

Strengthening Strategy to Religious Moderation at Indonesian Universities

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Abstract

Various mentoring programs in higher education have been globally explored to address issues of radicalism and intolerance. However, there was a notable lack of investigation within the context of tertiary education in Indonesia. This study aimed to qualitatively examine the implementation of Islamic mentoring programs in three Indonesian universities. The study was conducted at Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (UPI), Universitas Negeri Malang (UM), and Universitas Tanjungpura (UNTAN). Data were collected through observations, documentation, and interviews with university stakeholders responsible for managing these programs. The study employed a qualitative approach to gather in-depth insights into implementing the mentoring programs. The findings revealed that each university integrated the principles of religious moderation into their mentoring programs despite their unique orientations and curricula. The mentoring programs aimed to foster Islamic brotherhood under Pancasila, Indonesia's foundational philosophical theory. Each university developed distinct approaches to mentoring that reflected their individual objectives, activities, and curricular designs. These findings provide valuable insights for policymakers to develop more effective strategies for implementing mentoring programs that promote religious moderation in Indonesian universities. The study highlighted the importance of tailored approaches to accommodate each institution's diverse needs and contexts, ensuring the programs' effectiveness in promoting peace, tolerance, and social cohesion.

Keywords: *Islamic Mentoring Program, Indonesian Universities, Islamic Brotherhood, Pancasila, Moderation, Radicalization.*

Introduction

The issue of radicalism and intolerance within educational institutions is a growing global concern (Lawale, 2020; Malik, 2024; Nasith, 2024; UNESCO, 2017). In Indonesia, a country with a rich tapestry of cultural and religious diversity, fostering religious moderation is vital for maintaining social harmony and preventing the spread of radical ideologies (Agung et al., 2024; Nasih & Hamid, 2023). Given the nation's unique sociocultural landscape, promoting an inclusive and tolerant society is desirable and essential for national unity (Anwar, 2023; Basyir, 2022; Nur et al., 2020). Educational institutions, particularly universities, are pivotal in shaping the perspectives of young individuals (Irham et al., 2020; Nasih, Sultoni, & Thoriquttyas, 2020). They serve as critical venues for implementing initiatives encouraging moderate religious views and counteracting extremist narratives.

Evidence from existing literature highlights the effectiveness of mentoring programs in addressing radicalism issues by promoting tolerance (Alam, 2020; Nasih, Sultoni, Thoriquttyas, et al., 2020), respect (Abdallah, 2019; Rahmanto et al., 2020), and peaceful coexistence (Abubakar & Hemay, 2020; Qadri et al., 2024). For instance, mentoring initiatives have instilled a sense of communal responsibility and understanding among students, thereby reducing the appeal of radical ideologies (Abdallah, 2019; Abubakar & Hemay, 2020). Therefore, studying the implementation of Islamic mentoring programs in Indonesian universities is socially relevant and contributes to the broader effort of nurturing a tolerant and cohesive society.

While numerous studies have explored mentoring programs in higher education worldwide (Brabazon & Schulz, 2020; Hakro & Mathew, 2020; Okolie et al., 2020), there is a noticeable gap in research focusing on

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the context of tertiary education in Indonesia, particularly concerning Islamic mentoring programs. Previous research has predominantly focused on Western contexts, overlooking the unique challenges and opportunities in a predominantly Muslim country like Indonesia (Arifianto, 2019; Faiqah & Pransiska, 2018). This study aims to fill this gap by providing a detailed analysis of Islamic mentoring programs in three major Indonesian universities (Kulidtod, 2019; Mawikere et al., 2023): Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (UPI), Universitas Negeri Malang (UM), and Universitas Tanjungpura (UNTAN). The originality of this study lies in its context-specific examination, offering critical insights into how these programs are designed, implemented, and perceived.

This study is grounded in the theoretical framework of religious moderation, which emphasizes balanced and inclusive religious practices that promote tolerance and respect for diversity. Religious moderation is underpinned by theories of pluralism and ethical engagement, advocating for the coexistence of multiple belief systems and the importance of ethical interactions among different religious groups (Kırmacı, 2021; Shamsul, 2005). Social identity theory is also employed to explore how individuals' religious identities are shaped and reconciled with other aspects of their identity within the university setting (Herdiansah et al., 2018). By integrating these theories, the study seeks to understand how Islamic mentoring programs can cultivate a moderate religious outlook among students, contributing to a more inclusive and harmonious society (Mansoor et al., 2022).

