

## Digital Religious Literacy and Religious Moderation among Madrasah Students in Batu City: A Case Study

Naila Nafahatus Sahariyah Al-Ulya, Alvian Nur Jamil, Nuriyatul Qomariyah, Iksan Kamil Sahri  
Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel Surabaya, Indonesia

### Corresponding Author:

Naila Nafahatus Sahariyah Al-Ulya, e-mail : [nailanafa23.nn@gmail.com](mailto:nailanafa23.nn@gmail.com)

**Abstract.** The rapid expansion of digital technology is reshaping how madrasah adolescents learn and express religion. This study explores digital religious literacy and religious moderation among students at MTsN Kota Batu using a descriptive qualitative design. Data were collected through open-ended questionnaires from 30 students, in-depth interviews with three students, and classroom and school-environment observations. Analysis followed Miles and Huberman's interactive model of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Findings show that personal devices and platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and WhatsApp dominate students' access to religious knowledge, while verification of content remains limited and authority-centred. Practices of moderation appear in respectful interaction, observance of online ethics, and avoidance of provocative debates, although critical reflection is still shallow. Theoretically, this study further clarifies the link between digital religious literacy and moderation in an Indonesian madrasah context. Practically, it offers empirical input for school programs that strengthen critical digital religious literacy.

**Keywords:** *Digital religious literacy; Madrasah; Religious moderation; Religious authority; Social media*

**Abstrak.** Perluasan teknologi digital yang begitu cepat mengubah cara remaja madrasah belajar dan mengekspresikan keberagaman. Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi literasi keagamaan digital dan moderasi beragama pada siswa MTsN Kota Batu dengan menggunakan desain kualitatif deskriptif. Data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner terbuka kepada 30 siswa, wawancara mendalam dengan tiga siswa, serta observasi kelas dan lingkungan sekolah. Analisis data mengikuti model interaktif Miles dan Huberman yang meliputi reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa gawai pribadi serta platform seperti YouTube, TikTok, dan WhatsApp mendominasi akses siswa terhadap pengetahuan keagamaan, sementara verifikasi konten masih terbatas dan berpusat pada otoritas figur agama. Praktik moderasi tampak dalam interaksi yang saling menghormati, kepatuhan terhadap etika komunikasi daring, dan penghindaran debat provokatif, meskipun refleksi kritis masih dangkal. Secara teoretis, studi ini memperjelas hubungan antara literasi keagamaan digital dan moderasi dalam konteks madrasah di Indonesia. Secara praktis, penelitian ini menawarkan masukan empiris bagi program sekolah yang memperkuat literasi keagamaan digital yang kritis.

**Kata Kunci:** *Literasi keagamaan digital; Madrasah; Media sosial; Moderasi beragama; Otoritas keagamaan*

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## **Introduction**

The rapid development of digital technology in the past five years has significantly reshaped how Indonesian adolescents access and engage with religious information. Platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and WhatsApp have become primary channels through which young people encounter sermons, fatwas, and religious discussions. The 2024 APJII report shows that Indonesia has reached 215.6 million internet users, with those aged 13–18 representing the most active segment of social media users. This situation indicates that digital environments have become an influential extension of religious learning among madrasah students.

Despite these opportunities, exposure to digital religious content also presents risks. The 2021 Kominfo Digital Literacy Index indicates that Indonesia's digital competence remains in the "moderate" category, with digital security and critical evaluation being the weakest dimensions. In East Java, the 2023 score is only slightly higher, suggesting that students are still vulnerable to misinformation and polarizing narratives online. Previous studies highlight similar concerns: digital spaces often enable the circulation of intolerant or sectarian religious messages, which can shape adolescents' perceptions in problematic ways (Humaizi et al., 2024; Ma'arif et al., 2023).

Scholarly discussions on religious moderation reinforce the importance of balanced and contextual religious understanding. Religious moderation occupies a complex position within Indonesian discourse, shaped by state policy, public narratives, and everyday religious practices (Amri et al., 2024). At the same time, national initiatives emphasize moderation as a strategic response to rising intolerance and radicalism, including among youth populations (Ma'arif et al., 2023; Solechan et al., 2024). Studies further show that digital literacy—particularly critical engagement with online religious sources—plays a central role in preventing exposure to extremist narratives and strengthening students' moderate religious attitudes (Nurhayati et al., n.d.).

Research on youth religiosity also shows varied patterns across school types. Rahmat et al. (2025), for instance, found significant differences in tolerance levels between MTs and SMP students, with madrasah students tending to display lower interfaith tolerance despite high religiosity. This reinforces the need to examine how religious moderation develops among madrasah adolescents in relation to their daily digital experiences. Yet, existing studies often focus either on digital literacy or on religious moderation in isolation, leaving limited understanding of how the two interact in shaping students' religious reasoning within Islamic school settings.

