

Integration of Wasathiyah Values in Islamic Education: Policy Analysis, Pedagogy, and Contemporary Implementation

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Abstract

This article explores the integration of Wasathiyah values in Islamic education in Indonesia, focusing on how these principles are embedded in national policy, curriculum design, pedagogical practice, and institutional culture. Wasathiyah grounded in the values of tawasuth (moderation), tasamuh (tolerance), tawazun (balance), and i'tidal (justice) has become a central framework promoted by the Ministry of Religious Affairs as part of its national priority agenda on religious moderation. Through a structured literature review, this study analyzes official curriculum documents, government policies, Islamic education textbooks, and empirical findings from pesantren. The analysis reveals that Wasathiyah is operationalized not only as a normative concept but also as a practical educational foundation reflected in learning competencies, character-building programs, and classroom learning strategies. In pesantren, the integration of Wasathiyah is characterized by a holistic model combining spiritual formation, communal traditions, local culture, and interactive learning. Despite these developments, several challenges persist, including limited teacher capacity, traditional lecture-dominated learning, institutional resistance, and the rise of digital extremism among youth. This study argues that strengthening Wasathiyah-based education requires a comprehensive roadmap emphasizing pedagogical innovation, digital literacy, multicultural learning, and professional development for teachers. Ultimately, Wasathiyah-based Islamic education has the potential to serve

as a transformative force in shaping inclusive, tolerant, and socially responsible Muslim communities in contemporary Indonesia.

Keywords: *Wasathiyah, Islamic Education, Religious Moderation, Curriculum, Pedagogy.*

Introduction

The concept of *wasathiyah* in islam constitutes a fundamental theological and ethical basis, not merely a temporary political term. Etymologically defines *wasathan* an *sawa'un*, which means the middle ground between two extreme limits, or as justice (i'tidal). *Wasathiyah* is also interpreted as a (excessiveness/extremism) and *tafrith* (negligence or deficiency)(Al-Asfahaniy 2009). Thus definition positions *wasathiyah* as the ideal stance that upholds justice and balance. In the context of conduct and morals (ahklaq), islam establishes a moderate ethical standard, situated between the attitude of idealists(who regard humans as angels, thereby establishing unattainable ethical values) and realists (who regard humans as animal, thereby desiring behavior inappropriate for human dignity)(Ibnu 'Asyur 1984). *Wasathiyah* functions as a pillar of anti extremism ethics, ensuring that muslims maintain balance (*tawazun*) between the spiritual dimension and social reality (Akhtar 2022; Nugroho, 2025).

The terminology *wasath* and its derivatives are mentioned three times in the Qur'an: surah Al-Baqarah verses 143 and 238, and surah Al - Qalam verse 48. Based on the review of classical literature, as explained by Al-Asfahaniy, these meanings consistently refer to the middle position (*sawa'un*) or justice, establishing it as a standard moral benchmark in islam(Al-Asfahaniy 2009). Ethically *wasathiyah* acts as a vital moral filter, protecting the community from the practices of *ifrath*(extremism or excess) and *tafrith* (negligence or trivialization of religious teaching)(Ibnu 'Asyur 1984). This balance ensures that religious practice is neither an excessive burden nor a trivialized matter, resulting in a just and sustainable middle path(Nurhadi 2023; Nugroho, 2025).

The primary objective of establishing the *wasathiyah* position has profound practical consequences: It enables the muslim community to undertake the role as a witness(*syahadah*) over the deeds of all humankind (Al-Muhafidz 2022). This middle position provides the unique advantage of the ability to witness objectively, and this role of testimony can only be correctly executed if the community adopts the prophet Muhammad as the perfect role model (*uswah hasanah*) in every conduct and action. Although *wasathiyah* is literally translated as moderation, it is essential to

distinguish it from the partial terms emerging in contemporary discourse. Historically, in Islamic scholarship, terms such as ‘moderate islam’ ‘arab islam’, liberal islam’ or ‘Nusantara islam’ are not recognized. Scholars maintain that islam is a single divine religion revealed by Allah (SWT) to the prophet Muhammad for a universal mission of peace (AlMuhafidz 2022).

