Mainstreaming Religious Moderation in Indonesian Higher Education: Perspectives on Goals, Curriculum Content, and Implementation Strategies

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – This study maps stakeholder perspectives on the goals, content, and delivery strategies of Religious Moderation Education (RME) in Indonesian universities, and tests alignment between preferences and current practice. It responds to policy calls to move beyond course-only provision toward campus-wide mainstreaming.

Design/methods/approach – A cross-sectional online survey of 500 respondents (200 lecturers, 300 students) from public and Islamic universities used structured Likert-type questionnaires. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and cross-tabulations.

Findings – Respondents strongly endorsed core objectives: strengthening Pancasila-based civic identity (85%), preventing conflict and radicalism (84%), and bridging religious–non-religious perspectives (80%). Content priorities centred on interfaith harmony ($M = 4.35$) and civic-constitutional values ($M = 4.28$), with intra-Islam harmony also high ($M = 4.12$). Integrated cross-curricular models received the highest effectiveness rating ($M = 4.32$) yet were less used than IRE-only courses (41% vs 68%); campus-culture programming was also effective ($M = 4.05$; usage 55%). These figures indicate a misalignment between stakeholder preferences and prevailing practice.

Research implications/limitations – Evidence supports system-level integration of RME across curricula and campus culture, coupled with lecturer development and assessment. Cross-sectional, self-report data limit causal inference and generalizability; longitudinal and implementation studies are needed.

Originality/value – Provides a large-N, multi-stakeholder baseline and advances a goals–content–strategy framework not only as a practical policy tool but also as a conceptual contribution to the study of Religious Moderation Education (RME) and contemporary religious education more broadly. By analytically linking normative goals, curricular content domains, and delivery strategies, the framework offers a transferable lens for examining how religious education can balance identity formation with civic pluralism. It also guides institutional audits and policy design for inclusive, effective RME and underscores the need for system-level reforms to enhance the civic and pluralistic impact of religious education in diverse societies.

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Introduction

Religious Moderation Education (RME) is increasingly recognised as a doctrinal and civic imperative for fostering justice, tolerance, and social cohesion within plural societies. This is pursued through Islamic religious education (IRE), inclusive public education systems, and public communication efforts led by the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Husna, 2022; Muthia et al., 2024; Rifai & Nurhaliza, 2024). However, the implementation of such policies continues to face resistance from conservative groups, as well as significant gaps in civic and interfaith literacy. These issues underscore the need for context-sensitive strategies tailored to both general and religious schools (Basuki & Ja'far, 2025; Febrianto & Munfarida, 2023; Nadhif et al., 2025; Parwanto, 2025).

RME has become a central concern in higher education as institutions navigate pluralism, polarisation, and the practical challenge of aligning religious identity with civic life. Global scholarship on religious education distinguishes between "learning about" religion, which focuses on developing literacy in religious traditions, and "learning from" religion, which emphasises cultivating dispositions for dialogue, nonviolence, and civic accommodation. Effective systems typically balance both orientations to support coexistence in diverse societies (Fancourt, 2015). In Indonesia, these questions are sharpened by the constitutional commitment to Pancasila and periodic episodes of social tension that test universities' capacity to produce graduates who are both religiously grounded and civically cohesive. Comparative work in Southeast Asia further emphasises that moderation initiatives must be locally situated while remaining attentive to wider regional dynamics, inviting models that can travel across institutional types without losing contextual sensitivity (Bahri et al., 2025). Across these strands, RME is broadly defined as an educational approach that balances religious identity with civic values through structured encounters with difference, dialogic pedagogy, and institutional supports that normalise tolerance and cooperation.

Within Indonesia's higher education sector, RME has progressed from policy discourse to curricular experimentation. Studies document attempts to embed moderation principles in course syllabi, co-curricular activities, and campus governance, often articulating intended outcomes with reference to Pancasila's ideals of unity in diversity, civic commitment, and nonviolence (Nasir & Rijal, 2021). However, these initiatives often remain fragmented and symbolic, lacking systematic integration and evaluative mechanisms that ensure continuity across institutions. While their study provides a valuable account of mainstreaming efforts, their analysis tends to emphasise policy rhetoric over implementation fidelity. It therefore overlooks challenges such as lecturer preparedness, limited student engagement, and weak institutional infrastructure, all of which shape program success. Development and evaluation efforts have proposed frameworks for specifying competencies, mapping content domains, and aligning assessment, marking a shift from normative advocacy to early-stage program design (Mukhibat et al., 2024).

Policy analyses of State Islamic Higher Education have highlighted legal instruments, quality assurance mechanisms, and organisational structures intended to

sustain moderation beyond isolated courses or individuals (Kholis & Rini, 2023; Mardhiah et al., 2025). While these studies represent meaningful advances, they are often conceptual or institution-specific and thus lack scalable, evidence-based frameworks. This study builds upon prior work by operationalising a goals, content, and strategy framework across a large and diverse sample of lecturers and students. It continues the effort to specify content domains and assess delivery models. Still, it revises earlier approaches by empirically comparing strategy effectiveness, mapping stakeholder alignment, and offering a diagnostic tool for institutional reform. In doing so, it addresses the ongoing variability in RME operationalisation, where some programs emphasise theological moderation, others focus on interfaith literacy or civic competencies, by providing a more comprehensive, data-driven foundation for mainstreaming religious moderation in higher education.

A persistent problem identified across studies is the tendency to treat IRE as the principal or sole carrier of moderation outcomes. However, the literature on Islamic education suggests that such an approach is insufficient, as fostering religious moderation requires not only doctrinal instruction but also the development of dialogic, civic, and interfaith competencies. This issue is particularly salient in IRE, where moderation must be addressed through comprehensive, context-specific pedagogical strategies that extend beyond normative content, emphasising experiential learning and integration across disciplines. While IRE is foundational, a course-bound, confessional silo may be insufficient to produce the attitudinal and behavioural shifts that moderation entails, especially when students' dispositions are co-shaped by peer networks, organisational life, and cross-disciplinary learning. Evaluations of implementation frequently describe superficiality, awareness of moderation concepts without sustained practice opportunities, yielding fragile transfer to everyday campus interactions (Chotimah et al., 2025). More broadly, gaps between policy rhetoric and classroom reality persist, including uneven lecturer preparation, tight instructional time, and weak alignment between curricular goals and co-curricular infrastructures that could consolidate learning beyond the classroom.

