

**Revealing Religious Tolerance and Moderation in  
Upin & Ipin Series: A Visual Analysis**Fany Aulia Azahro<sup>1</sup>, Ocid Abdul Rosyid<sup>2</sup>, Rafila Kasamira Dewi Abrori<sup>3</sup>,  
Dewi Puspitasari<sup>4\*</sup><sup>1,4</sup>Universitas Islam Negeri K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan, <sup>2</sup>Madrasah  
Tsanawiyah Negeri 7 Kuningan, <sup>3</sup>Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 1 Pekalongan

\*e-mail: dewi.puspitasari@uingusdur.ac.id

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**Abstrak:** Film animasi anak memiliki peran penting dalam membentuk persepsi anak-anak terhadap nilai-nilai sosial dan budaya, termasuk toleransi, dan moderasi beragama. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah memahami bagaimana pesan tentang toleransi dan moderasi beragama dikomunikasikan melalui simbol-simbol, adegan, serta interaksi karakter pada film *Upin & Ipin*. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode analisis wacana visual untuk mengkaji representasi visual dalam film tersebut. Teknik analisis data melibatkan pengamatan terhadap adegan yang menampilkan interaksi antaragama, perayaan keagamaan, dan perilaku saling menghormati antar-karakter dengan latar belakang budaya dan agama berbeda. Setiap adegan dianalisis berdasarkan konteks visual dan naratif untuk mengidentifikasi pesan moderasi beragama. Data dianalisis menggunakan *descriptive coding* dan *thematic analysis* untuk menemukan pola penggambaran visual moderasi beragama. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa "*Upin & Ipin*" konsisten menampilkan nilai-nilai moderasi beragama melalui karakter yang harmonis dalam berpartisipasi dalam perayaan keagamaan. Pesan visual ini menekankan pentingnya saling menghormati dalam masyarakat multikultural. Implikasi dari penelitian ini adalah bahwa media anak, khususnya film kartun, dapat digunakan sebagai alat untuk mengajarkan nilai-nilai moderasi beragama dan toleransi sejak dini.

**Kata Kunci:** Pendidikan anak, Toleransi beragama, Moderasi beragama, Serial *Upin & Ipin*, Keberagaman budaya

**Abstract:** Children's animated films play an important role in shaping children's perceptions of social and cultural values, including tolerance and religious moderation. This study aimed to understand how messages about religious tolerance and moderation are communicated through symbols, scenes, and character interactions in the *Upin & Ipin* series. This study used a qualitative approach with a visual discourse analysis method to examine the visual representation in the series. The data analysis technique involved observing scenes that show interreligious interactions, religious celebrations, and respectful behavior between characters with different cultural and religious backgrounds. Each scene was analyzed based on the visual and narrative context to identify messages of religious moderation. Data were analyzed using *descriptive coding* and *thematic analysis* to find patterns of visual depictions of religious moderation. The results showed that *Upin & Ipin* series consistently displays the values of religious moderation through harmonious characters in participating in religious celebrations. This visual message emphasizes the importance of mutual respect in a

multicultural society. This study implies that children's media, especially cartoon film, can be used to teach the values of religious moderation and tolerance from an early age.

**Keywords:** *Children's education, Religious tolerance, Religious moderation, Upin & Ipin series, Cultural diversity*

## INTRODUCTION

Tolerance is a key value that encourages fairness, respect, and open-mindedness toward others, embracing differences in opinions, practices, race, religion, and ethnicity (Ismail, 2014). It's about understanding that diversity is part of life and that each person deserves to have their beliefs and values respected. In Islam, tolerance is closely tied to freedom of religion, ensuring that no one should be pressured to change their convictions (Hidayat & Basri, 2008). Haleem (2014) expands on this by explaining that tolerance isn't just about accepting differences but also involves a positive, active approach to acknowledging the rights of others as human beings. Tolerance can take two forms: passive tolerance, which is more about accepting differences, and active tolerance, which goes a step further to engage with and appreciate those differences, helping to build peaceful coexistence.

Religious moderation, known as '*al-wasathiya*', focuses on a balanced understanding and practising religious teachings, steering clear of extremes (Imarah, 2014). This balance is essential in creating harmony in a diverse society, promoting mutual respect and tolerance across religious and cultural groups. In today's fast-paced world, where extreme ideologies can quickly take hold, moderation is critical to preserving social cohesion. Groups that manipulate religious teachings for personal or political agendas often distort the peaceful and merciful values at the core of religion (Shihab, 2019).