The use of partial terms such as moderate islam or progressive islam risks reducing the universal majesty of islam(Ibnu ‘Asyur 1984). Muslim scholars argue that islam is fundamentally one divine religion, and that use of additional labels is feared to discredit the fundamental nature of islam itself (Ibnu ‘Asyur 1984). Wasathiyah differs from these labels because it is not merely an ideological or political choice that can be categorized by location(e.g., ‘Islam Nusantara) or tendency (e.g., liberal islam). Instead wasathiyah is positioned as the essence, a characteristic inherently embedded in the understanding that there are various “versions” of islam, whereas the intended meaning is a single religion possessing an integral and balanced methodology (manhaj). This concern arises from the fear that these additional terms might indirectly reduce the genuine concept of islam, which should intrinsically all values of moderation (Ibnu ‘Asyur 1984).

The importance of preserving the uniqueness of the wasathiyah terminology lies in its function as a concept that encompasses all aspects of goodness(Ahmad and Shunhaji 2021). Therefore, wasathiyah rejects all forms of labels that restrict its universality, establishing it as the standard benchmark to be followed in religious practice (Ibnu ‘Asyur 1984). Wasathiyah is viewed not merely as an attitude, but as a methodology (manhaj) that serves as the criterion for the correctness of attitudes and actions(Al-Asfahaniy 2009). In this context, manhaj wasathiyah is a pattern of thought and behavior that keeps the muslim community on the middle path, avoiding two dangerous extreme poles.

This manhaj wasathiyah is relevant as a response to the thought of extremist ideologies that can trigger intercommunity divisions (Nurhadi 2023). Through the education sector, this methodology seeks to prevent and halt the spread of such extremist teaching among students (Nurhadi 2023). Therefore, wasathiyah operates as an epistemological filter, ensuring that religious understanding is always just (I’tidal), standard (sawa’un) and middle-ground, as defined by Al-Asfahaniy, making it the only accountable method in practicing islam(Al-Asfahaniy 2009). The main theological foundation of wasathiyah is the designation of the Muslim community as ummatan

washatiah(the middle nation) in the Qur'an, surah Al-Baqarah verse 143 (Al-Muhafidz 2022). This verse establishes the universal for the muslim community and provides clear religious authority for the concept of moderation. Being designated as the middle nation has deep and multidimensional functionalities. Thus wasathiyah is not merely encouraged, but constitutes a binding religious mandate (manhaj) for every muslim. It is a theology identity that must be reflected in education, morals, and social interaction so that the universal mission of islam can be achieved peacefully.

In the realm of morals and behavior, wasathiyah is the manifestation of the moderate methodology (manhaj) in setting ethical standards(Al-Asfahaniy 2009). Islam establishes ethical values that balance between the two extreme views on human nature: the idealist view and the realist view. Idealists imagine humans are like angels (pure goodness), thereby establishing ethical values that are naturally unattainable (Ibnu 'Asyur 1984). This group is overly optimistic about human nature, considering it untainted pure goodness. Conversely, realists regard humans as animals, thereby justifying behaviors unworthy of human dignity (Ibnu 'Asyur 1984). This approach ignores the spiritual and moral dimension that differentiates humans from other creatures, thus tending to reduce ethical values (Ibnu 'Asyur 1984).