A general solution advanced in recent work is mainstreaming: moving from "course-only" delivery to integrated, cross-curricular designs that are reinforced by campus culture programming and sustained through institutional policy. In this view, moderation outcomes are more likely when RME is embedded across character-building and civic education curricula, when students routinely participate in structured interfaith dialogue and collaborative projects, and when assessment rubrics explicitly track moderation-relevant competencies such as perspective-taking, conflict de-escalation, and public-reasoning (Mukhibat et al., 2024; Nasir & Rijal, 2021). Legal codification, quality assurance, and dedicated organisational units are seen as necessary to convert individual initiatives into repeatable, auditable practice, creating continuity despite leadership or staffing changes (Mardhiah et al., 2025). The design signal is therefore "whole-of-campus" alignment: clarity of goals, broad content, and multi-layered strategies that integrate coursework, student life, and community engagement.

Specific pedagogical solutions focus on practice-rich learning and lecturer competence. Project-Based Learning (PBL), for instance, is one of the instructional models considered effective for teaching RME, as it engages students in authentic tasks that require collaboration, critical thinking, and interaction across differences. Such experiential approaches provide concrete opportunities to internalise moderation values through real-world problem-solving and dialogic reflection. PjBL and other experiential designs are repeatedly associated with gains in moderation-related outcomes, particularly when students engage with diverse peers and partners in purposeful tasks that require deliberation, negotiation, and joint problem-solving (Muliadi et al., 2025). Such designs multiply occasions for dialogue across difference, offering iterative feedback on attitudes and behaviours that purely lecture-based formats struggle to shape (Parker, 2014). Evidence from secondary and madrasah settings converges on structured routines, guided dialogue, reflective writing, and community-linked projects that can be adapted to university contexts to scaffold durable habits of empathy and civic cooperation (Darmi et al., 2024). Across these studies, educator capacity emerges as a central lever: dialogic facilitation, interfaith literacy, and the management of controversial issues are trainable skills that condition program impact.

A second set of specific solutions concerns curriculum engineering and institutional supports. Development studies outline actionable taxonomies for RME, typically including interreligious harmony, intrafaith harmony, and civic-constitutional values and propose alignment maps that link course outcomes, learning activities, and assessment indicators. Although this framework offers a valuable structure for integrating moderation principles into curriculum design, it remains largely prescriptive and lacks empirical validation across diverse institutional contexts. Furthermore, the taxonomies presented may oversimplify the complex sociocultural dimensions of religious moderation if not carefully adapted to educators' and learners' lived realities and varying capacities. Policy-oriented analyses stress the importance of governance, resource allocation, and monitoring to prevent initiatives from remaining symbolic or episodic. Comparative work cautions that while high-level principles are transferable, institutional histories and local politics shape feasibility, requiring adaptation rather than transplantation of successful models across sites (Bahri et al., 2025). Together, these contributions converge on a design logic: articulate measurable goals, diversify content beyond confessional boundaries, and sustain cross-context strategies that bridge curriculum, co-curriculum, and campus culture.

Despite these advances, the evidentiary base remains fragmented. Much of the literature consists of qualitative case studies or single-institution reports, valuable for depth but limited for generalisation (Nasir & Rijal, 2021; Parker, 2014). Reviews repeatedly diagnose superficial implementation without benchmarking perceived effectiveness across delivery models, making it difficult to know whether integrated designs outperform IRE-only approaches in practice (Chotimah et al., 2025). Pedagogical studies report promising associations for PjBL and dialogic methods, yet seldom link breadth of content to strategy effectiveness across multiple stakeholder groups within the same institution or sector. What is notably scarce are large-N, multi-stakeholder mappings that simultaneously

disaggregate RME into measurable domains, compare strategy usage and effectiveness across delivery models, and analyse convergence and divergence between lecturers and students in ways that can directly inform policy and curriculum design.

The present study addresses these gaps by offering a large-scale, cross-sector survey of lecturers and students in Indonesian universities, operationalised through a goals–content–strategy framework and analysed using reliability checks and correlational techniques. Its first aim is to clarify intended goals with particular attention to bridging religious and non-religious perspectives, preventing conflict and radicalism, and reinforcing Pancasila-based civic identity. The second aim is to prioritise content by mapping stakeholder perceptions of inter-religious harmony, intra-Islamic harmony, and civic-constitutional values, thereby identifying the domains most likely to yield system-level gains when integrated into teaching and campus life. The third aim is to compare strategy usage and perceived effectiveness across delivery models (IRE course-only, integrated curriculum, and campus-culture programming), while examining alignment between content breadth and strategy effectiveness.

The study's novelty lies in its scale and design: It simultaneously analyses lecturer and student perspectives using a validated instrument, benchmarks the effectiveness of strategies beyond single-course provision, and translates findings into decision-ready levers for curricular mainstreaming, lecturer development, and culture building. In addition, it offers a novel contribution by incorporating data from both Islamic (PTKI) and general (PTU) higher education institutions, thereby enhancing the representativeness and applicability of the findings across diverse educational settings in Indonesia. While the scope is limited to perceptions and self-reported practices within Indonesian public and Islamic universities, and the inferences are correlational rather than causal, the design offers a replicable diagnostic template for institutional audits and policy translation that can be periodically repeated to monitor progress.

To make the analytical logic explicit, this study addresses the following research questions: (RQ1) Which RME goals are most strongly endorsed by lecturers and students across PTKI and PTU? (RQ2) Which RME content domains (inter-religious harmony, intra-Islam harmony, civic-constitutional values) are prioritised by stakeholders? (RQ3) How do reported usage and perceived effectiveness compare across three delivery models (IRE course-only, integrated curriculum, campus-culture programming)? (RQ4) To what extent is content breadth associated with the perceived effectiveness of each delivery model?