The primary aim of this study is to examine the implementation and impact of Islamic mentoring programs in promoting religious moderation across the universities above. The specific objectives are:

To investigate the specific values and principles embedded in the Islamic mentoring programs that promote religious moderation.

To compare these programs' implementation strategies and activities across the three universities.

To analyze the challenges faced by the universities in implementing these programs.

To provide recommendations for policymakers to enhance the effectiveness of Islamic mentoring programs in promoting religious moderation.

By focusing on these objectives, this study fills a critical research gap and provides practical recommendations that can inform policy and practice in Indonesian higher education. Given the rising concerns about radicalism and intolerance in educational settings, this research is timely and necessary. The findings of this study will be invaluable in guiding the development of effective educational strategies that promote a balanced, tolerant, and inclusive society.

Method

This study employed a qualitative research design (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Nassaji, 2020) to comprehensively explore the implementation and impact of Islamic mentoring programs in promoting religious moderation at three major Indonesian universities. The qualitative approach was chosen to gain deep insights into participants' subjective experiences and perceptions (Barbaccia et al., 2022), allowing for a nuanced understanding of the complex social dynamics within these educational settings.

The study was conducted at UPI in Bandung, UM in Malang, and UNTAN in Pontianak. These universities were selected for their significant, well-established status and diverse student populations, providing a rich context for examining Islamic mentoring programs. Additionally, these institutions have a history of implementing Islamic mentoring programs as part of their extracurricular offerings, making them ideal sites for this research.

The study population consisted of university stakeholders, including program coordinators, lecturers, and students actively involved in the Islamic mentoring programs at UPI, UM, and UNTAN. Inclusion criteria

focused on individuals directly involved in the design, implementation, or participation in the mentoring programs, ensuring that participants could provide in-depth and relevant information. No specific exclusion criteria allowed for a broad range of perspectives. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to identify and select participants who could offer valuable insights. The intended sample size was 30 participants, comprising ten from each university, sufficient to achieve data saturation and ensure a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena under study.

Data collection methods included semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were chosen to allow flexibility in probing deeper into topics as they emerged during the conversations (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). The interview guides were designed to elicit detailed information about the mentoring programs, focusing on their objectives, activities, challenges, and perceived impacts. Interviews were conducted in Indonesian, the native language of the participants, to facilitate clear communication. They were audio-recorded with the informed consent of the participants.

Observations were conducted during mentoring sessions to capture real-time activities, interactions, and the overall atmosphere within the programs (Pryce et al., 2021). This observational data provided contextual understanding and helped corroborate the information gathered from interviews. Additionally, relevant documents, such as program curricula, reports, and policy documents, were analyzed to provide a comprehensive view of the program's structure and objectives. These documents were invaluable in understanding the programs' formal aspects and alignment with institutional goals.

Data were meticulously transcribed, coded, and analyzed thematically using NVivo software. The analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step process for thematic analysis: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. This systematic approach ensured a thorough and rigorous analysis of the data. Data were checked and cleaned by cross-referencing interview transcripts with audio recordings to maintain accuracy. Triangulation of data sources—combining interviews, observations, and documents—was employed to enhance the validity and reliability of the findings, providing a more robust and comprehensive understanding of the study's subject matter.

Overall, this methodological approach provided a holistic view of the implementation and impact of Islamic mentoring programs, capturing these initiatives' structural and experiential dimensions. The findings from this study are expected to contribute significantly to the discourse on religious moderation and education in Indonesia.

Results and Discussion

Mentoring Goals Across Upi, Um, And Untan

The religious mentoring programs at UPI, UM, and UNTAN are meticulously designed to align with the broader objectives of religious moderation, as emphasized by Indonesia's national policies (Kawangung, 2019; Mukhibat et al., 2024). These programs aim to foster an inclusive and tolerant society by instilling faith, devotion, and noble character values among students.

At UPI, the "Tutorial Program," guided by Rector's Regulation No. 0440/UN40/2016, seeks to cultivate students who embody strong faith, devotion, and noble character. This program goes beyond traditional religious education by incorporating scientific inquiry, democratic values, and peacebuilding. The campus mosque is a pivotal center for these activities, emphasizing the importance of religious learning in an academic setting. A senior lecturer's illustrative quote highlights this program's evolution: "In the 1980s, Tutorial was only in the form of IRE... The discussion is unlike in Salman Mosque or mentoring; it is more towards educational terminology, and then tutorials appear." This evolution reflects a shift from purely religious teachings to a more holistic educational approach.

