namely (1) not using violence in the agenda of Islamic struggle (2) accommodating the concept of modern nation-state (3) inclusiveness to all members of society (Faiqoh & Pransiska, 2018). The Chairman added that until today, there are many parents who are political rivals outside the school gate, but when it comes to YPI AL-Azhar meeting, they can sit side by side, taking off all their political and religious views.

The acceptance of people from different political and Islamic religious views towards YPI Al-Azhar indicated their belief in the moderation view of Al-Azhar which covers all 4 aspects as suggested by Yasid, (2010) in Fahri and Zainuri (2019), i.e. 1) creed (*Aqîdah*) 2) worship (*Ibâdah*) 3) conducts and behaviour (*akhlâq*) 3) the implementation of Sharia. The praxis of moderation is due to in depth understanding of the leadership in YPI Al-Azhar towards the concept of moderation itself. As claimed by the chairman of YPI Al-Azhar that the institution has adopted an eclectic definition of religious moderation by combining both 2 definitions of moderation i.e the versions of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and The Board of Ulema of Indonesia. He argued:

“Al-Azhar has its own version of moderation, as it combined the two definitions (The Ministry of Religious Affairs and The Board of Ulema of Indonesia), Al-Azhar believes in the principles of tawassuth (moderation), tawaazun (balanced), I'tidal (straight), innovative and accommodative. These traits have been our attributes for many years. Al-Azhar is the concrete proof of religious moderation, and it always strive to give solutions. In Indonesia, it is recorded throughout history that various Islamic mass organizations such as Muhammadiyah, NU, Persis, Masyumi and so on are accommodated in Al-Azhar”. (Sobirin, Personal Communication, May 17, 2021).

Despite the fact that Buya Hamka was strongly associated with Masyumi and Muhammadiyah, YPI Al-Azhar in general is recognized with its openness policy, as until today, almost all religious mass organizations were allowed to organize their events in the vicinity of the great Mosque Al Azhar. This proves the attribute which was claimed by the Chairman as giving solution, as YPI Al-Azhar strives to always accommodate public gatherings organized by Islamic organizations as part of contribution to the society. The argument above was supported by one of the informants, she said:

I can say that Al-Azhar has positioned itself in the middle, as we can see many ustazs in Al-Azhar who come from different background. (Sobirin, Personal Communication, May 17, 2021).

Until today, we can see variety of preachers from different background of mass organizations, and streams giving Islamic lectures in the great mosque. The pictures of moderation above, give us strong indication of religious moderation practice, which is based on good understanding of the concept of moderation by the management.

### **Religious Moderation Strategy**

The tragedy of 911 has changed world perceptions towards terror and radicalism. Many scholars and educators view the necessity of early preventive measure toward radicalization and extremism from school. Under the umbrella of UNESCO, campaigns against extremism and radicalization have been done within school curriculums across the globe. UNESCO's Executive Board published a Decision that underlines the importance of education as a tool to prevent violent extremism and terrorism as well as genocide, racial and religious intolerance, war crimes and crimes against humanity worldwide. It is argued that education is necessary to improve societal commitment processes and to prevent violent extremism, whether it is provided through school systems, clubs and community associations or at home (Sas et al., 2020).

Since many believe that education is very important tool to overcome radicalization, books as the most important learning materials are included in de-radicalization implementation (Ide, 2017). Textbooks are very important element of dissemination of message, as students and teachers can gain some understanding on some issues understudied. In order to achieve optimal results, the inclusion of moderation messages in Islamic education textbooks should be also supported by strategies, approaches, methods and learning techniques that are in accordance with Islamic religious subject and the conditions of students (Rustan et al., 2018).

Hence, in order to maintain religious moderation policy, YPI Al-Azhar provided its own Islamic education textbooks for all the Al-Azhar schools, accompanied with guide book to teaching and learning Islam. The chairman explained the need to guide book:

“We have our own version of guide book to practice Islam. In (daily) practice, sometimes, there are disputes between Muslims (on khilafiyah matters) such as, opening supplication in prayer (du'a iftitaḥ) which has more than one choice of supplications, such as *Allahu Akbar kabi-ro, walhamdu lillahi katsiro...* and *Allahumma ba'id baini wa baini...* This kind of view (of choices) is taught in Al-Azhar based on the texts of hadith so that, students of Al-Azhar are able to understand that differences...”. (Sobirin, Personal Communication, May 17, 2021).

The management urges teachers to instill the acceptance of different opinions to their students. It is part of moderation curricular is to expose students to different views, so they will grow up as tolerant Muslims who can accept other people point of views. When students are trained to be open minded, they would be avoided from being trapped in radicalism. The importance of learning to accept different opinions as process of habituation to respect others and to build moderation is also indicated by Jusmirah (2020).

Beside in-class curricular activities, co curriculars and extra curriculars also play important role in shaping characteristic of students. Therefore, monitoring all activities involving guest speakers and students is urgently needed. In order to ensure that all programs are safe from any element that could jeopardize religious moderation practice, monitoring programs was thoroughly done since the stage of proposal. As part of strategy in promoting and maintaining religious moderation in YPI Al-Azhar. All activities organized by departments under YPI Al-Azhar have to go through proposal submission whereby the management team have to study the proposal thoroughly, to ensure that no possibility of violation of the policy. In addition, all activities are supervised by supervisors, if problem arises in the event, shariah board will rectify.