Methods

Research Design

This study adopted a cross-sectional quantitative design to generate a sector-wide snapshot of how lecturers and students perceive the goals, content, and strategies of RME in Indonesian higher education. A cross-sectional survey is appropriate for analysing relationships among variables in authentic educational settings where experimental manipulation is neither feasible nor desirable, and for examining associations between program delivery modes and perceived outcomes (Chacón-Cuberos et al., 2024). We

employed a structured online questionnaire to maximise geographical reach and standardise administration across public and Islamic universities. Instrument development drew on the global distinction between "learning about" and "learning from" religion to ensure coverage of both knowledge and dialogic or civic competencies (Fancourt, 2015) and on Indonesian policy and curriculum scholarship highlighting Pancasila aligned moderation, integrated curricula, and campus culture supports (Mukhibat et al., 2024).

The analytic plan combined descriptive statistics to profile patterns and Pearson correlations to test alignment between content breadth and strategy effectiveness; an approach consistent with survey research in higher education that prioritises interpretable, policy-relevant signals over causal claims in the first instance (Chacón-Cuberos et al., 2024). All design choices and operational parameters, including the cross-sectional frame, online administration, and descriptive correlational analyses, follow the protocol summarised in the project notes.

Participants

Participants comprised 500 respondents, including 200 lecturers and 300 students, purposively sampled from both Islamic Religious Universities (PTKI) and general public universities (PTU). The sample included 110 lecturers from PTKI and 90 from PTU, while the student group comprised 160 from PTKI and 140 from PTU. The inclusion of both academic staff and students was deliberate: mixed-stakeholder designs broaden representation and reduce single-actor bias when investigating sensitive, values-laden topics such as religious moderation (Huang, 2022). Participants were drawn from a wide regional coverage across Indonesia, including Sumatra (26%), Java (45%), Kalimantan (10%), Sulawesi (12%), and Eastern Indonesia (7%). Purposive sampling was employed to ensure that selected participants had direct engagement with religious moderation practices in curricular and co-curricular settings.

Respondents came from a range of disciplinary backgrounds, including Islamic Studies, Education, Social Sciences, and Humanities, ensuring relevant perspectives on RME integration in academic and cultural domains. Online distribution via institutional email lists and student organisations increased coverage and heterogeneity. However, it may have introduced sampling bias, favouring those with stronger digital access or greater interest in religious moderation issues. This potential self-selection bias should be taken into account when interpreting the results. Our sampling frame sought to avoid stakeholder exclusion, which can undermine system-level goal attainment and collaborative legitimacy. Nonetheless, perfect representational balance across institution types and regions may not have been achieved (Curşeu & Schruijer, 2020; Yazida Ichsan et al., 2024).

Instruments

The structured questionnaire was designed to capture four domains. Section A collected demographic and institutional information (e.g., sector, rank or program, region) to enable descriptive profiling and subgroup cross-tabulation. Section B measured

perceptions of RME objectives, explicitly reflecting global and Indonesian conceptualisations of moderation as the balancing of religious identity with civic values, tolerance, and nonviolence (Nasir & Rijal, 2021). Section C assessed the perceived relevance and importance of content domains frequently identified in the literature and policy guidance, including interreligious harmony, intra-Islamic harmony, and civic constitutional values. Section D elicited preferences and perceived effectiveness regarding strategy options that figure prominently in institutional debates: an IRE course-only model, integrated cross-curricular implementation, and campus culture programming (Kholis & Rini, 2023; Mardhiah et al., 2025). All items employed five-point Likert-type response scales (agreement or frequency). The use of Likert-type scales is standard in survey studies of learning, motivation, and pedagogy (Dowson & Mcinerney, 2004; Lopez et al., 2024) and facilitates both descriptive summaries and correlational analyses with minimal respondent burden (Afwadzi et al., 2024).

Instrument quality assurance proceeded along two lines. First, we emphasised internal consistency. Defined as the degree to which items within a scale measure the same underlying construct so that responses are coherent and reliable across related questions. To assess this, we reported Cronbach's alpha with a target threshold of ≥ 0.80, a criterion widely accepted for research-grade reliability in multi-item scales (Teo, 2013). Second, while confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and higher-order CFA are frequently used to test dimensional structure and construct validity in educational measures, our primary purpose in this study was diagnostic and comparative, not scale development; we therefore prioritised internal consistency and simple-structure checks appropriate to descriptive correlational aims. The instrument blueprint aligns conceptually with mainstreaming arguments in the RME literature, ensuring that measured strategies map onto theoretically and policy salient delivery models and that content domains capture both interfaith and civic dimensions rather than confessional boundaries alone (Nasirian et al., 2024). To support interpretability, item wording avoided technical jargon and sensitive doctrinal framings; where potentially sensitive content arose, neutral formulations were used to reduce social desirability bias, an approach recommended for surveys touching on values and identity.

Data Collection

Data were collected over a 2-week period via an online survey. Invitations were disseminated through institutional email channels to lecturers and through student organisations to reach diverse student cohorts. Online deployment was selected for its scalability and administrative uniformity across geographically dispersed institutions, in line with established practice in higher education survey research (Chacón-Cuberos et al., 2024). Prior to participation, respondents received an information sheet describing the study's purpose, voluntary nature, estimated completion time, data uses, and contact details for the research team. Electronic informed consent was obtained in accordance with ethical guidelines. No personally identifying information beyond minimal demographics necessary for analysis was collected, and all responses were stored on

secure drives with access restricted to the research team. Because RME is a sensitive topic that intersects with identity and belief, the instrument and consent materials were crafted to minimise perceived risk, emphasise confidentiality, and signal respect for diverse viewpoints; practices consistent with recommendations for multi-stakeholder research on sensitive issues (Curşeu & Schruijer, 2020).