Similarly, UM's Taffa'uh fi Dinil Islam (TDI) program focuses on a comprehensive range of objectives. Initially, TDI aimed to provide basic Islamic knowledge and Qur'an recitation skills. However, the program has since expanded to foster faith, devotion, and a culture of tolerance among students. This progression from a narrow focus to a broader set of outcomes demonstrates the program's adaptation to contemporary needs and challenges. A participant noted, "However, currently, the goals of TDI activities are more complete," indicating the program's ongoing development to address various aspects of student growth.

In contrast, the PENDIKAR program at UNTAN, which stands for character education, targets all students, regardless of their religious affiliations. This inclusivity reflects the program's commitment to fostering a society rooted in Pancasila morality—a foundational element of Indonesian national identity and religious moderation. The program's vision and mission emphasize building a community that upholds the principles of unity, tolerance, and respect for diversity. A statement from a university official underscores the program's significance: "The education agency started in 2012 when Mr. Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono was president... This is inseparable from the background of life on our campus at UNTAN." This quote highlights the program's role in addressing the specific sociocultural challenges the UNTAN community faces.

Overall, the mentoring goals across these universities underscore a shared commitment to nurturing students who are knowledgeable in their faith and capable of contributing positively to a diverse and pluralistic society. While distinct in its approach, each program aligns with the overarching goal of promoting religious moderation and national cohesion. The findings suggest that these programs are integral to instilling tolerance and peaceful coexistence among young Indonesians, thereby supporting the nation's stability and unity.

Mentoring Activities in UPI, UM, and UNTAN

The implementation of mentoring activities at UPI, UM, and UNTAN varies in structure and content but shares a common focus on fostering religious moderation. Each university's program is tailored to its unique student population and institutional objectives, offering diverse approaches to achieving similar goals.

UPI's mentoring activities are primarily conducted at the campus mosque, creating a dedicated space for spiritual and educational growth. The program begins with Dhuha prayers, followed by lectures and small group coaching sessions as part of the Tutorial Program. This structure encourages active student participation and spiritual development, integrating religious practice with academic learning. The program is designed with specific requirements: students must meet particular prerequisites in their Islamic Religious Education (IRE) tutorials to pass the course, including the ability to read the Quran and participate in tutorial activities. A senior lecturer noted, "In IRE tutorials, students must meet two prerequisites to pass... if they do not pass the tutorial, their grades are suspended." This emphasis on academic accountability underscores the importance of religious education in students' overall academic performance.

UM's TDI program is comprehensive, encompassing general lectures on Islamic teachings, guidance on Qur'an recitation, and worship practices. The program is carefully structured to accommodate students' varying levels of Qur'anic proficiency, grouping them according to their reading abilities. Each group is overseen by a mentor who provides tailored instruction and support. The curriculum covers many topics, including tajwid (the art of Qur'anic recitation) and its practical applications, which are essential for mastering proper Qur'anic pronunciation and understanding. One participant explained, "Participants are grouped according to their ability to read the Qur'an... The curriculum encompasses the study of tajwid and its practical applications." This focus on individualized learning helps students deepen their understanding of Islamic teachings and enhances their religious literacy.

The PENDIKAR program at UNTAN stands out for its unique emphasis on interfaith dialogue and the study of holy books from various religious traditions. This program serves Muslim students and includes students from different faiths, promoting a holistic approach to religious education. The core activities—mutual visits, interfaith dialogue, and the reading of holy texts—are designed to foster a deep understanding and respect for religious diversity. These activities allow students to explore different religious perspectives,

encouraging tolerance and empathy. A faculty member highlighted, "Students who can read the Qur'an are around 80%, but the tahsin skill is deficient." This statement reflects a broader focus on enhancing the quality of religious education, ensuring that students gain a nuanced understanding of their own and others' religious practices.

Overall, the mentoring activities at UPI, UM, and UNTAN not only aim to strengthen students' religious knowledge but also promote a moderate and inclusive approach to faith. By addressing different aspects of religious education—from theological understanding to practical application—these programs play a crucial role in nurturing a tolerant and cohesive student community. The differences in program design and implementation reflect each university's unique cultural and institutional context, while their shared goal of promoting religious moderation underscores the importance of such initiatives in contemporary Indonesian society.