Based on the above review, a clear research gap emerges. Although digital media's influence on adolescent religiosity is well documented, few studies specifically examine how digital religious literacy intersects with the formation of religious moderation among junior secondary madrasah students. MTsN Kota Batu—with its urban-religious context, high internet penetration, and large student population—offers a relevant setting for investigating this relationship.

Therefore, this study focuses on exploring how madrasah students access and interpret digital religious information and how these practices relate to their development of religious moderation. The study aims to contribute to the refinement of digital religious literacy frameworks in the Indonesian Islamic education context and provide empirical insights for strengthening moderation-based learning in madrasah environments.

## **Methods**

This study employed a qualitative method using a case study approach. According to Yin, a case study is a research strategy used to gain an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon within its real-life context, in which the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2018). This approach was applied to comprehensively explore the dynamics of digital religious literacy and religious moderation among madrasah adolescents, particularly at MTsN Kota Batu. Through this case study, the researcher sought to obtain a holistic picture of how madrasah students interpret their experiences in accessing, understanding, and responding to various religious contents in the digital sphere, and how these experiences influence their religious attitudes within the school environment.

The research was conducted at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri (MTsN) Kota Batu, located at Jalan Ir. Soekarno No. 3, Junrejo, Batu City, East Java. This site was selected purposively because MTsN Kota Batu is an A-accredited madrasah with a strong religious environment and extensive access to digital technology. These conditions make it a relevant context for examining the phenomena of digital religious literacy and religious moderation among adolescents.

The data sources consisted of both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected through open-ended questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and observations of students' digital activities and religious behaviors. A total of 30 students completed the open-ended questionnaire designed to explore their experiences in accessing and interpreting religious content on digital media. From these responses, three students with the most representative answers were selected for further interviews to enrich interpretive data. In addition, one Islamic Education (PAI) teacher was interviewed as a key informant to provide an educator's perspective and strengthen data triangulation. Secondary data were obtained from various supporting documents, such as school archives, digital literacy activity reports, and the *Religious Moderation Policy Document* issued by the Ministry of Religious Affairs 2019.

Data collection techniques were carried out through an integrated combination of several procedures. The process began with distributing open-ended questionnaires to explore students' experiences, habits, and perspectives in accessing religious content via digital media. This was followed by in-depth interviews with the PAI teacher and selected students to gain a more contextual understanding of religious moderation practices and digital literacy patterns within the madrasah environment. Observations were conducted to examine learning activities, student interactions at school, and the use of digital devices in religious learning contexts. Furthermore, documentation was used to complement the data with photographs, program notes, and relevant policy documents.

Data analysis employed the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (Sugiyono, 2019), consisting of three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data reduction was carried out by selecting and focusing on relevant information to identify patterns, themes, and main categories aligned with the research focus. The reduced data were then presented narratively to facilitate interpretation. Conclusions were drawn through an ongoing verification process using source and method triangulation techniques, by comparing the results of questionnaires, interviews, and observations to ensure the validity and consistency of the findings.

Through this approach, the study is expected to provide a deep understanding of how madrasah adolescents develop digital religious literacy while simultaneously fostering attitudes of religious moderation amid the increasingly complex challenges of the digital era.

## **Results and Discussion**

### *Patterns and Dynamics of Digital Religious Literacy among Madrasah Adolescents*

Digital religious literacy among madrasah adolescents has emerged as a phenomenon alongside the increasing intensity of social media use as the main source of religious knowledge.

Based on the questionnaire results from 30 students and in depth interviews with three MTsN Kota Batu students, most respondents (78%) reported obtaining religious information from digital platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram. This pattern reflects a rapid shift from conventional models of religious learning toward more visual and interactive content-based approaches.

Students tend to prefer light, inspiring, and contextually relevant *da'wah* content that resonates with their daily lives such as short videos about moral behavior, stories of the Prophet's companions, or proper ways of worship. Several respondents mentioned popular preachers such as Ustadz Adi Hidayat and Hanan Attaki as their primary online sources for understanding Islam. However, a smaller portion of students (22%) still rely on traditional sources, such as religious books (*kitab*) and face to face study circles (*pengajian*), indicating that the process of digitalization of religion within madrasahs occurs gradually and unevenly among individuals.

These findings reinforce Campbell's argument about the shift of religious authority in digital religion, in which religious authority is no longer monopolized by formal institutions or clerics but has shifted toward digital figures who communicate in ways that are accessible and relatable to youth audiences (Campbell, 2021). This phenomenon also reflects what Hoover terms mediated religious practice, referring to religious engagement that is shaped and mediated by digital technology (Hoover & Kim, 2016). In the case of MTsN Kota Batu, Islamic Education (PAI) teachers continue to play a crucial role as "guardians of authority", serving to filter and guide students in distinguishing between valid and misleading religious content.