Although dialogic, Delphi-style consensus techniques can deepen construct clarity through iterative feedback. We did not use a Delphi method because the study aimed to benchmark perceptions at scale rather than to reach consensus among experts. The choice of a one-shot survey is consistent with sector-wide diagnostic objectives and permitted broader participation within the field period. Finally, to enhance representational adequacy and mitigate the risks of excluding consequential voices, recruitment messaging explicitly encouraged participation from different ranks, disciplines, and program types within each sector.

Data Analysis

Analyses were conducted in IBM SPSS Statistics version 26. We first produced descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, and percentage distributions) to characterise overall patterns in goal endorsement, content priorities, and perceived strategy effectiveness. Frequency distributions and cross tabulations by stakeholder group (lecturers versus students) and by sector (public versus Islamic universities) were then used to explore convergence and divergence across institutional locations, consistent with best practice in descriptive survey reporting (Araujo & Cruz-Correia, 2024). Reliability analyses reported Cronbach's alpha for each multi-item domain, with $\alpha \geq 0.80$ treated as evidence of satisfactory internal consistency, in line with established psychometric conventions for applied research (Dowson & Mcinerney, 2004; Teo, 2013). To examine alignment between breadth of content prioritisation and perceived strategy effectiveness, our core relational hypothesis, we computed Pearson product-moment correlations among scale or index scores derived from Sections C and D, after verifying distributional assumptions and the absence of influential outliers. Pearson's correlation is suitable for assessing linear associations among continuous or quasi-continuous composites in survey research. It provides an interpretable indicator of direction and magnitude without imposing a causal structure.

Because institutions and respondents are nested within sectors, multilevel model-driven approaches could, in principle, partition variance and handle clustered dependencies (Alhaj et al., 2020). However, given the present study's descriptive diagnostic purpose and the balanced representation across the two principal sectors, we prioritised transparent summaries and bivariate alignment tests as decision-support inputs for leaders and curriculum designers. We therefore treat our findings as correlational signals appropriate for program diagnosis rather than as causal estimates of intervention effects. The analytical outputs are reported in Section 3 and organised into four tables to aid interpretation. Table 1 summarises agreement rates for core RME goals; Table 2 details the distribution of responses for the most strongly endorsed goal; Table 3 presents mean

importance ratings for content domains; and Table 4 contrasts usage and perceived effectiveness across delivery models.

The methodological choices, which include a cross-sectional survey administered online to lecturers and students, a theory- and policy-informed instrument emphasising goals, content, and strategies, and a descriptive-correlational analytic plan, are aligned with contemporary quantitative research standards in education and with sector-specific RME debates. They provide reliable, interpretable evidence to guide curricular mainstreaming and campus culture programming, while acknowledging the limits of non-experimental inference (Mukhibat et al., 2024; Nasir & Rijal, 2021).

Results and Discussion

1. Goals of Religious Moderation

As a foundational concept in religious and civic discourse, religious moderation aims to reduce violence, prevent fanaticism, and counter radicalism by promoting a balanced, middle-path stance among differing religious perspectives. It seeks to accommodate religious diversity, particularly in pluralistic societies like Indonesia, by encouraging mutual respect while maintaining fidelity to one's own absolute religious principles. This approach fosters active listening, constructive engagement with differences, and the cultivation of interreligious harmony (Untung et al., 2025). RME is increasingly recognised not only as a medium for deepening religious understanding but also as a critical pedagogical and civic strategy for building inclusive citizenship in a pluralistic society. Given the enduring complexity of Indonesia's sociocultural fabric and the centrality of Pancasila as its normative foundation, aligning educational goals with civic values is vital (Takdir, 2025). The analysis in this section draws on stakeholder perceptions to identify the extent to which these intended goals are collectively understood and supported by lecturers and students across institutional types.

The findings revealed widespread support among university stakeholders for RME's primary objectives. Figure 1 and Table 1 illustrate the percentage of agreement across three core goals. The goal of reinforcing a Pancasila-based civic identity received the highest approval, with 85% of respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing. This was closely followed by preventing religious conflict and radicalism (84%) and aligning religious and non-religious views (80%). The neutral stance ranged from 10% to 12%, while only a small minority expressed disagreement across all three goals.
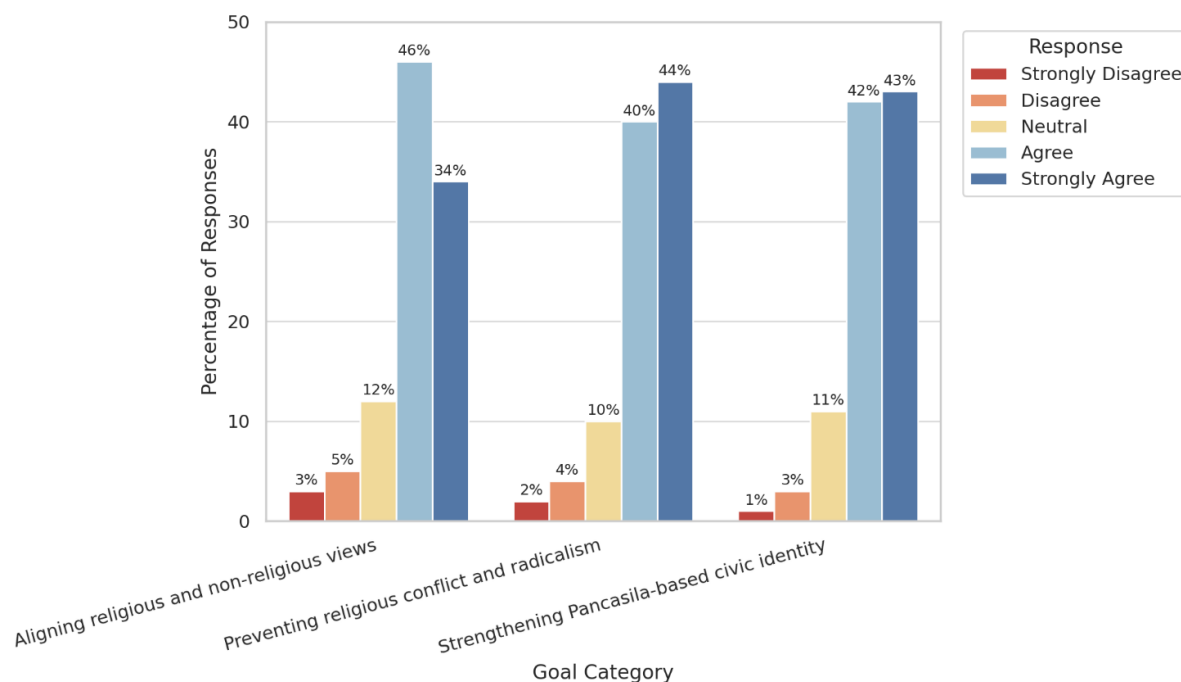
Figure 1. Agreement on Religious Moderation Goals

