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**Implementation Strategies of Mosque-Based Religious Moderation
Pioneers in Fostering Social and Religious Harmony**

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Abstrak

Dalam beberapa tahun terakhir, isu moderasi beragama menjadi perhatian utama dalam diskursus keagamaan nasional, seiring meningkatnya polarisasi sosial dan penyebaran paham keagamaan ekstrem yang berpotensi mengancam kohesi sosial. Masjid, sebagai institusi keagamaan yang dekat dengan masyarakat, memiliki potensi besar untuk menjadi agen penyebar nilai-nilai Islam *wasathiyah* (moderat) yang inklusif dan damai. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis strategi implementasi program Masjid Pelopor Moderasi Beragama (MPMB) di Aceh dalam membangun harmoni sosial dan keagamaan lintas komunitas. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus fenomenologis, penelitian ini dilakukan pada tiga lokasi representatif: Masjid Istiqamah Benuaraja Aceh Tamiang, Masjid MAN 1 Aceh Tenggara, dan Masjid Kampus UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan analisis dokumen untuk menggali pengalaman dan pemaknaan para aktor terhadap praktik moderasi beragama di masing-masing konteks. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa masing-masing masjid mengembangkan strategi yang kontekstual dan berbasis pada karakter komunitasnya. Masjid Benuaraja menekankan pendekatan komunitas dan kearifan lokal, Masjid MAN 1 mengintegrasikan pendidikan keagamaan moderat dalam kurikulum formal, sementara Masjid Kampus UIN mengembangkan dakwah digital berbasis kampus. Ketiganya memiliki benang merah dalam menginternalisasi nilai Islam *wasathiyah*



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seperti toleransi, keadilan, dan keseimbangan. Namun, implementasi program MPMB masih menghadapi sejumlah tantangan, antara lain rendahnya literasi konseptual tentang moderasi beragama, keterbatasan SDM dan anggaran, belum tersedianya modul pelatihan standar, serta tidak adanya sistem monitoring dan evaluasi yang terukur. Secara teoretis, temuan ini berimplikasi pada penguatan kajian kelembagaan keagamaan dalam perspektif studi Islam kontemporer, khususnya dalam pengembangan model masjid sebagai pusat pendidikan moderasi berbasis komunitas. Secara praktis, hasil penelitian ini dapat menjadi dasar bagi penyusunan kebijakan dan kurikulum pelatihan moderasi beragama yang lebih sistematis dan kontekstual di lingkungan masjid.

Kata Kunci: *Moderasi Beragama, Masjid Pelopor, Strategi Dakwah, Harmoni Sosial*

Abstract

In recent years, the issue of religious moderation has become a central concern in national religious discourse, along with increasing social polarization and the spread of extremist ideologies that potentially threaten social cohesion. Mosques, as religious institutions deeply rooted in community life, possess significant potential to serve as agents in promoting *wasathiyah* (moderate) Islamic values. This study aims to explore the lived experiences, perceptions, and meaning-making processes of mosque stakeholders as they implement the Masjid Pelopor Moderasi Beragama (MPMB) program in Aceh to foster social and interreligious harmony. Employing a qualitative approach with a phenomenological case study design, this research was conducted in three representative settings: Istiqamah Benuaraja Mosque in Aceh Tamiang, MAN 1 Mosque in Aceh Tenggara, and the Campus Mosque of UIN Ar-Raniry in Banda Aceh. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis to uncover the subjective experiences and contextual interpretations of imams, mosque administrators, educators, and community members. The findings reveal that each mosque developed contextual strategies grounded in its experiential understanding of local community dynamics. Participants emphasized community-based approaches rooted in local wisdom, the integration of moderate religious values into formal education, and the development of digital campus-based da'wah. Despite these efforts, challenges persist, including limited conceptual literacy about religious moderation, insufficient human resources and funding, the absence of standardized training modules, and weak monitoring and evaluation systems. Theoretically, this study contributes to expanding phenomenological insights into institutional religious practices within contemporary Islamic scholarship. In practice, the findings provide a grounded basis for developing policies and training curricula on religious moderation that are more systematic and responsive to the real experiences of mosque communities.

Keywords: *Mosque Pioneer, Preaching Strategy, Religious Moderation, Social Harmony*

INTRODUCTION

The mosque represents the oldest religious institution in Islamic civilization, serving a multidimensional role in the spiritual, social, and educational life of the Muslim community. In Acehese society, widely recognized for its strong Islamic identity, the mosque serves not merely as a place of worship but also as a center for strengthening public morality and fostering social harmony (Efendi, 2024; Nasution, 2018). However, over the past two decades, this strategic role has faced serious challenges due to the rise of transnational ideologies, the polarization of the Muslim community, and the emergence of exclusive religious narratives that often lead to intolerance.