Furthermore, the questionnaire data indicate that although many students possess basic digital literacy skills, their critical awareness regarding the validity of religious sources remains low. Approximately 43% of students admitted that they rarely verify the religious information they encounter on social media. This finding highlights the urgent need to strengthen the dimension of critical religious literacy the ability to assess the credibility, social context, and ideological implications of circulating religious content (Reid, 2024). Such skills are essential for developing resilience against digital radicalism and for reinforcing moderate religious character among madrasah students.

Overall, the dynamics of digital religious literacy among madrasah adolescents at MTsN Kota Batu reveal two main tendencies:

1. Cognitive and cultural transformation in religious learning, in which students begin to construct their religious understanding through digital content that is fast-paced, visual, and thematic in nature.
2. Challenges of authority and authenticity in religious teachings, as the flow of religious information is no longer fully controlled by educational institutions.

Teachers and madrasahs thus serve as mediators between traditional Islamic values and contemporary digital culture. As expressed by one Islamic Education (PAI) teacher, "Today's students learn about religion more quickly through social media, but our task is to ensure that they understand what is right and what is wrong."

Accordingly, the pattern of digital religious literacy among madrasah adolescents not only reflects their adaptation to technological change but also illustrates an ongoing process of value negotiation between digital modernity and the Islamic traditions upheld within the madrasah environment. This dynamic forms an essential foundation for the subsequent discussion on the practice of religious moderation in digital activities.

### *Religious Moderation Practices in Digital Activities*

The practice of religious moderation in digital spaces constitutes a crucial dimension in understanding how madrasah adolescents interact with religious content in the online environment. Based on the questionnaire responses from 30 MTsN Kota Batu students, the majority (65%) stated that they often encounter differing religious views on social media, particularly related to issues of *fiqh* and the preaching styles of religious figures. However, 71% of them chose to remain neutral and refrain from responding emotionally to such debates. This tendency demonstrates a moderate orientation characterized by tolerance, respect for differences, and avoidance of hate speech.

In depth interviews with three students further reinforced these findings. One student expressed, “*When people argue about religious differences on TikTok, I usually stay quiet or ask my teacher or parents for clarification so I don’t misunderstand.*” Another student mentioned that they tend to follow peaceful, positive, and motivational *da’wah* content rather than provocative materials. This pattern indicates that madrasah students have begun to internalize the values of religious moderation in their digital behavior, although such moderation is not always accompanied by deep reflective awareness.

This phenomenon can be explained through the concept of *religious moderation in the digital space* as proposed by Hefni, who emphasizes the importance of the ability to manage religious life in a balanced way amid exposure to extreme content in online media. In this context, moderation is not only understood as a theological middle position but also as a form of *digital literacy competence* the ability to filter, interpret, and reflect on religious information that circulates rapidly in digital environments (Hefni, 2020). This aligns with Campbell’s concept of *civic digital religion*, which views online religious practices as spaces for social participation and the development of peaceful and tolerant public character (Campbell, 2021).

Furthermore, these findings reflect the principles of religious moderation formulated by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs 2019, which encompass four key indicators: national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence, and acceptance of local traditions. (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2019). Based on the questionnaire data, 83% of students agreed that respecting differences in schools of thought (*mazhab*) and worship practices is part of Islamic teaching. However, only 47% reported actively sharing positive content on social media, indicating that their moderate attitude remains largely passive (defensive) rather than active (transformative).

Islamic Education (PAI) teachers play a significant role in the internalization of these values. Through interviews, the teacher explained that religious learning is now often linked to digital issues, such as how to assess the validity of online religious news or how to practice ethical commenting in digital public spaces. This approach resonates with Azyumardi Azra’s perspective that religious moderation among students should aim toward digital-based religious citizenship the formation of digital citizens who are religiously conscious, polite, and socially ethical (Suhail et al., 2025).

Based on the overall analysis, the practice of religious moderation at MTsN Kota Batu can be categorized into three main forms:

1. Cognitive Moderation, which refers to the ability to understand diverse religious perspectives with an open mindset.
2. Affective Moderation, manifested through empathy, tolerance, and appreciation for the diversity of religious practices on social media.

3. Practical Moderation, reflected in concrete actions such as choosing positive content, avoiding provocation, and rejecting hate speech.

These three forms illustrate that madrasah students have begun to develop a pattern of religiosity aligned with the spirit of *Islam Wasathiyah* a balanced integration of spiritual, rational, and social values. However, field findings also indicate the need for further reinforcement in terms of critical reflection and the habitual active participation in disseminating the values of moderation.