Wasathiyah assumes the middle position, acknowledging the existence of fitrah(potential for goodness) within humans, but also recognizing that the morals taught by islam are noble, ye remain realistic and practically applicable to morals in daily life (Ibnu demonstrating islam's moderate approach to morals and behavior (Ibnu 'Asyur 1984). Islamic education adopting wasathiyah targets the formation of a balanced and harmonious character, capable of appreciating differences and avoiding extremism (Akhtar 2022). Aligning with the general goals of Islamic education to form faithful, pious, and moral upright individuals(Azhari and Mustapa 2021). In the framework of national policy, specifically those mainstreamed by the ministry of religious affairs(kemenag), wasathiyah is operationalized through four core values explicitly integrated into the religious education curriculum (Afida 2024). These values serve as the primary pillars that translate the theological concept into practical guidance for character education (Nurhadi 2023).

Tawasuth (The Middle Path/Moderation) this central value demands an attitude of neither excess (ifrath) nor negligence (tafrith). In educational practice, tawasuth means rejecting both rigid dogmatism and extreme secularism, seeking a practical and relevant point of balance in Indonesia's

diverse social life (Afida 2024). Tasamuh (Tolerance) this concept surpasses passive tolerance; it involves active appreciation for differences in beliefs, religious expression and cultural background (Afida 2024). In the key to building social harmony within Indonesia's pluralistic society (Akhtar 2022). Tawazun (Balance) this value mandates equilibrium across various dimensions: spiritually, balancing the right of Allah (ritual dimensions) and the rights of humans (social/transactional dimension); and intellectually, balancing textual authority (naql) and reason (aql)(Afida 2024). I'tidal(Justice) this is the attitude of being straight and fair, inquiring muslims to place everything in its proper context, especially socially.

The application of I'tidal in PAI is realized through emphasis on social justice and responsibility, as exemplified in fiqh discussions on the application and wisdom of zakat in community life. To address these research objectives and provide a comprehensive analysis of wasathiyah integration, the following section details the methodology employed in this study. The research employs a qualitative approach utilizing a systematic literature review and document to examine the integration of wasathiyah values (moderate Islam) within Islamic education, specifically through analyzing policy, pedagogy, and institutional culture. Methodologically, the study involved a rigorous review of national policy documents, such as the 2013 PAI curriculum and the ministry of religious affairs' strategic plan (renstra), aiming to map how core wasathiyah values (tawasuth, tasamuh,tawazun, and I'tidal) are explicitly mainstreamed into curriculum structures basic competencies, and learning indicators.

Furthermore, the study conducted institutional case analyses in non-formal Islamic educational settings, notably *pesantrens*, to understand practical implementation, identify effective pedagogical models (like problem-based learning and reflective journaling), and document key implementation challenges, including teacher capacity and the pervasive risk of digital extremism.

Discussion

The Indonesian government, through the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kemenag), has elevated Wasathiyah—conceptualized as religious moderation—into a national policy priority. The strengthening of religious moderation has been formally designated as one of Kemenag's seven strategic programs in the national Strategic Plan (Renstra) (Afida 2024). This policy signals a shift

from doctrinal religious transmission toward character education grounded in inclusiveness, justice, and anti-extremism. By embedding Wasathiyah into national planning documents, the government affirms the central role of Islamic education as a safeguard against radicalism and intolerance (Afida 2024; Nugroho, 2024).

This policy mandate is operationalized through cross-ministerial coordination, especially between Kemenag and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek), ensuring that religious moderation is implemented across both madrasah and public schools (Kemenag) and Kemendikbudristek 2025). Since 2019, Kemenag has systematically formulated Core Competencies (KI) and Basic Competencies (KD) aimed at shaping spiritual attitudes (KI-1) and social attitudes (KI-2) that are explicitly inclusive and moderate. These competencies mark a purposeful redirection of PAI learning objectives at every educational level. Implementation also includes teacher training, the development of thematic moderation modules, and the preparation of teaching materials that emphasize inclusiveness and humanistic Islamic values (Afida 2024; Nugroho, 2019).