Table 1. Agreement on Religious Moderation Goals (N = 500)

Goal Category	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agreement (%)
Aligning religious and non-religious views	3%	5%	12%	46%	34%	80%
Preventing religious conflict and radicalism	2%	4%	10%	40%	44%	84%
Strengthening Pancasila-based civic identity	1%	3%	11%	42%	43%	85%

These patterns indicate a shared commitment to using RME not only as a preventive tool against extremism but also as a proactive framework for cultivating a unified national identity rooted in constitutional values. Disaggregated responses (see Table 2) showed consistency across demographic categories, as lecturers and students from both public and Islamic universities largely converged in their perceptions, with variation in strong agreement ranging from 30% to 36%. Notably, Islamic university lecturers had the highest level of strong agreement (36%) for aligning religious and nonreligious views, followed closely by Islamic university students (35%).

Table 2. Distribution for "Aligning Religious and Non-religious Views" (N = 500)

Respondent Category	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Lecturers - Public Universities	2%	6%	14%	48%	30%	100%
Lecturers - Islamic Universities	4%	5%	10%	45%	36%	100%
Students - Public Universities	3%	5%	13%	44%	35%	100%
Students - Islamic Universities	3%	4%	11%	47%	35%	100%

Disaggregated data from Table 2 further reinforce the finding that support for these goals transcends institutional type and role (lecturer vs. student). Although variations in the percentage of strong agreement exist, they remain within a relatively narrow band, with Islamic university lecturers and students showing slightly higher levels of endorsement for integrating religious and non-religious perspectives. This uniformity across demographic lines reinforces the inclusivity and generalizability of RME as a unifying educational intervention. These patterns support the theoretical position that religious moderation is most impactful when perceived as both a shared social imperative and a pedagogical necessity (Kosim et al., 2024).

The strong endorsement of the core goals of RME in this study aligns with previous empirical and conceptual work emphasising the strategic role of RME in promoting tolerance, preventing radicalisation, and sustaining national cohesion. For instance, Hanafi et al. (2023); Kosim et al., (2024) show how religious moderation embedded in educational activities across madrasas and universities fosters interfaith understanding and civic commitment. Similarly, Tinambunan et al. (2025) highlight the transformative impact of religious literacy and inclusive dialogue in reducing extremist tendencies among students. These findings echo the current study's emphasis on RME as a tool not only for religious instruction but also for civic formation grounded in Pancasila values.

Moreover, studies such as Rusmana et al. (2025); Untung et al. (2025) support the view that RME enhances national unity by reinforcing shared commitments to tolerance and peaceful coexistence in multicultural societies. Their research underlines how integration of local wisdom and national narratives within RME frameworks strengthens belonging and trust across diverse groups. This harmonizes with the high level of stakeholder agreement in the present study regarding the role of RME in reinforcing Pancasila-based identity and aligning religious and non-religious perspectives. However, some authors have raised cautionary notes. Takdir (2025), for example, point to potential tensions in implementing moderation programs, especially when perceived as compromising doctrinal purity or when insufficient resources hinder consistent application.

Despite widespread endorsement, the literature also acknowledges ongoing challenges in balancing religious authenticity with inclusivity. For instance, Susanti et al. (2024) warn that religious moderation may be met with resistance from conservative segments or misinterpreted as relativism. These concerns are not antithetical to the findings of this study but instead highlight areas where more careful pedagogical and policy

design is required. Overall, the convergence between this study and prior research supports the continued development of RME, while also calling attention to structural, ideological, and resource-based barriers that need to be addressed to fully realize its transformative potential.

These findings affirm that RME is not merely a normative response to extremism, but a pedagogical framework broadly embraced across institutions as part of inclusive citizenship formation. Unlike previous studies that often focused on conceptual discourse or limited practices within religious institutions, this research demonstrates a convergence of perceptions among academic stakeholders from both Islamic and general universities, reinforcing the view that religious moderation has been internalized as a shared agenda in higher education. Accordingly, the study's main contribution lies in expanding the representational base and asserting that religious moderation holds not only symbolic value but also strategic institutional relevance, provided it is supported by well-designed curricula, contextualized pedagogical strategies, and cross-sectoral commitment.

2. Content Priorities

Religious moderation is a critical concept aimed at fostering unity, tolerance, and social harmony within diverse societies. The aim is to identify which domains are viewed as most impactful when integrated into teaching and campus life. Building on the shared goals outlined previously, this section explores how different dimensions of content are valued by lecturers and students, thereby offering insights into curriculum areas that can yield system-level gains in fostering inclusive citizenship, strengthening national identity, and reducing religious tensions. The analysis not only ranks these content domains but also situates them within broader discussions on civic education and pluralistic engagement in religious instruction.

Table 3 presents the ranking of content dimensions based on mean scores and standard deviations. Inter-religious harmony was rated as the most important content area (mean = 4.35; SD = 0.72), reflecting a strong emphasis on fostering tolerance and understanding across diverse religious communities. This priority underscores the role of RME in mitigating polarization and promoting dialogue beyond confessional boundaries. Civic-constitutional values ranked second (mean = 4.28; SD = 0.75), indicating robust support for integrating Pancasila and constitutional education within religious instruction. Intra-Islamic harmony, although slightly lower in rank (mean = 4.12; SD = 0.81), still received a high importance score, highlighting the need to balance internal doctrinal unity with external pluralistic engagement.