Ultimately, the practice of religious moderation in digital activities among MTsN Kota Batu adolescents reflects a complex process of social learning, in which the digital sphere becomes a space of dialectical interaction between traditional values and modern culture. Moderation, therefore, is not merely a normative doctrine but has transformed into a lived digital practice embodied in the daily online behavior of madrasah students. These findings also serve as a bridge to the next discussion on the role of teachers and the religious environment in strengthening digital moderation among madrasah adolescents.

#### *Synergy between Teachers and the Religious Environment in Shaping Digital Moderation among Madrasah Adolescents*

The formation of religious moderation in digital spaces cannot be separated from the role of the educational environment and teachers as role models in the internalization of Islamic values. Based on interviews with Islamic Education (PAI) teachers and observations of religious activities at MTsN Kota Batu, it was found that efforts to foster moderate digital religious literacy are carried out through two main approaches:

1. Strengthening values through teacher exemplification.
2. Creating an inclusive religious ecosystem, both within the school environment and in digital spaces.

The questionnaire results revealed that 82% of students acknowledged that Islamic Education (PAI) teachers play a major role in guiding them to choose religious content that is calming, non-provocative, and aligned with the value of *tawasuth* (moderation). Several students mentioned that their teachers' advice often serves as an "initial filter" before they trust or share religious content on social media. One student stated, "If there's a provocative sermon video, I usually remember my teacher's advice not to believe it right away. I first check who is speaking and what their intention is."

This finding affirms Bandura's (1986) Social Learning Theory, which posits that individual behavior is shaped through observation and imitation of social models in one's environment (Mukhalalati et al., 2022). Thus, teachers function as religious role models who not only impart cognitive understanding of Islam but also demonstrate moderate ways of thinking and behaving when facing differences.

Furthermore, PAI teachers at MTsN Kota Batu are not limited to teaching within the classroom; they also engage in religious interactions through the school's digital platforms, such as WhatsApp groups, the school's YouTube channel, and online Qur'anic literacy programs. These media are utilized to disseminate peaceful religious messages, facilitate relaxed discussions on contemporary religious issues, and guide students to resist being easily influenced by digital hate speech.

This practice aligns with Hefner's (2020) view that effective religious education in the digital era requires synergy between formal dimensions (curriculum and instruction) and cultural

dimensions (social and religious environments) (Mashuri et al., 2024). When these two aspects collaborate, they create a religious ecosystem that supports the development of digital moderation among adolescents.

The religious environment of the madrasah also plays a pivotal role in strengthening moderate habitus. Activities such as morning prayers, Qur'an recitations (tadarus), and religious discussion forums serve as spaces for cultivating tolerance and mutual respect for differing views. Based on field observations, the school environment's emphasis on etiquette, respectful communication, and politeness both online and offline acts as a key factor in shaping a moderate religious character.

In addition, peer group support reinforces the internalization of moderation values. Some students are actively involved in producing short da'wah content on the school's social media channels, featuring peaceful and positive narratives. This demonstrates the presence of peer reinforcement, or mutual encouragement among peers to uphold constructive and tolerant religious behavior. As Vygotsky (1978) asserts, social interaction serves as a crucial arena for the development of individual values and identity (Widiastuti et al., 2023). In this context, the madrasah environment functions as a zone of proximal development for nurturing adolescents' digital moderation.

From the overall empirical data and field findings, the synergy between teachers and the religious environment in shaping students' digital moderation can be categorized into three main forms:

Table 1. Synergy between Teachers and the Religious Environment in Shaping Digital Moderation among Madrasah Adolescents at MTsN Kota Batu

Form of Synergy	Empirical Description at MTsN Kota Batu	Theoretical Connection
Teacher Exemplification (PAI Teachers)	Teachers model moderate attitudes, respond wisely to religious issues on social media, and advise students to be selective toward digital religious content.	Bandura (1986): Social Learning Theory - behavior formation occurs through observation and imitation of social models.
Inclusive Religious Ecosystem	The madrasah fosters an open and welcoming religious atmosphere that values diversity and emphasizes balance in practicing religion.	Hefner (2020): Synergy between curriculum and school culture strengthens religious moderation.
Peer Community Support	Students remind one another and collaboratively create peaceful <i>da'wah</i> content on the school's social media platforms.	Vygotsky (1978): Social interaction accelerates the internalization of values and identity formation.

Thus, the synergy between teachers, the religious environment, and the student community within the madrasah serves as the main pillar in fostering digital religious moderation. This effort not only strengthens a balanced religious character but also equips madrasah adolescents with the ability to navigate the complexities of the digital sphere with wisdom, critical awareness, and ethical responsibility.