Mentoring Curriculum in UPI, UM, and UNTAN

The mentoring curricula at UPI, UM, and UNTAN are specifically designed to cater to the unique sociocultural contexts of each institution while maintaining a unified commitment to promoting religious moderation. Each curriculum is a strategic blend of religious teachings and principles that emphasize tolerance, respect for diversity, and peaceful coexistence, all underpinned by the national ideology of Pancasila.

At UPI, the curriculum includes a variety of topics aimed at broadening students' understanding of Islamic teachings. Subjects such as "Islam as a Blessing for the World," "Human and Religion," and "Marriage and Family Education" are integral parts of the program. These topics are carefully chosen to encourage a broad-minded and inclusive interpretation of Islam, promoting a tolerant approach to religious and cultural diversity. The curriculum's emphasis on these areas reflects UPI's commitment to fostering an environment where students can engage with diverse perspectives and develop a balanced worldview.

UM's curriculum is developed with the active involvement of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) lecturers, ensuring the content is relevant and pedagogically sound. The topics covered include "Management of the Heart," "The Art of Patience," and "Global Diversity in Islam." These subjects aim to cultivate spiritual and emotional resilience among students while highlighting the diversity within the global Muslim community. UM's curriculum is regularly updated to reflect the evolving needs of students and the university's broader educational objectives, demonstrating a dynamic approach to religious education that aligns with contemporary issues and challenges.

UNTAN's curriculum, meanwhile, incorporates themes such as "Religion Against Laziness," "Hoaxes," and "Intolerance." Including these topics highlights the university's effort to address contemporary social issues through the lens of religious teachings. The curriculum is designed to promote the principles of religious moderation and national unity, using the framework of Pancasila as a guiding principle. This approach emphasizes the importance of tolerance and peaceful coexistence and instills a sense of civic responsibility among students.

The integration of religious moderation indicators into the mentoring activities at these universities is summarized in Table 1. The table delineates how each institution incorporates various aspects of religious moderation into their programs, ensuring a comprehensive approach to student development.

Table 1. Availability of Religious Moderation's Indicators in Mentoring Activities

Macro indicators	Micro indicators	UPI	UM	UNTAN
Tolerance	Being the middle (tawassuth)	√	√	√
	Upright (i'tidal)	√	√	√
	Tolerance (tasamuh)	√	√	√

	Deliberation (syura)	√	√	√
Commitment to the nationalism	Reform (ishlah)			
	Pioneering (qudwah)		√	
	Citizenship (muwathanah)	√	√	√
Non-violence	Non-violence (al-la'urf)	√	√	√
Accommodation to the local culture	cultural friendliness (i'tibar al-'urf)	√	√	√

The mentoring programs at UPI, UM, and UNTAN are all aligned with the national commitment to fostering religious moderation, with each institution emphasizing fundamental values such as tolerance, non-violence, and accommodation of local culture. Integrating these values into the curricula and activities of the mentoring programs underscores the universities' pivotal roles in cultivating a generation that embraces pluralism and religious moderation. This alignment with Pancasila's principles is foundational to their educational missions.

In summary, while each university employs unique methodologies and curricular emphases, they aim to nurture religious moderation and promote a tolerant, inclusive, and peaceful society. These findings highlight the essential role of Islamic mentoring programs in shaping the attitudes and beliefs of students, underscoring the importance of continued support and strategic enhancements to these programs. By reinforcing the values of Pancasila, these programs contribute significantly to the broader effort of maintaining social harmony and preventing the spread of radical ideologies in Indonesia.

This study investigated the implementation of Islamic mentoring programs at three Indonesian universities— UPI, UM, and UNTAN —with a focus on promoting religious moderation. The findings demonstrate that each institution has successfully incorporated the principles of religious moderation into its mentoring programs, utilizing distinct approaches that reflect their unique contexts. These programs play a central role in fostering tolerance, non-violence, and an appreciation for local culture, aligning with broader national objectives to promote religious moderation as outlined in Indonesian policy.

The results align with existing literature on the role of educational institutions in promoting religious moderation (Nasution et al., 2024; Saepudin et al., 2023). Prior research has established that well-structured mentoring programs can significantly contribute to developing a tolerant and moderate religious outlook among students. These programs, particularly when embedded within a university's religious and cultural framework, have counteracted radicalism and enhanced social cohesion (Abdallah, 2019; Abubakar & Hemay, 2020). Integrating Pancasila values—Indonesia's foundational philosophical theory—within the mentoring curricula at UPI, UM, and UNTAN aligns with Arifianto's (2019) findings, which emphasize the importance of national ideology in shaping religious perspectives in Indonesia. Additionally, the study's focus on interfaith dialogue and the promotion of diverse interpretations of Islam is consistent with Faiqah and Pransiska's (2018) work, highlighting inclusivity's critical role in religious education.