Table 3. Perceived Importance of Content Dimensions (N = 500)

Content Dimension	Mean	Standard Deviation	Importance Rank
Inter-religious harmony	4.35	0.72	1
Intra-Islamic harmony	4.12	0.81	3
Civic-constitutional values	4.28	0.75	2

These results affirm previous research suggesting that religious moderation efforts must simultaneously address both inter- and intra-faith dynamics while embedding civic frameworks to anchor shared values. The narrow range of standard deviations indicates relatively strong consensus across the respondent pool.

The prioritisation of content in RME, as evidenced by stakeholders' emphasis on inter-religious harmony, civic-constitutional values, and intra-Islamic harmony, aligns with an increasing body of literature supporting pluralistic and inclusive pedagogies. Muzayanah & Ghony (2025) highlight how Islamic educational institutions foster values such as tolerance, moderation, and mutual assistance through curricular and extracurricular programming, reinforcing the importance of interfaith understanding. This resonates with Muhtar et al. (2025) also emphasize the role of interfaith educators in Lombok and Bali in cultivating interaction experiences and mutual perceptions that promote lasting inter-religious harmony.

Equally important is the content focus on intra-Islamic harmony, which, while ranked third in this study, remains a critical domain for internal unity. Fitriani (2023) Observes that a mono-religious educational model in IRE can contribute to both tolerance and intolerance, depending on its framing. To mitigate this, the mutual enrichment model proposed by Fitriani integrates diverse Islamic perspectives to build solidarity across intra-faith lines. Ikhrom et al. (2023) further raise concerns about the presence of intolerant narratives in textbooks, advocating collaboratively developed materials that promote peaceful coexistence within the Islamic tradition. These concerns support the notion that internal doctrinal cohesion is foundational for broader civic engagement.

Moreover, the strong endorsement of civic-constitutional values aligns with global citizenship frameworks that address identity crises and ideological polarisation. Abdullahi (2021) asserts that education for global citizenship strengthens national unity and interfaith resilience, a perspective that finds resonance in the Indonesian context. Yahya & Rahmat (2021) also show that using dialogue-argumentative methods in Islamic education fosters moderate thought patterns, reducing exclusivism and enhancing civic reasoning. These findings reinforce the idea that civic-constitutional content is not simply additive to RME but essential for equipping students with the competencies required for democratic participation and peaceful coexistence.

Collectively, these studies affirm the triangulated content priorities observed in this research and suggest a clear path forward for curriculum and policy development. The integration of inter-religious, intra-Islamic, and civic dimensions offers a holistic approach that can be operationalised through curriculum design, teacher training, and

extracurricular activities. As Takunas et al. (2024) argue, a comprehensive approach to multicultural Islamic education creates the conditions for genuine religious harmony. Thus, the current study's findings echo the broader literature in calling for a multidimensional content strategy to anchor RME in Indonesia's diverse and dynamic educational landscape.

Taken together, this study extends prior research by affirming the relevance of inter-religious, intra-Islamic, and civic-constitutional content within RME, while also highlighting their interconnectedness as a coherent curricular strategy. Unlike earlier studies that often treated these domains in isolation or emphasised particular institutional contexts, our findings demonstrate a more integrated understanding among diverse stakeholders, suggesting broader readiness for systemic adoption. The contribution of this research lies in its ability to synthesise these dimensions into a unified framework that reflects both the normative foundations of religious moderation and the practical demands of civic education. This triangulated approach not only reinforces existing pluralistic pedagogies but also advances a more actionable and inclusive model for curriculum and policy reform in Indonesia's higher education landscape.

3. Strategy Usage and Effectiveness

Religious moderation strategies are diverse and context-specific, aiming to promote tolerance, prevent radicalism, and foster interfaith harmony. Building on prior findings concerning goals and content, this section explores whether strategic design and implementation effectively support the intended civic and interfaith outcomes of RME. Table 4 captures the reported usage rates and perceived effectiveness of three strategic approaches to delivering RME. The most widely implemented approach was the use of IRE courses, reported by 68% of respondents. However, its effectiveness rating (mean = 3.65; SD = 0.89) placed it third among the three strategies. In contrast, integrated cross-curricular models, used by 41%, received the highest effectiveness score (mean = 4.32; SD = 0.71), followed by campus culture initiatives, used by 55%, with a mean effectiveness of 4.05 (SD = 0.77).

Table 4. Strategy Usage and Perceived Effectiveness (N = 500)

Strategy Type	Usage (%)	Effectiveness Mean	Standard Deviation	Effectiveness Rank
IRE course only	68%	3.65	0.89	3
Integrated cross-curricular implementation	41%	4.32	0.71	1
Campus culture programs	55%	4.05	0.77	2

This effectiveness premium for integrated strategies supports the growing argument in education literature for embedding religious moderation outcomes across character education, civic courses, and cocurricular activities. To examine the degree of misalignment, we constructed a simple "gap index" by subtracting the standardised usage rate (on a 1–5 scale) from the mean perceived effectiveness score of each strategy. For

integrated curriculum, the gap was +0.91 (M_effectiveness = 4.32; standardized usage = 3.41); for campus culture, +0.55 (M = 4.05; usage = 3.50); and for IRE-only, –0.35 (M = 3.65; usage = 4.00). These figures reflect a positive misalignment for underused strategies and a potential overreliance on less effective ones. This misalignment highlights untapped opportunities to scale more effective yet underutilised strategies, such as integrated curriculum and campus culture programming. Quantifying this gap helps clarify where realignment is needed between stakeholder endorsement and institutional practice. The results offer convergent evidence that RME in Indonesian universities should move beyond the traditional confines of IRE-only models.