From this perspective, the madrasah is not merely a place for learning religion but also a space for cultivating digital ethics rooted in the values of *Islam Wasathiyah*. Such synergy forms the foundation for developing a moderate and contextually relevant religious character in the digital era.

*Thematic Findings: Dynamics of Digital Religious Literacy and Religious Moderation among Madrasah Adolescents*

Based on thematic analysis of questionnaire data, interviews, and observations at MTsN Kota Batu, several patterns of interaction were identified, showing the interrelation between digital religious literacy and the practice of religious moderation among madrasah adolescents. These interactions are not linear but rather dynamic, reflecting a reciprocal process in which the ability to comprehend digital religious content influences and is simultaneously shaped by the formation of balanced and tolerant religious attitudes.

1. *The Interplay between “Learning from the Digital World” and “Affirming Madrasah’s Traditional Values”*

The majority of students (approximately 74%) reported gaining religious inspiration from digital platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram. However, they still regarded teachers and religious activities within the madrasah as their “primary filters” for interpreting the digital messages they consume.

This phenomenon represents a form of value hybridization an integration between digital learning culture and madrasah religious traditions. As Campbell (2020) explains in his theory of Networked Religion, the digital realm provides new spaces for religious learning, yet traditional authority continues to play a role in shaping the direction of religious understanding.(Siuda, 2021)

In the case of MTsN Kota Batu, Islamic Education (PAI) teachers function as mediators who help students balance between “free access to information” and “the framing of Islamic values.” Students learn to consume *da’wah* content with an awareness that virality does not necessarily equate to religious truth.

2. *The Critical Dynamics between Information Access and Religious Authority*

Questionnaire data indicated that 41% of students had experienced confusion due to differing opinions among religious figures on social media. However, most of them (68%) reported responding to such differences by discussing them with teachers, parents, or classmates before forming conclusions.

This process illustrates a stage of authority negotiation, as described by Hoover and Echchaibi (2021), in which digital youth are not merely passive recipients of religious teachings but active agents who select, compare, and interpret religious messages according to their social context (Berger & Golan, 2024).

The interaction between digital authority (online preachers) and traditional authority (madrasah teachers) creates a productive dialogical space. Within this space, the values of religious moderation find their practical expression students learn to be open to differences without losing their religious identity.

3. *Literacy Skills as the Foundation of Moderation*

According to the questionnaire results, around 45% of students reported being able to distinguish between provocative and educational religious content. However, 33% still found it difficult to assess the authenticity or authority behind online *da’wah* accounts.

This finding shows that the level of critical religious literacy varies among students. Ting (2020) argues that digital religious literacy is not merelyF the ability to access information but also the competence to evaluate credibility, understand context, and relate religious messages to universal human values (Prasetia, 2025).

Teachers at MTsN Kota Batu have responded to this challenge by implementing a classroom activity called “*Digital Da’wab Content Analysis*”, where students critically analyze *da’wab* videos by examining the speaker, purpose, language style, and social impact. This strategy effectively cultivates selectivity while reinforcing *wasathiyah* (moderate) values.

4. *Madrasah Ecosystem as a Space for Value Negotiation*

The religious yet digitally adaptive environment of the madrasah serves as a social arena where students negotiate traditional Islamic values with digital culture. Activities such as online *tadarus* (Qur’an recitation), positive *da’wab* content competitions, and cross-class discussions on current religious issues exemplify how moderation values are formed through social collaboration.

This aligns with Vygotsky’s (1978) Social Constructivism Theory, which emphasizes that values and knowledge are constructed through social interaction and environmental mediation (Wibowo et al., 2025). In this regard, the madrasah functions as a mediating environment, channeling peaceful Islamic values into students’ digital practices.

5. *Thematic Synthesis: Interaction Patterns and Direction of Dynamics*

From the synthesis of all empirical findings, a thematic mapping of the interaction between digital religious literacy and religious moderation was developed, as presented in the following table:

Table 2. Thematic Synthesis of the Interaction between Digital Religious Literacy and Religious Moderation among Madrasah Adolescents at MTsN Kota Batu

Main Theme	Empirical Findings at MTsN Kota Batu	Theoretical Interpretation and Academic Relevance
Value Hybridization	Students combine religious learning from social media with guidance from madrasah teachers.	Networked Religion (Campbell, 2020): the digital sphere serves as an extension of conventional religious interaction.
Authority Negotiation	Discussions between online preachers’ perspectives and madrasah teachers’ views become a medium for shaping moderate attitudes.	Hoover & Echchaibi (2021): religious authority becomes dialogical in the digital era.
Critical Religious Literacy	Teachers guide students in analyzing <i>da’wab</i> content to prevent exposure to hate speech.	Ting (2020): critical religious literacy enhances reflective and ethical thinking skills.
Digital Religious Ecosystem	The madrasah facilitates positive digital <i>da’wab</i> practices grounded in <i>wasathiyah</i> (moderation) values.	Vygotsky (1978): values are constructed through social interaction and learning environments.