These technical steps ensure that national policy can be translated into classroom practices. Reviews of national policy documents—including the 2013 PAI Curriculum and the Kemenag Renstra—show that Wasathiyah values (*tawasuth*, *tasamuh*, *tawazun*, and *i'tidal*) have been thoroughly embedded in curriculum structures, KD formulations, and learning indicators (Afida 2024). In practice, KI-1 and KI-2 place strong emphasis on religious practice, empathy, tolerance, and social responsibility, which are then articulated in lesson plans (RPP) prepared by teachers (Afida 2024; Nugroho, 2023). This ensures that moderate attitudes become measurable learning outcomes, not merely supplementary ideals. Analysis of updated Kemenag PAI textbooks shows a philosophical shift in content: *Aqidah*, *Akhlak*, *Fiqh*, and *SKI* materials now highlight justice, humanity, diversity, and anti-violence principles (Afida 2024). This reflects a systematic transition from ritual-centric education toward contextual religious understanding suitable for pluralistic societies. For example, *Akhlak* chapters introduce concepts such as tolerance, empathy, and anti-violence within concrete social situations, aligning with humanizing education (Turmuzi 2021).

The curriculum also mandates pedagogical reform, shifting from verbalistic teaching to participatory and reflective methods like problem-based learning and journal writing to cultivate co-

existence experiences (Afida 2024). Mapping Wasathiyah into KD across Aqidah, Fiqh, SKI, and Akhlak ensures that each discipline contributes structurally to shaping moderate, socially responsible learners (Afida 2024).

Educational level	PAI subject	Basic Competency (KD)	Integrated Wasathiyah Value
Junior high (Class VIII)	<i>Akidah Akhlak</i>	Emulating the praiseworthy traits of the prophets	Tawasuth (Moral Balance)
Senior High (Class X)	<i>Fiqh</i>	Applying <i>zakat</i> law and its wisdom in social life .	I'tidal (Social Justice)
Junior High (Class IX)	Islamic Cultural	Understanding the role of <i>ulama</i> in spreading islam in the archipelago.	Tasamuh (Tolerance) cultural appreciation.
	History (SKI)		
Senior High (Class XI)	<i>Akhlak</i>	Demonstrating mutual respect among religious adherents in daily interaction.	Anti-extremism pluralism respect.

In the Grade VIII Akidah Akhlak curriculum, the Basic Competency (KD) emphasizes emulating prophetic character, which directly reflects the value of Tawasuth (moderation/balance) and noble character (akhlak mulia) (Afida 2024). This competency guides students toward balanced moral behavior—avoiding extremes, communicating respectfully, and demonstrating openness to differing opinions, criticisms, and perspectives, thereby cultivating tolerance in social interactions (Salsabila and Hosna 2025). In Grade X Fiqh, the KD requires students to apply zakat law and understand its underlying social wisdom (Afida 2024). This establishes a clear connection to I'tidal (justice), highlighting socio-economic solidarity, communal responsibility, and the ethical dimension of Islamic jurisprudence. Through this, students comprehend religious law not merely as a ritual obligation but as a mechanism promoting fairness and social welfare (Afida 2024). The Grade IX Islamic Cultural History (SKI) curriculum emphasizes the peaceful spread of Islam in the Indonesian Archipelago through the role of ulama(Afida 2024). This historical narrative instills Tasamuh

(tolerance) by demonstrating how Islam integrated harmoniously with diverse cultural traditions. It reinforces the Wasathiyah framework as a lived historical process rooted in dialogue, adaptability, and non-coercive propagation. For Grade XI Akhlak, the KD focuses on respectful interaction among religious communities, operationalizing Tasamuh in daily life (Afida 2024). This embeds pluralism appreciation and anti-extremism as measurable competencies, ensuring that learners develop ethical social behavior aligned with peaceful coexistence.