We further tested the relationship between content breadth and strategy effectiveness. A composite "content breadth" score was created by averaging responses across the three domains (interfaith harmony, intra-Islamic harmony, civic-constitutional values), showing high internal consistency (α = 0.84). Pearson correlation analyses revealed that content breadth correlated moderately with integrated strategy effectiveness (r = 0.42, p < .01) and more modestly with campus culture (r = 0.28, p < .05), but was not significantly associated with IRE-only (r = 0.09, ns). These results support an alignment between broader content engagement and perceived effectiveness, particularly for integrative and cultural approaches. Causal inferences, however, are not warranted due to the cross-sectional design.

Comparing the use of strategies and perceived effectiveness across different delivery models reveals critical insights into implementing RME in higher education. The IRE course-only model, though most commonly used, has the lowest effectiveness ratings. Studies by Amirudin et al. (2025) confirm that using pedagogies like Problem-Based Learning (PBL) in IRE classrooms enhances critical thinking and contextual understanding, but also highlight limitations in reach and scalability when confined to single-course formats. Similarly, experiential learning approaches, such as those investigated by Muhamad et al. (2024), have demonstrated strong engagement outcomes, particularly in topics like environmental ethics, but require structured support and institutional commitment to be effectively scaled.

Integrated curriculum models show the most promising outcomes in aligning content breadth with strategy effectiveness. To move beyond abstraction, we identify three illustrative forms of integrated implementation: (1) embedding RME themes into general education courses (e.g., civic education, philosophy of science); (2) interdisciplinary Project-Based Learning (PjBL) modules that require students from diverse academic backgrounds to collaborate on social cohesion or interfaith projects; and (3) structured co-curricular programs (e.g., interfaith student forums or community service tied to civic learning outcomes) that are formally assessed as part of character education. Chotimah et al. (2025) document the success of Madrasah Aliyah Negeri Insan Cendekia (MAN IC) during the pandemic, where Islamic and general education were fused with high alignment across content, pedagogy, and assessment. Sidik et al. (2024) Further reinforce this by comparing Imam Hatip Schools in Turkey and MAN IC in Indonesia, concluding that integrated curricula foster a holistic understanding that promotes tolerance and reduces ideological

polarisation. These findings resonate with the current study's results, which show that integrated approaches received the highest perceived effectiveness scores. The typology above provides a concrete framework for operationalising such integration across institutions, reinforcing the civic and interfaith dimensions of RME.

Campus culture programming falls somewhere in the middle on both usage and effectiveness. While less prevalent than IRE courses, initiatives such as ideological strengthening through contextual delivery and critical thinking, as reported by Kosim et al. (2025), have maintained IRE's relevance amid technological and cultural disruption. Furthermore, universities such as Universitas Gadjah Mada and Universitas Syiah Kuala have pioneered strategies to prevent radicalism through extracurricular activities, public lectures, and counter-narrative campaigns (Arifin et al., 2025). These cultural strategies complement curricular efforts by embedding moderation values in lived campus experiences, although their success often hinges on institutional culture and student participation levels.

Taken together, the evidence suggests that content breadth correlates strongly with perceived strategy effectiveness, particularly in integrated and experiential learning models. While traditional IRE courses remain dominant, they lack the transformative potential of broader, cross-curricular and cultural interventions. However, challenges persist, as resource constraints, digital inequality, and facilitator readiness continue to limit implementation fidelity in some contexts (Amirudin et al., 2025). Future programming should therefore prioritise capacity building, institutional support, and hybrid delivery models to ensure the promise of RME is fully realised across Indonesia's diverse educational landscape.
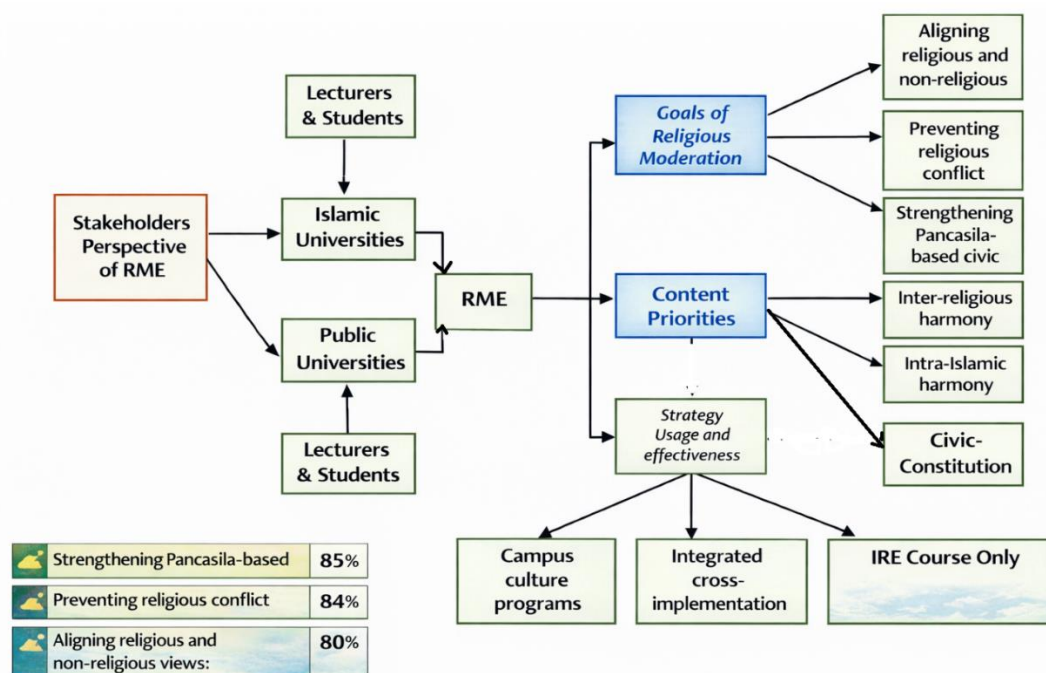
Figure 2. Framework of RME in Higher Education

This study contributes a more nuanced understanding of RME implementation by revealing how strategy effectiveness is significantly shaped by content integration and institutional context. Unlike prior research that often focused on single-course delivery or case-based innovations, our findings provide comparative evidence that integrated and culture-based approaches offer greater transformative potential, especially when aligned with interfaith and civic learning objectives. The added value of this research lies in its simultaneous mapping of usage patterns and effectiveness perceptions across stakeholder groups, thus bridging the gap between normative aspirations and practical realities. It reinforces the view that RME success depends not only on pedagogical design but also on systemic support, capacity development, and cross-sector collaboration to move beyond symbolic inclusion toward sustainable, whole-of-campus implementation.