The dynamic interaction between digital religious literacy and religious moderation among madrasah adolescents illustrates a dual learning process both intellectual and moral. Students not only learn about religion through social media but also develop the ability to select, interpret, and contextualize religious teachings in accordance with moderate Islamic values.

Thus, digital religious literacy functions as a medium for cultivating religious moderation grounded in critical awareness, where madrasah adolescents act as active, reflective, and responsible agents in engaging with religious content within digital spaces.

The integration of teachers, the religious environment, and digital platforms creates a dynamic and relevant Islamic educational ecosystem oriented toward nurturing a generation of Muslims who embody the spirit of *rahmatan lil 'alamin* Islam as a mercy to all creation.

The findings of this study demonstrate that fiqh instruction in the MTs studied is characterised by a rich and deliberately varied repertoire of teaching strategies, reflecting a departure from single-method approaches that often dominate traditional religious classrooms. The teacher consistently employs cooperative learning formats, group investigation, lecture-based clarification, guided discussion, question–answer routines, demonstration, and hands-on practice. This systematic variation corresponds with broader pedagogical shifts identified in contemporary Islamic education research, which emphasise diversified instruction to counter disengagement and to stimulate students' cognitive, affective, and behavioural involvement. Studies examining pedagogical practice in Islamic schools show that adolescents respond more actively to lessons delivered through multiple modalities rather than through prolonged teacher-centred exposition (Nurhayati et al., n.d.). In this context, the teacher's deliberate variation does not merely reflect preference but constitutes a pedagogical adaptation aligned with national-level trends in Islamic educational reform.

An essential dimension of the strategy selection is its alignment with the nature of fiqh as both a conceptual and procedural subject. Conceptual content—such as legal definitions, categories of obligation, or textual interpretation—is addressed primarily through structured lectures, guided discussion, and question–answer formats. This is theoretically appropriate, as conceptual clarity forms the foundation of legal understanding within Islamic jurisprudence. Research in Indonesian Islamic education similarly highlights the importance of dialogic engagement and verbal scaffolding when addressing abstract doctrinal material, noting that conceptual content requires cognitive structuring before it can be situated within students' practical lives (Ma'arif et al., 2024). In contrast, the procedural dimension of fiqh—especially ritual acts such as ablution and prayer—requires embodied mastery. Here, demonstration followed by hands-on practice becomes essential, reflecting findings that procedural religious learning is most effective when students observe, imitate, and repeat guided performance. At the university level, studies show that mastery of Qur'anic interpretation, ethical norms, and ritual practice improves substantially when theoretical instruction is paired with demonstration-based and experiential learning models (Solechan et al., 2024). The fiqh teacher's approach in this MTs thus resonates with well-established principles of Islamic pedagogy that emphasise the intimate link between knowledge and action.

Another salient theme in the findings is the teacher's responsiveness to diversity within the classroom. Students possess varied levels of prior religious knowledge, motivation, discipline, and cognitive readiness. To accommodate this diversity, the teacher adapts instructional strategies across different classes and adjusts the level of difficulty, pacing, and expected output. This aligns with findings from studies on tolerance and religiosity among adolescents, which indicate that heterogeneity in exposure to religious discourse—even within the same school—affects learning readiness and comprehension (Rahmat et al., 2025). The teacher's adaptability also reflects a broader pedagogical principle emphasised in multiple national analyses: effective religious instruction requires differentiated scaffolding to ensure that students with limited background knowledge do not fall behind those with stronger foundations. Such differentiation contributes

not only to improved comprehension but also to the cultivation of equitable and inclusive religious learning communities.

Cooperative learning strategies used by the teacher—particularly group investigation—function as significant mechanisms for constructing meaning collaboratively. Students are encouraged to divide tasks, synthesise information, present findings, and engage in peer questioning. These activities mirror patterns observed in studies on collaboration within Islamic learning environments, where cooperative structures foster responsibility, communication, and collective reasoning. Research on religious moderation education also suggests that collaborative dialogue provides opportunities for students to practise tolerance, mutual respect, and critical engagement, especially when discussing issues that may involve differing interpretations or sensitivities (Humaizi et al., 2024). Thus, the cooperative learning activities observed in this MTs not only support academic understanding but also play a role in cultivating socio-religious competencies aligned with national moderation goals.