A wonderful example of how media can promote these values is the popular animated series 'Upin & Ipin'. Through its storytelling, the series demonstrates harmonious relationships among families of different religious backgrounds, emphasizing the importance of tolerance and peaceful living. Drawing on Stuart Hall's representation theory (1997), 'Upin & Ipin' shows how media shapes our understanding of culture and diversity. It uses everyday situations to showcase respect for differences, making it easier for children to understand and internalize these values. Research supports this approach. For example, Khotimah et al. (2023) explored the role of short films in fostering teenagers' understanding of religious moderation, and Lestari et al. (2021) found similar results among younger children.

The impact of 'Upin & Ipin' on shaping children's understanding of tolerance is significant. The show depicts characters from diverse backgrounds interacting with respect and kindness, demonstrating how friendship and respect transcend cultural and religious

differences (Arafah et al., 2020). The simplicity and relatability of the language make it an appropriate tool for teaching young learners about tolerance.

The influence of media, particularly in shaping young minds, has long been recognized. Alfiani (2020) discovered that children regularly watch 'Upin & Ipin' often develop tolerance attitudes by mimicking the characters' positive behaviors. This highlights the important role media plays in instilling values of acceptance and respect at an early age. With guidance from parents and educators, series like 'Upin & Ipin' can be used as powerful tools to teach religious tolerance and appreciation for diversity in a way that is engaging and meaningful for children.

## **METHOD**

This study employed qualitative content analysis to examine specific episodes of *Upin & Ipin* that highlight religious and cultural diversity. According to Hsieh and Shannon (2005), qualitative content analysis is an appropriate method for interpreting and analyzing textual, visual, and audio data by identifying patterns and themes. We utilized visual analysis methods to explore scenes showcasing this diversity, focusing on colors, symbols, and cultural representations. For example, the strategic inclusion of various religious symbols within a single scene emphasizes the essence of a multicultural community. The episodes were selected based on their relevance to themes of diversity and tolerance, allowing us to gather rich qualitative data. A structured viewing guide was the primary instrument for data collection, ensuring consistency during the analysis. We conducted multiple viewings of each episode, utilizing note-taking to capture significant moments and themes, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the visual and narrative content.

Following the visual analysis, we employed thematic coding to categorize and interpret the visual elements identified. This analysis examined colors, symbols, and character interactions to understand their roles in illustrating various cultural and religious backgrounds. We also considered the social and cultural context of Malaysia, where the series is produced, interpreting how these elements reflect daily interactions among different ethnic and religious groups. Our findings suggest that *Upin & Ipin* appropriately uses visual storytelling to promote themes of diversity, educating young audiences about the benefits of cultural and religious acceptance. By presenting relatable characters and scenarios, the series not only entertains but fosters tolerance and empathy, making it a valuable tool for understanding the topic in a diverse world (Hidayat & Basri, 2008; Khotimah et al., 2023).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

The analysis of certain episodes from ‘Upin & Ipin’ highlights the theme of moderation through balanced, fair, and tolerant interactions between characters of diverse religious backgrounds. This moderation, which avoids extremes, fosters harmonious coexistence, respect for differences, and justice—core principles of religious and cultural moderation. The following points outline the main themes of the scenes depicted, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Points Outline Key Themes from the Illustrated Scenes

Points	Description
Balance and Fairness (Tawazun)	The episodes depict a balanced approach to religious and cultural diversity. For example, the concept of ‘Tawazun’ - balance and impartiality—is highlighted when non-Muslim characters like Uncle Muthu and Uncle Ah Tong join in Eid al-Fitr celebrations. This balance in how people interact despite their differences is a core value of moderation, which seeks to avoid extremes.
Respect for Diversity	The images show how characters from various religious backgrounds (Islam, Confucianism, Hinduism) live together harmoniously. This respect for differences aligns with the idea of moderation, which encourages tolerance and peaceful coexistence. In the Chinese New Year and Deepavali scenes, characters of different faiths participate in each other’s celebrations, symbolizing mutual respect and inclusiveness.
Justice and Non-Discrimination	In Picture 3, Atok distributes gifts to all children fairly, regardless of their religious beliefs. Justice is a key principle of moderation, emphasizing equal treatment and avoiding favoritism or discrimination, as supported by Islamic teachings of fairness (ihsan).
Mutual Cooperation and Charity	The scenes depicting Ramadhan (Picture 5) emphasize the value of giving and charity. Moderation here is seen in the idea that acts of kindness, like sharing food, should be performed for everyone, regardless of differences. This reinforces the principle of solidarity and caring for others, which are key tenets of moderation.
Moderate Religious Expression	The nasyid singing (Picture 6) to memorize Islamic months reflects a moderate religious approach, where music is used as a tool for learning without veering into extreme interpretations that might prohibit such practices. This balanced use of religious education tools illustrates a moderate understanding of religious teachings.