This study extends the current understanding by illustrating how these programs can be adapted to different institutional contexts while still achieving the overarching goal of religious moderation (Afwadzi & Miski, 2021; Dolbec et al., 2022). For instance, UNTAN's PENDIKAR program emphasizes interfaith dialogue, providing a unique model that could be replicated in other multicultural environments. This approach underscores the potential for religious moderation programs to foster mutual understanding and respect among students of various religious backgrounds. Similarly, UPI's emphasis on integrating local culture into its mentoring curriculum showcases the adaptability of religious moderation initiatives, ensuring that they are culturally relevant and contextually appropriate.

One of the study's strengths lies in its qualitative methodology, which enabled an in-depth exploration of Islamic mentoring programs' distinctive characteristics and implementation strategies across diverse universities. Using multiple data sources, including interviews, observations, and document analysis,

provided a comprehensive view and enhanced the validity of the findings through triangulation. Moreover, including geographically and culturally diverse universities offers a broader perspective on promoting religious moderation in varying contexts, highlighting commonalities and differences.

Despite these strengths, the study has several limitations. The qualitative nature of the research, while providing rich, detailed insights, limits the generalizability of the findings. The scope was restricted to three universities, which may not fully capture the diversity of higher education institutions across Indonesia. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data from interviews may introduce bias, as participants might present themselves in a socially desirable manner. The absence of a longitudinal component also means that the study does not assess the long-term impacts of these mentoring programs on students' religious attitudes and behaviours.

The findings of this study have significant implications for both policy and practice. For policymakers, the results underscore the importance of integrating religious moderation into university curricula and extracurricular activities. These programs are crucial in shaping students' attitudes toward tolerance, pluralism, and peaceful coexistence. The success of UNTAN's PENDIKAR program, in particular, suggests that incorporating interfaith dialogue should be a fundamental aspect of religious moderation initiatives, especially in multicultural societies. For practitioners, the study highlights the necessity of tailoring mentoring programs to the student population's specific cultural and religious contexts. This ensures that the content is relevant and impactful, facilitating the internalization of moderate values among students.

Future research should expand the study's scope to include a broader and more diverse sample of universities, providing a more comprehensive understanding of how Islamic mentoring programs operate in different contexts. A mixed-methods approach, including quantitative measures, could offer a more objective assessment of the program's impacts on students' religious attitudes. Longitudinal studies would also be beneficial in evaluating the sustained effects of these mentoring initiatives over time. Additionally, future research could explore specific challenges and barriers to implementing these programs, offering valuable insights into how they can be more effectively designed and executed to foster religious moderation. This would contribute to the ongoing discourse on the role of education in promoting social harmony and countering extremism in Indonesia and beyond.

Conclusion

This study examined the implementation of Islamic mentoring programs at UM, UPI, and UNTAN, focusing on how these programs promote religious moderation. The key findings indicate that while each university employs distinct approaches tailored to their specific contexts, they all aim to foster a tolerant, peaceful, and inclusive religious outlook among students. Concerning the study's objectives, the mentoring programs at all three universities successfully embedded the principles of religious moderation, including tolerance, non-violence, and respect for diversity, into their curricula and activities. This demonstrates that Islamic mentoring programs can effectively promote these values. Despite differences in implementation strategies—such as UPI's focus on integrating local culture and UNTAN's emphasis on interfaith dialogue—the programs effectively contributed to the overarching goal of religious moderation. These variations highlight the importance of adapting mentoring activities to each institution's unique needs and contexts.

The study identified several challenges, including variations in institutional support and the diverse characteristics of student populations, which influenced the effectiveness of the programs. Addressing these challenges is crucial for enhancing the impact of mentoring activities. The findings suggest that a more strategic and context-sensitive approach is needed to improve the effectiveness of Islamic mentoring programs in promoting religious moderation. Policymakers should focus on enhancing institutional support, incorporating interfaith dialogue, and ensuring that the programs are culturally relevant and inclusive. In summary, this study highlights the critical role of Islamic mentoring programs in fostering religious moderation in Indonesian universities. By aligning these programs with national values such as

Pancasila, universities can contribute significantly to promoting a tolerant and cohesive society. The results underscore the need for continued support and strategic refinement of these programs to ensure long-term success.

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