The successful integration of these values requires a pedagogical shift from traditional, verbalistic instruction toward participatory and reflective methods (Afida 2024). Problem-Based Learning (PBL) is emphasized as a key approach, using real cases of social tension to train students in applying Tawasuth and Tasamuh to contemporary ethical dilemmas. This approach transforms Wasathiyah from abstract doctrine into practical reasoning skills embedded in daily life. Journaling is also encouraged as a reflective tool to support effective internalization of moderate attitudes (Afida 2024). However, implementation challenges persist. Many PAI teachers lack sufficient training to apply participatory pedagogy, often reverting to dogmatic methods (Salsabila and Hosna 2025). This limits the effectiveness of curriculum reforms, as teacher competency is central to shaping moderate student character (Umam 2024).

Insights from pesantren offer scalable models for addressing these gaps. Pesantren practices integrate intellectual instruction, communal activities, spiritual discipline, and ethical habituation into a unified framework (Saihu 2021). These models demonstrate the practical realization of Wasathiyah and provide valuable strategies for strengthening its implementation in formal education. At Pesantren Sains Tebuireng Jombang, the integration of Tawassuth is realized through the alignment of the formal Islamic curriculum with local cultural practices (Salsabila and Hosna 2025). Qur'anic values are contextualized with contemporary issues so that Islamic teachings remain relevant in a modernizing society (Anwarudin 2020).

Tawassuth is internalized through structured repetitive activities daily prayers and Qur'an recitation, weekly tahlil and communal work, and monthly tomb visits and public discussions—creating a consistent habituation process that transforms Wasathiyah from abstract values into lived experiences (Salsabila and Hosna 2025; Nugroho, 2025). Integrated PAI instruction links theoretical learning in madrasah diniyah with real-life community practices, forming a balance between spiritual

depth and social participation. In Akidah Akhlak, the cultivation of Tawassuth specifically targets interpersonal character formation such as openness, dialogue, and tolerance, indicating measurable behavioral outcomes rather than purely cognitive learning (Salsabila and Hosna 2025). This illustrates that embedding moderation in curriculum and culture produces a responsive, adaptive educational model aligned with globalization challenges (Salsabila and Hosna 2025; Nugroho, 2025).

Similarly, Pondok Pesantren Nurul Yaqin Pringsewu applies a comprehensive pedagogy integrating cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions (Umam 2024). Its curriculum balances classical Islamic sciences such as Tafsir Jalalain and Bulughul Maram with modern subjects like science, geography, and history, thereby sustaining Tawazun between tradition and modernity. This balance also extends to intellectual mastery, moral formation, environmental awareness, spirituality, and social responsibility (Umam 2024). To nurture Tasamuh, the pesantren incorporates Sociology and Anthropology, enabling students to appreciate cultural diversity and engage in constructive cross-cultural dialogue (Umam 2024). Beyond Kemenag's four core values, Nurul Yaqin emphasizes Syura (consultation), Islah (reform), Aulawiyah (prioritization), and Tatawwur wa Ibtikar (innovation), including technology-based learning. Pedagogy is practical and interactive, using discussions, direct practice, and community projects; contextual fiqh instruction enables students to apply Islamic teachings responsibly within pluralistic contexts (Umam 2024).

Although these models illustrate effective Wasathiyah operationalization, several challenges persist. One major concern is that formal religious education, when delivered dogmatically, may fail to foster multicultural competence and may even justify conflict (Yunus and Salim 2018). Social tensions rooted in non-religious issues may become intensified when framed as religious duties, making resolution more difficult. This dual potential of religion to unify or divide requires that Wasathiyah-based curricula consistently highlight humanistic and anti-violence values (Afida 2024). Failures in multicultural education often stem from rigid, textual teaching that is detached from daily realities, producing exclusivist tendencies and intolerance (Yunus and Salim 2018). Therefore, contextual, empathetic, socially grounded instruction is essential to prevent conflict escalation.