This phenomenon raises significant concern, particularly given national data indicating that Aceh once recorded the lowest interreligious harmony index in Indonesia in 2019 (Redaksi Analisa Aceh, 2019). Such a condition underscores the urgency of revitalizing the mosque's role so that it does not become a source of social segregation, but rather a locus of reconciliation and community development grounded in civility. In response to this issue, the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs launched the Masjid Pelopor Moderasi Beragama (MPMB) or Mosque for Religious Moderation Initiative, which aims to establish mosques as centers for disseminating the values of Islam *Wasathiyah*, an Islamic paradigm emphasizing balance, justice, tolerance, and equality (Helmy et al., 2021).

Nevertheless, the implementation of this program has yet to reach an optimal level. Several studies have identified limited understanding among mosque administrators regarding the concept of religious moderation, alongside constraints in human resources, training modules, and mentoring systems (Ristawati & Muhammad, 2023; Maizuddin et al., 2023). However, the current literature has focused mainly on conceptual frameworks and policy analyses. At the same time, empirical investigations of how mosque actors interpret, experience, and implement religious moderation across diverse social settings remain limited. This indicates a clear research gap between national policy expectations and grassroots-level religious practices.

In the era of digital transformation and the fifth industrial revolution (Industry 5.0), reimagining the role of the mosque has become an imperative. Mastery of

information technology by da'i (preachers) and imams is now one of the key determinants of effective religious communication among digital-native generations (Asman & Muhammad, 2022; Zuhriyah & Rohimah, 2024). Therefore, religious moderation in Aceh should not be perceived as a dilution of Islamic law, but rather as a sign of religious maturity in responding to the dynamics of contemporary life (Mufidah, 2017).

Given these gaps, the novelty of this study lies in its phenomenological case study approach, which uncovers the lived experiences, interpretive processes, and contextual strategies of mosque stakeholders as they implement the MPMB program across diverse institutional environments. This approach enables a deeper understanding of how moderation values are internalized, negotiated, and practiced within community-based, educational, and digital mosque ecosystems, an aspect that has not been sufficiently explored in previous studies.

Based on this background, the present study seeks to analyze strategies for implementing the MPMB program in Aceh by examining the practices and innovations of several representative mosques. The focus is on the efforts of mosques to promote social harmony through approaches that are adaptive to community characteristics and responsive to digital-era challenges. The findings of this research are expected to provide empirical contributions to the development of an institutional model for mosques as centers of religious moderation education in Indonesia.

METHODS

This study employs a descriptive, qualitative approach, using a phenomenological case study design, to explore how mosque actors experience and interpret the implementation of the Mosque as a Pioneer of Religious Moderation (MPMB) program in Aceh. The research adopts Heidegger's interpretative phenomenology, which emphasizes understanding participants' lived experiences and the meanings they construct in their social context. A case study framework complements this phenomenological orientation to situate these experiences within the institutional characteristics of selected mosques. Data were collected through participatory observation, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and document analysis of sermons, program reports, and digital publications. Research sites were selected purposively,

and informants included mosque imams, board members, community leaders, and representatives of the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

Data analysis followed the interpretative phenomenological analysis procedure, as outlined by Van Manen, including holistic immersion in the data, identification of significant experiential statements, interpretative reflection to uncover underlying meanings, and the synthesis of these meanings into thematic structures. These phenomenological themes were then integrated with the case study context to illustrate how meaning-making processes interact with institutional and community dynamics. The analytical process was strengthened using Miles and Huberman's interactive model, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing to ensure systematic interpretation. Research validity was maintained through triangulation, expert consultation, and member checking. A participatory approach was applied by engaging key stakeholders as reflective partners, ensuring that the resulting model of mosque-based religious moderation is contextually grounded, credible, and practically applicable.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study was conducted at three mosques that have implemented the Mosque as a Pioneer of Religious Moderation (MPMB) program in Aceh Province, namely Istiqamah Benuaraja Mosque in Aceh Tamiang Regency, the mosque within MAN 1 Aceh Tenggara, and the UIN Ar-Raniry Campus Mosque in Banda Aceh. These three locations were purposively selected to represent the social, cultural, and institutional diversity in the implementation of the MPMB program in Aceh. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation of religious activities, and document analysis. The findings indicate that the MPMB program's implementation strategies across these mosques are grounded in the spirit of transforming mosques from mere places of worship into centers of social, educational, and inclusive empowerment. Each mosque developed a distinct strategy according to its local context. At Istiqamah Benuaraja Mosque, a community-based approach became the primary focus. The mosque administrators involved youth organizations, religious counselors, and community leaders in moderation training and inter-group dialogues. This strategy effectively strengthened the mosque's role as a social mediator and an inclusive space for da'wah. These findings align with Asrori and

Mustaghfiri (2023), who emphasize that community-based cultural dialogue represents the most effective praxis of moderation at the grassroots level.