The teacher's emphasis on demonstration and hands-on practice in ritual topics is particularly consistent with the needs of adolescent learners. Students repeatedly indicated that procedural lessons became clearer and more memorable when they could see actions modelled before attempting them. This matches evidence showing that religious practice—unlike conceptual content—relies on embodied repetition and procedural memory. Digital Qur'an literacy research likewise shows that students gain deeper understanding when textual study is supported by practical engagement with digital, oral, and physical forms of religious expression (Ma'arif et al., 2023). In this MTs, the combination of demonstration and practice not only strengthens ritual proficiency but also boosts students' confidence, enabling them to perform religious acts more accurately and consistently in everyday life.

The assessment system employed by the teacher reveals a comprehensive and multidimensional approach. Written tests and quizzes measure cognitive understanding, but observational assessments, performance evaluations, and affective assessments address the psychomotor and behavioural dimensions crucial to fiqh mastery. Research on assessment within Islamic education underscores the necessity of integrating cognitive, behavioural, and spiritual evaluation to account for the holistic nature of religious learning (Ainissyifa & Nasrulloh, n.d.). Moreover, the practice of providing remedial instruction aligns with mastery learning frameworks that advocate repeated opportunities for students to achieve competence. Studies within Islamic higher education show that continuous feedback, repeated demonstration, and tiered remediation significantly enhance students' achievement and consistency in religious practice (Ainissyifa & Nasrulloh, n.d.). The MTs' assessment system is therefore consistent with national and international best practices in religious education.

Despite these strengths, structural and contextual constraints remain evident. The limited instructional time allocated to fiqh—only two periods a week—restricts the depth with which teachers can explore complex topics or conduct extended practice sessions. This limitation mirrors findings from analyses of Islamic school conditions across Indonesia, where insufficient time allocation is identified as a major impediment to deep learning in religious subjects (Ma'arif et al., 2023). Environmental constraints—such as heat, ventilation problems, and lighting issues—further reduce students' attention span and comfort. Such physical constraints are frequently cited in educational psychology research as significant predictors of reduced concentration and motivation in developing adolescents. Meanwhile, student-related constraints—varying levels of discipline, fluctuating motivation, and inconsistent study habits—correspond with national

findings highlighting the vulnerability of adolescents to distraction, especially when exposed to overwhelming amounts of digital content and online stimuli (Nurhayati et al., n.d.).

Institutional support emerges as an essential counterbalance to these challenges. Monitoring and mentoring practices implemented by school leadership help ensure that instructional strategies remain aligned with curriculum expectations and national policies. Professional development activities—such as peer mentoring, workshops, and reflective sessions—provide teachers with opportunities to refine their strategies and integrate new pedagogical techniques. Studies of professional development in Islamic educational settings show that regular supervision, peer learning, and targeted training significantly improve teachers' pedagogical adaptability and confidence (Nurhayati et al., n.d.). These institutional supports therefore create an enabling environment that allows the fiqh teacher to respond effectively to contextual limitations while continually improving classroom practice.

Students' perspectives reinforce the effectiveness of the instructional design. Many reported increased enjoyment, stronger motivation, and greater clarity when participating in interactive, varied, and practical lessons. They emphasised that group work, demonstration, and discussion helped them understand not only the concepts but also the real-life application of fiqh. This is consistent with national trends showing that adolescents learn religious content more meaningfully when instruction incorporates active participation, practical application, and peer collaboration. Studies on digital religious engagement similarly demonstrate that youth develop deeper religious insight when learning is dialogic, reflective, and grounded in concrete practice rather than abstract explanation alone (Humaizi et al., 2024; Rahmat et al., 2025). The alignment of findings from this MTs with national patterns suggests that pedagogical variation is not only effective within this context but also consistent with broader developmental needs of Indonesian adolescents.

A deeper reflection on the findings reveals that the teacher's instructional repertoire reflects principles consistent with current national debates on religious moderation and digital religious exposure. Although this study focuses on face-to-face fiqh instruction, its implications relate to larger trends identified in recent analyses of Indonesian Muslim youth. National studies document a rise in exposure to online religious content that is fragmented, polarised, and at times contradictory. This digital exposure influences adolescents' beliefs and practices, making critical engagement and guided interpretation increasingly necessary (Amri et al., 2024; Nurhayati et al., n.d.). Although digital learning tools were not the primary focus of instruction in this MTs, the emphasis on dialogue, collaborative meaning-making, and teacher modelling helps inoculate students against passive consumption of unverified online religious content. In this way, the pedagogical structure of the fiqh classroom contributes indirectly to strengthening religious literacy and moderation.