Internal barriers also challenge Wasathiyah implementation. Many traditional institutions struggle to reconcile Stuart's heritage with modern educational demands, requiring systematic methodological adjustments (Umam 2024). Teacher competency is a critical factor: numerous PAI

teachers lack training in reflective, technology-based pedagogies, leading them to revert to dogmatic instruction that undermines moderation goals (Salsabila and Hosna 2025). Student diversity further complicates character formation, as differences in background and comprehension affect value internalization (Salsabila and Hosna 2025). Digital exposure intensifies the challenge: social media frequently disseminates extremist content, necessitating stronger digital literacy-based moderation efforts (Zulkhairi 2023). Rapid information flow demands adaptive models such as blended learning and flipped classrooms, provided the content remains moderate and contextual (Habibullah 2025). Teaching materials must stay aligned with contemporary realities, ensuring Qur'anic values remain relevant (Anwarudin 2020). Continuous evaluation is crucial to assess cognitive outcomes, teaching quality, curriculum alignment, and the learning environment (Habibullah 2025). Establishing safe, non-judgmental discussion spaces is equally important for cultivating dialogical, moderate attitudes.

Conclusion

The integration of Wasathiyah values into Islamic education in Indonesia indicates that religious moderation is no longer merely understood as a theological concept, but has developed into a structured policy foundation, curriculum, and institutional practice. The four pillars of Wasathiyah *tawasuth*, *tasamuh*, *tawazun*, and *i'tidal* have been explicitly implemented in the PAI Curriculum through the formulation of Basic Competencies (KD), the adjustment of teaching materials, and the strengthening of students' spiritual and social character. Findings from various *pesantren* case studies demonstrate that a comprehensive approach which integrates formal instruction, habituation, local cultural context, social involvement, and reflective activities is more effective in sustainably forming moderate attitudes compared to approaches focusing only on the cognitive aspect. This integrated implementation model successfully internalizes Wasathiyah values through repeated habituation. Nevertheless, the application of Wasathiyah values still faces various structural and pedagogical constraints, particularly related to the limited competency of teachers, the dominant tendency of teaching being verbalistic, the lack of acceptance toward multicultural approaches, and the strong influence of extremist narratives in the digital space. The significant gap between the policy direction at the central (macro) level and its execution at the educational unit (micro) level is also a major inhibiting factor in achieving optimal religious moderation.

To secure and optimize the internalization of Wasathiyah values as the foundation of Islamic education in the future, a strategic roadmap focusing on four key areas is required: The primary priority must be placed on the Strengthening of Educator Capacity through compulsory in-service training programs focused on reflective and participatory pedagogies (such as problem-based learning and conflict case studies). This training must specifically cover teachers' ability to integrate social science perspectives (Sociology and Anthropology) to foster deep pluralism awareness and mitigate the potential for rigid dogmatism. Standardization of Integrated Implementation is necessary by developing and mandating community-based co-curricular modules for all formal schools and madrasahs. This strategy must emulate the effective hidden curriculum model in pesantrens, including the implementation of social service activities (ro'an) and structured discussions (muhadharah) to instill Tawassuth practically, connecting Qur'anic teachings with the realities of contemporary development. Mitigation of Digital Extremism Risk must be integrated as a compulsory digital literacy module within PAI at all educational levels. This module should focus on information filtering, social media ethics, and emphasizing the value of Aulawiyah (prioritization) in filtering post-truth narratives. This strategy must be supported by the formation of safe discussion forums (safe spaces) so students can build an understanding of moderation through open dialogue. Policy Support and Continuous Evaluation must be mandatorily applied. A mechanism for evaluating the PAI curriculum that focuses on students' affective outcomes and social behavior (attitudes of tolerance, empathy) in addition to cognitive assessment needs to be established. The Ministry of Religious Affairs must encourage stronger collaboration with external institutions (ngos, cultural figures) to strengthen cross-cultural understanding and ensure the cyclical refinement of PAI learning strategies. With these measurable steps, Islamic education has the potential to become a vehicle for social transformation that reinforces the values of harmony, justice, and rejection of extremism in facing the dynamics of contemporary society.

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