Visually, some scenes can be analyzed as follow:



Picture 1. Upin, Ipin, and Their Friends Gather to Celebrate Eid al-Fitr

In one episode of 'Upin & Ipin', Upin, Ipin, and their friends gather at Atok's house to celebrate Eid al-Fitr. Despite not all of them being Muslim, they attend the celebration of their friends with different beliefs, demonstrating mutual respect and tolerance (see picture 1).



Picture 2. Uncle Muthu and Others are Seen Visiting Atok's House and Bringing Gifts

In the Eid al-Fitr scene (see picture 2), Uncle Muthu, Uncle Ah Tong, Opah, and others are seen visiting Atok's house and bringing gifts, despite the fact that Uncle Muthu and Uncle Ah Tong are not Muslims. This moment reflects a significant gesture of acceptance and respect across religious differences. The scene can be analyzed through the lens of religious moderation, particularly the concept of *Tawazun*, which refers to balance in action and thought.

In this case, the depiction of Uncle Muthu and Uncle Ah Tong joining the Eid celebration represents not just an image of religious tolerance, but a broader message of cultural balance and mutual respect. By including characters from different religious backgrounds in a harmonious setting, *Upin & Ipin* communicates the importance of unity and shared values, even within a diverse society. This highlights how media can act as a powerful tool for promoting social cohesion and fostering understanding among different cultural and religious groups.

The scene thus underscores not only *Tawazun* but also the close-knit tolerance between communities, supporting the principles of religious moderation and balanced social relationships.



Picture 3. Atok Dahlang is Seen Distributing Gifts to Children

In the Eid al-Fitr scene (see picture 3), Atok Dahlang is seen distributing gifts to children, treating everyone fairly, including Jarjit, despite their different religious backgrounds. This act of justice reflects one of the key principles of religious moderation.



Picture 4. Upin, Ipin and Other Friends, Come Together to Celebrate Chinese New Year Celebration at Mei Mei's House

In the Chinese New Year celebration scene (see picture 4), characters like Upin, Ipin, Mail, Ehsan, Fizi, Mei Mei, Susanti, Jarjit, and other friends, despite following different religions—Confucianism, Islam, Hinduism—come together to celebrate at Mei Mei's house. This harmonious gathering, where everyone respects and participates in each other's traditions, reflects the principles of religious tolerance and moderation. Religious moderation, in this context, encourages communities to accept and respect differences, fostering peaceful coexistence and mutual respect.



Picture 5. The Distribution of Free Food and Takjil to Mosque During the Fasting Month

The Ramadan scene in *Upin & Ipin* (see picture 5), which shows the distribution of free food and takjil to mosque during the fasting month, reflects a sense of mutual cooperation and community spirit. By sharing food with others, the show emphasizes values of charity and social solidarity, ensuring that everyone, regardless of their economic status, can break their fast together.



Picture 6. Upin, Ipin and Their Friends Sing a Nasyid

This scene shows Upin, Ipin and their friends about to sing a nasyid (see picture 6), or what is more commonly known as an Islamic song.



Picture 7. Upin and Ipin's Attendance at a Chinese New Year Performance

In the “Chinese Opera” scene (see picture 7), Upin and Ipin's attendance at a Chinese New Year performance reflects a beautiful expression of mutual respect for religious diversity within their community. The gathering of residents, including those from various backgrounds, demonstrates an appreciation for each other's traditions and celebrations. This scene is especially significant in Indonesia, a country with the largest Muslim population in the world, where religious moderation is essential for fostering harmonious existence.



Picture 8. Mei Mei and Jarjit Learning the Names of the Months in the Islamic Calendar

In the scene where Upin and Ipin's friends — Mei Mei and Jarjit (see picture 8), who are from different religions — happily join in learning the names of the months in the Islamic calendar, the concept of tolerance is clearly illustrated. Even though Mei Mei and Jarjit do not share the same religious background, they actively engage in their friends' religious

learning, demonstrating mutual respect and understanding. This reflects a deep sense of tolerance, where individuals from diverse faiths can coexist peacefully, participate in each other's cultural activities, and show respect for differences.