Upon the entrance of new recruits, YPI Al-Azhar depends on orientation program to blend new staff with the existing staff and the system. In addition, orientation of new staff also very important role in familiarizing them to the traditions and policy of the institutions as suggested by Dragomiroiu et al. (2014) Therefore, to maintain religious moderation policy and ensure that all staff of YPI Al-Azhar understand the vision and mission of the institution orientation program is also used to instil new employees all policy taken by the institution. It is expected that after the program everyone will be at same page in implementing all policies including the policy of religious moderation.

An empirical study by Nahon & Barzilai (2005) which was based on original dataset of 686.192 users and 60.346 virtual communities, while also relying on extensive literature review and secondary data show the complexity of interactions between religious fundamentalism and Internet. In addition, the fact that the access to knowledge and information becomes unlimited, as online search engines provide everything they need. Whilst the report of PPIM UIN Jakarta (2017) indicated the big influence of internet in seeding intolerance amongst Z generation, as the study found that students without internet access have relatively shown more tolerant and moderate attitudes compared to those who are with internet access.

This data indicated the necessity of religious moderation strategy in virtual era, as many students have been ordained to virtual learning and therefore, there is always possibility to be exposed by religious teachings that are not inline with moderation policy initiated by YPI Al Azhar. When the Chairman was asked about religious moderation strategy during virtual era, he stated that YPI Al-Azhar considered virtual teaching and learning as opportunity to learn to maximize the potentials of teachers in online pedagogy. In order to maintain the religious moderation, all teaching materials need to be well coordinated and checked accordingly. In addition, in virtual teaching, the presence of parents in creates social control, as being at homes, students are accompanied by their parents. This helps the process of maintaining religious moderation strategy, as if there any inappropriate content, parents would lodge a complaint to the school. Hence, parental involvement becomes very important element of religious moderation strategy during the era of virtual.

One of the informants reminded that the policy on religious moderation needs to have clear fences and everyone needs to understand their limitation. This, because many people misunderstand the concept, thinking that ignoring and not caring of what people do is part of moderation. Students need to be made understand the concept of religious moderation properly, they need to embody the concept which emphasizes on promoting the middle way, not the right extreme nor the left one. Hence, teachers regular upgrading in this matter is very important.

### **Implication of Religious Moderation**

The Chairman of YPI Al-Azhar stated that the implementation of religious moderation strategy has positive implication on the quality of education. He elaborated that religious moderation strategy required the cooperation between teachers, students and parents, and this cooperation is also very important element of improving the quality of education, as the quality will only achieved unless there is strong connection and cooperation between teachers, students and parents. He argued:

“The quality of education in Al-Azhar will be achieved only with the collaboration of three components i.e teachers, students and parents. When collaboration becomes habit, the success of our education can be easily achieved”. (Sobirin, Personal Communication, May 17, 2021).

The teaching on religious moderation should also be practiced by parents at home, as study by Riany el al., (2019) suggested the assumption that family factors may play a role in preventing the radical ideology among moderate Islamic parents.

The attributes of tolerance and not impulsive towards others are very important in promoting religious moderation. These traits lead to the habit of being wise in delivering messages to others, when students were taught in this manner, practicing religious rites becomes more voluntarily. The implementation of religious moderation cannot be realized without good examples given by teachers. The chairman stated that teachers in YPI Al-Azhar have been oriented to the principle of start with yourself or *ibda' binafsik*, with giving good examples, teachers will be avoided from being impulsive. One of the informants admitted that when it comes to religious obligation like daily prayers, she does not need to remind her children to pray, as they will do it without being asked to do.

The policy on religious moderation also leads to the fact that many people accept the way religious preaching is carried on. Beside the fact that many people trust YPI Al-Azhar in educating their children, Islamic lesson classes for adults are also received warm welcome from people. One of the informants stated that many people join the Islamic lessons initially on trial basis, but later on become regular students who attend classes such as Quran and its interpretation (*tafsir*), and other thematic lessons. It is quite normal consequence of being inclusive, as the more inclusive the institution is, the more group of people will enjoy to be the part of that institution.

## CONCLUSION

Religious moderation is very important, however, right understanding of the meaning of moderation is more important. With good understanding, appropriate approach and strategy can be prepared and developed. YPI Al-Azhar can be a good example of how religious moderation is implemented. The success of Al-Azhar in promoting moderation has positive implication to the quality of education, as indicated in its outcome, that many alumni of YPI Al-Azhar have successfully contributed in society as ministers, governors, government officials, public figures and so on. In addition to safeguarding our children from radicalism and intolerance, moderation strategy when it is practiced by education institutions, it could also attract parents from different background of religious streams. Schools need to collaborate with parents in order to maintain the implementation of religious moderation, as the virtual presence of teachers cannot cover many areas of supervisions, including what students are exposed from the internet. When collaborative plans and actions become organizational habit in schools, the quality of education can be easily achieved, as it also depends on school-home collaboration. Finally, religious moderation strategy promoted by school will not be successful unless the same view on moderation is also shared by parents.

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