Conversely, the mosque at MAN 1 Aceh Tenggara implemented an educational institutional model through synergy among the madrasa, mosque administrators, and religious instructors. The values of moderation were integrated into teaching and learning activities, interfaith discussions, and students' religious guidance. The involvement of Islamic education teachers and other educators was crucial in cultivating moderate awareness among students. This approach resonates with Suraiya (2023), who asserts that the internalization of tolerance values within educational institutions reinforces the formation of a balanced and open religious character. Meanwhile, the UIN Ar-Raniry Campus Mosque in Banda Aceh developed a digital-campus model emphasizing technology-based da'wah. Social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and live streaming were utilized as channels for disseminating narratives of Islam *Wasathiyah* (moderate Islam). This approach effectively addressed the needs of younger generations, who are familiar with digital culture. As Mandala et al. (2024) point out, spreading the values of moderation must adapt to digital spaces to counter the tide of online extremism. However, despite its broad outreach, this model faced challenges in program sustainability and the shortage of skilled human resources in digital content production, as also noted by Abdul Fikri and Zahrotun Nisa (2024).

Nevertheless, findings from the three research sites reveal a common obstacle: low conceptual literacy regarding religious moderation among mosque administrators and congregants. Some still perceive moderation normatively, or even mistakenly, as a compromise of Sharia's principles. This phenomenon reinforces Akhmadi's (2019) observation that misconceptions about moderation remain a significant barrier to mainstreaming Islam *Wasathiyah* at the community level. The lack of training and the absence of standardized modules exacerbate this condition, as Hefni (2025) stresses the importance of technical instruments and measurable indicators to ensure the effectiveness of Rumah Moderasi (Moderation Houses).

Beyond conceptual challenges, structural weaknesses were also evident in the absence of standardized monitoring and evaluation systems. None of the three sites had measurable mechanisms to assess program outcomes, whether in improving

congregants' understanding, changing religious attitudes, or enhancing da'wah effectiveness. This finding aligns with Nur (2024) and Syaripudin et al. (2024), who highlight that the success of moderation programs depends heavily on the availability of continuous, data-based evaluation systems. Without clear indicators, religious moderation risks remaining at a symbolic level, failing to produce real, transformative impact in society.

Interestingly, the study also found that ulama dayah (traditional Islamic scholars) played a significant role in maintaining a balance between moderate values and local Islamic identity. In several MPMB activities, dayah scholars served as cultural interpreters of moderation through local wisdom concepts such as *tasammuh* (tolerance) and *tawāzun* (equilibrium). This supports Wahyudi's (2024) finding that ulama dayah function as cultural brokers, bridging Islamic values with Acehnese social realities. Their involvement has proven essential in strengthening public acceptance of moderate discourse and preventing ideological resistance.

Based on these comprehensive findings, it can be concluded that the implementation of the MPMB program in Aceh has developed into three primary models: community-based, educational-institutional, and digital-campus. These models reflect the flexibility of moderation approaches tailored to social contexts and available resources. The community model is most effective in regions with strong traditional social bases; the educational model fosters moderation early through formal schooling systems, while the digital model broadens the reach of da'wah in the technological era. However, the effectiveness of each model greatly depends on human resource readiness, institutional support, and a sustainable evaluation system.

Therefore, this research emphasizes that mosques hold strategic potential as centers for mainstreaming religious moderation, provided that programs are implemented through locally grounded approaches, tiered training, and synergy among ulama, educational institutions, and religious authorities. In addition to reinforcing the theoretical understanding of *wasathiyah* as a contextual and lived practice, these findings provide practical guidance for replicating the three MPMB models across diverse mosque settings, tailored to each mosque's institutional capacity and community structure. The results also underline important policy implications, including the need for standardized training modules, measurable

evaluation indicators, and strengthened collaboration between mosque administrators, educational institutions, and the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Supporting digital infrastructure and involving dayah scholars as cultural mediators will further enhance the scalability and sustainability of the MPMB program across Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the implementation of the Masjid Pelopor Moderasi Beragama (MPMB) program in Aceh emerges through three contextual models: community-based, educational-institutional, and digital-campus, each reflecting different pathways for internalizing *wasathiyah* values such as tolerance, balance, and justice. Theoretically, the findings expand the understanding of *wasathiyah* by positioning it as a lived institutional practice shaped by sociocultural dynamics rather than a purely normative concept. In practice, identifying these three models provides a replicable framework for strengthening mosque-based moderation initiatives. However, program effectiveness remains constrained by limited conceptual literacy, insufficient technical guidelines, weak monitoring systems, and uneven human resource capacity. These challenges indicate that the MPMB initiative is still in an early phase of institutional consolidation and requires structured, context-sensitive support to achieve maturity.

This research contributes to the academic discourse by demonstrating how moderation is negotiated through community engagement, educational processes, and digital outreach. Nonetheless, it acknowledges certain limitations, including restricted research sites, varying managerial capacities across mosques, and the evolving nature of digital da'wah. Based on the findings, theory-driven recommendations include developing standardized moderation guidelines, establishing measurable evaluation indicators, and strengthening collaboration among mosque administrators, educational institutions, dayah scholars, and the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Future research may employ mixed-methods designs, conduct longitudinal assessments, or explore the psychological and gendered dimensions of congregational responses to moderation. Strengthening mosques as centers of social harmony ultimately requires sustained capacity-building and

collaborative governance so that *wasathiyah* values are not only articulated but also embodied in everyday religious practice.

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