The findings also contribute to the ongoing scholarly conversation about how religious education can cultivate balanced, reflective, and contextually grounded Islamic understanding among adolescents. Studies examining Islamic education in universities and pesantren highlight the importance of critical inquiry, discussion, adaptation to learners' contexts, and integration of values into daily practice (Ma'arif et al., 2023; Solechan et al., 2024). The MTs teacher's strategies echo these principles on a smaller scale, creating classroom conditions where students can engage actively with fiqh content while reflecting on its relevance for daily life. By providing space for questioning, dialogue, collaboration, and practice-based verification, the teacher fosters the kind

of religious understanding that supports character formation rooted in moderation, responsibility, and reflective practice.

In summary, the findings illustrate a pedagogical model in which instructional diversity, contextual responsiveness, systematic assessment, and institutional support converge to produce meaningful fiqh learning experiences for adolescents. While structural constraints limit the full realisation of these strategies, the teacher's adaptive approach demonstrates how fiqh instruction can be both conceptually rigorous and practically engaging. The consistency between the findings of this study and broader patterns in Islamic education research underscores the relevance of this MT's case for understanding the pedagogical dynamics of Indonesian madrasah education. Ultimately, this study contributes to the wider discourse on how Islamic schools can equip students with knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed not only for accurate religious practice but also for navigating the complexities of contemporary religious life.

## **Conclusion**

This study identifies four interrelated themes in the fiqh teacher's instructional practice at MTs Kota Batu. First, the teacher systematically employs a repertoire of strategies—cooperative learning, discussion, question–answer, demonstration, and hands-on practice—to connect abstract fiqh rulings with students' everyday experiences and varied learning profiles. Second, practice-based learning emerges as the core of fiqh instruction: repeated, guided performance of worship rituals (such as wudu, prayer, and related practices) functions as the main pathway for strengthening students' procedural and ritual competence. Third, assessment is implemented as a continuous cycle that combines diagnostic checks, formative feedback, summative tests, and remedial activities, enabling the teacher to monitor students' progress and respond to learning difficulties. Fourth, the implementation of these strategies is shaped by structural constraints, including limited instructional time, classroom space and facilities, students' heterogeneous prior knowledge, and fluctuating levels of motivation.

Theoretically, these findings contribute to Islamic education and instructional theory in several ways. They empirically affirm constructivist and active learning perspectives within the specific context of fiqh, showing that students' understanding and ritual competence are constructed through dialogic interaction and embodied practice rather than through expository teaching alone. The study also enriches the discussion on pedagogical content knowledge for Islamic subjects by highlighting the “praxis” dimension of fiqh: effective fiqh teaching requires not only clear conceptual explanation but also structured modelling, supervised rehearsal, and reflective discussion about the meaning and wisdom (*hikmah*) behind ritual obligations. In this sense, the case illustrates how cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains can be intentionally integrated in designing fiqh learning that is both doctrinally sound and pedagogically responsive.

Practically, the results generate several recommendations for teachers, madrasah leaders, and policymakers. For fiqh teachers, the study underscores the importance of deliberate lesson planning that sequences explanation, demonstration, and hands-on practice; the use of cooperative and discussion-based formats to activate students' prior knowledge; and the consistent use of formative assessment and remedial teaching to accommodate different levels of mastery. For madrasah leadership, the findings point to the need to provide structured professional development on active and practice-oriented fiqh pedagogy, to organize teaching schedules that allow sufficient time for practicum sessions, and to strengthen academic supervision and peer mentoring so that teachers can collaboratively refine their instructional designs. At the policy level,

the study suggests that the Ministry of Religious Affairs and relevant government bodies should support fiqh teachers through curriculum guidelines that explicitly promote practice-based and student-centered learning, adequate allocation of learning time and facilities for worship practicum, and continuous in-service training that links pedagogical innovation with the goals of character and worship competence.

This study is limited by its single-case design, involving one madrasah, one fiqh teacher, and a relatively small group of students within a specific institutional and socio-cultural context. The data were also collected within a bounded time frame, which restricts the ability to capture long-term changes in students' understanding and practice. As a result, the findings are analytically rather than statistically generalisable; they offer depth of insight rather than broad representativeness. Future research could therefore pursue comparative studies across different madrasah types (rural–urban, public–private, and varying accreditation levels), employ classroom video analysis to capture interactional details of fiqh instruction, or integrate quantitative measures of student learning outcomes to examine the effectiveness of different strategy combinations. In addition, further studies might explore how digital media and learning technologies can be integrated into practice-based fiqh learning without weakening the embodied, ritual dimension that is central to worship competence. Overall, the present study confirms that creative, varied, and contextually attuned instructional strategies—supported by continuous assessment and robust institutional backing—play a decisive role in enhancing students' understanding, engagement, and practical proficiency in fiqh.

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