Picture 9. The Residents of Durian Runtuh Village Celebrating the Deepavali Festival of Lights

The scene shows a form of dance celebrating the Deepavali festival of lights (see picture 9). The residents of Durian Runtuh village were invited by Uncle Muhto to celebrate together. This party is an Indian tradition, Uncle Muhto, Devi and Jarjit usually celebrate it. The residents of Durian Bawah village were very enthusiastic about going to Uncle Muhto's house to join in the celebration. It has become commonplace for all Durian Runtuh villages to celebrate the day together among residents of different religions, customs and cultures.

### **Discussion**

The episodes of *Upin & Ipin* emphasize the importance of respecting differences to foster harmony in diverse communities. The portrayal of moderation aligns with the concept of choosing a balanced path, avoiding extremes on either side (Misrawi, 2009). Religious moderation, as depicted in the episode, promotes tolerance and mutual respect, especially in religious contexts, ensuring societal harmony and unity.

Through visual storytelling, *Upin & Ipin* shows a variety of cultural and religious practices, reinforcing the values of religious moderation. Drawing from Stuart Hall's theory of representation, the series plays a significant role in shaping social realities. It illustrates how different identities coexist peacefully, sending a message of tolerance and mutual respect. This not only reflects but also strengthens the idea that religious moderation is vital for nurturing a harmonious society.

The characters' actions provide a valuable lesson in religious tolerance, aligning with Hall's (1997) theory that media representations shape cultural identities. The episode constructs a narrative of tolerance and moderation by portraying individuals from various religious backgrounds living harmoniously. Hall's theory underscores that media is not merely a mirror but an active force in shaping societal norms, such as religious moderation in multicultural settings.

As Setiyadi (2012) explains, Islam encourages balance between mind, reason, intuition, and conscience. This concept, known as *tawazun*, embodies fairness, honesty, and impartiality. Injustice, on the other hand, disrupts this balance. Hall's theory of representation helps to further interpret these scenes, showing how media constructs meaning and impacts cultural perceptions.

In Islam, fairness and justice are cornerstones of social welfare, with practices such as *ihsan* (doing good deeds) playing a crucial role (Maarif, 2017). In *Upin & Ipin*, a scene where Atok Dahlang distributes gifts equally among children, regardless of their religious backgrounds, beautifully embodies these values. Hall's theory emphasizes that media constructs social meanings, and this scene promotes equality and justice, encouraging inclusivity and fairness in diverse communities.

By representing non-discrimination, *Upin & Ipin* conveys the powerful message that differences, especially religious ones, should not hinder unity. The act of equally distributing gifts reinforces the values of religious moderation and social harmony, demonstrating how media can promote positive cultural values through representation.

Another evidence is that, the series uses music as a tool for education, particularly in Islamic contexts. In one scene, children learn the names of Islamic months through *nasyid* (a type of religious music), which reflects the role of music in conveying religious knowledge. Qurays Syihab (1996) and al-Ghazali's views on music and its spiritual significance in Islam further underscore that music can be an expression of divine beauty and knowledge.

Hall's ideas about media representation and the construction of cultural meaning are also reflected in this musical element. *Upin & Ipin* represents cultural diversity in a way that promotes understanding and tolerance. By featuring Muslim characters learning through music, the show conveys that religious practices and cultural differences should be embraced rather than feared, contributing to a more inclusive society.

That is why we may say that *Upin & Ipin* plays a crucial role in promoting the values of tolerance, moderation, and respect for diversity. Through Hall's lens of representation, the series helps to shape social perceptions, encouraging viewers, particularly children, to appreciate and engage with different cultures and religions. The show's depiction of shared celebrations, acts of charity, and harmonious living among characters from various religious backgrounds reinforces the message that mutual respect and inclusivity are key to fostering a peaceful and multicultural society.

## CONCLUSION

The majority of Muslims practice religious tolerance and moderation, fostering harmony and comfort in society. This promotes peaceful coexistence without fear or intimidation. Hall's

theory of representation highlights the importance of media in shaping societal perceptions, emphasizing the need to respect religious diversity. As the majority, Muslims should remain neutral and avoid taking sides in inter-religious matters.

The animated series 'Upin & Ipin' illustrates this through its portrayal of a harmonious community where different religions coexist. The show promotes values of moderation and tolerance, vital for peace among diverse groups. Our choice to explore this topic stems from personal experiences of interacting with friends of different faiths, recognizing the importance of applying this attitude in daily life. For Indonesian citizens, embracing moderation helps protect national unity. 'Upin & Ipin' influences its young audience by embedding moral messages of tolerance and respect, essential for children's moral development and understanding of coexistence in a multicultural society.

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