4. Implications for Design, Equity, and National Unity

The convergence between goals, content, and strategy effectiveness highlights a coherent design logic for future RME initiatives. The positive correlation between content breadth and perceived strategy effectiveness suggests that expanding content to include interfaith and civic components enhances the impact of delivery strategies. This supports the argument for a whole-of-curriculum approach, wherein religious moderation is mainstreamed across academic and cultural domains (Jakovljevic et al., 2024; Mulyana, 2023).

In addition, the explicit inclusion of both religious and non-religious perspectives contributes to equity and cohesion. By addressing not only the symptoms of polarisation but also its structural causes, RME becomes a civic glue that unites diverse constituencies under a shared normative framework. The embedding of Pancasila as a civic reference point provides both ideological coherence and political legitimacy to the broader RME project.

5. Significance

This study contributes to the growing body of evidence supporting integrated models of RME and offers a data-driven framework for policy and institutional design. At the theoretical level, the goals–content–strategy framework advances scholarship in RME and religious education by offering a transferable conceptual lens for analysing how religious identity formation, civic education, and institutional practice intersect in plural societies. The triadic structure also provides a portable tool for institutional audits, enabling universities to assess and enhance their RME provision.

6. Limitations

Certain limitations should be acknowledged. The cross-sectional design restricts causal inference, and self-reported measures may introduce bias. Expanding the sample to include a broader range of institutional types and regions would improve generalizability. Future research should incorporate longitudinal designs and classroom-based observations to triangulate findings and assess long-term impacts. In addition, the study is

subject to potential social desirability bias. Given that the survey addressed normatively charged topics such as Pancasila, religious moderation, and radicalism, the very high levels of agreement reported may partly reflect respondents' tendencies to provide socially acceptable or institutionally aligned responses rather than purely personal evaluations. Although anonymity was ensured and neutral wording was used to reduce evaluative pressure, such bias cannot be fully eliminated in survey research on sensitive civic and religious issues. This limitation should be considered when interpreting the magnitude of endorsement reported in the results.

Conclusion

This study concludes that stakeholders broadly endorse RME in Indonesian higher education, and a triadic framework of goals, content, and strategies should guide its systemic advancement. Beyond its practical utility, this framework also represents a conceptual contribution by integrating normative aims, curricular domains, and delivery mechanisms into a coherent analytical model for understanding religious moderation education. First, the findings reveal strong consensus in support of RME's intended goals, with over 80% of respondents endorsing its role in bridging religious and non-religious perspectives, preventing radicalism, and reinforcing Pancasila-based civic identity. Second, the prioritisation of content areas indicates that inter-religious harmony (M = 4.35), civic-constitutional values (M = 4.28), and intra-Islamic harmony (M = 4.12) are all perceived as essential, suggesting that integrating content across these domains may yield significant gains when embedded in the curriculum and campus life. Third, a comparative analysis of strategy usage and perceived effectiveness shows a notable mismatch: while IRE courses are most widely used (68%), they are rated the least effective (M = 3.65), whereas integrated curricula (M = 4.32) and campus culture programming (M = 4.05) are considered more impactful despite being underutilised. These quantitative insights, reinforced by supporting literature, highlight that broader content coverage correlates positively with strategy effectiveness and that scaling up integrated and experiential approaches is essential for realising the transformative potential of RME. Collectively, these results affirm the need to institutionalise RME beyond isolated courses and to mainstream it through pedagogical innovation, cultural programming, and policy alignment to foster cohesive, pluralistic citizenship education in Indonesia. Conceptually, the findings demonstrate how religious education can be examined as a system-level interaction between goals, content, and strategies, rather than as discrete curricular interventions.

Declarations

Muhamad Fauzi conceptualised the research design, coordinated data collection, and led the drafting of the manuscript. Faisal contributed to instrument development, supervised data validation processes, and reviewed the manuscript critically for intellectual content. Jumhur assisted with data analysis and interpretation, particularly statistical modelling and cross-tabulation. Hilmy Baihaqy supported the literature review and contributed to framing the discussion within regional and global discourses on religious moderation. Anis Malik Thoha

provided theoretical insights and contextualised policy, particularly regarding the integration of civic-constitutional values in Islamic higher education. Muhammad Jhoni facilitated institutional access, contributed to methodological refinement, and coordinated fieldwork across university sites. Alfauzan Amin contributed to the synthesis of findings, ensured alignment with current curriculum policy debates, and assisted with final manuscript editing. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

Data availability statement

The survey dataset generated and analysed in this study (N = 500) contains indirect identifiers and is therefore not publicly available to protect participant privacy. De-identified data, the questionnaire, and a variable codebook are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request and subject to a data-sharing agreement. Aggregated results and summary tables are included in the article.

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Declaration of Interests Statement

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

Additional Information

Ethics and consent. The study adhered to institutional ethical guidelines at the authors' universities. All participants provided electronic informed consent prior to participation; no personally identifying information beyond minimal demographics was collected, and responses were stored on secure drives with access limited to the research team.

Role of the funder. The funding body had no role in the study design, data collection, data analysis and interpretation, writing of the article, or the decision to submit the article for publication. Author contributions. All authors contributed to study conceptualisation, instrument development, data curation and analysis, and manuscript drafting and critical revision, and all approved the final version for submission. Correspondence. Requests for materials and data should be addressed to the corresponding author at muhamadfauzi_uin@radenfatah.ac.id

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