

ENACTING WASATHIYAH FROM BELOW: EVERYDAY PRACTICES OF MODERATION AND SOCIAL COHESION IN URBAN INDONESIAN MUSLIM COMMUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

Based on practice theory and the sociology of lived religion, this study explores the practices of wasathiyah (moderation in Islam) among urban Muslim communities in Surabaya and Sidoarjo, Indonesia. Despite previous studies have emphasized on wasathiyah as a concept and policy approach, less attention has been paid to its enactment in everyday life settings. This qualitative field study utilizes participant observation and in-depth interviews for three months with nine purposively selected participants, namely: mosque administrator, majelis taklim organizers, religious figure, and community members. Thematic analysis is used together with iterative coding that is guided by practice theory in analyzing data collected during this study. The study finds that the practice of wasathiyah pedagogy does not involve learning through direct teaching or instruction but through relational interaction, communal practice, dialogue, and leadership. Mosque and community gathering spaces become vibrant social places for reproducing values of inclusivity. However, such pedagogical process is not free of conflict; differences in religious literacy lead to disagreements on certain practice such as azan (call to prayer). These disagreements are further intensified by digital technology, particularly WhatsApp, due to lack of context-sensitive mediating process in voicing the disagreements. Theoretically, these findings contribute to the understanding of urban Muslim life by demonstrating that moderation functions as a practice shaped by social habitus—a pedagogy lived out in daily life rather than merely a set of doctrinal prescriptions. This Indonesian case offers broader comparative insights for the study of Muslim communities managing religious diversity and social cohesion in pluralistic urban environments globally.

Keyword: Religious Moderation; Lived Religion; Social Cohesion; Urban Islam

ABSTRAK

Berlandaskan teori praktik dan sosiologi agama yang dijalani (*studi ini mengeksplorasi praktik wasathiyah di kalangan komunitas Muslim perkotaan di Surabaya dan Sidoarjo, Indonesia. Meskipun studi-studi sebelumnya lebih menekankan *wasathiyah* sebagai konsep dan pendekatan kebijakan, masih sedikit perhatian yang diberikan pada perwujudannya dalam konteks kehidupan sehari-hari. Studi lapangan kualitatif ini menggunakan metode observasi partisipan dan wawancara mendalam selama tiga bulan dengan sembilan partisipan yang dipilih secara purposif, yaitu: pengurus masjid, penyelenggara majelis taklim, tokoh agama, dan

anggota masyarakat. Analisis tematik digunakan bersamaan dengan pengodean iteratif yang dipandu oleh teori praktik untuk menganalisis data yang terkumpul. Studi ini menemukan bahwa praktik pedagogi *wasathiyah* tidak melibatkan pembelajaran melalui pengajaran atau instruksi langsung, melainkan melalui interaksi relasional, praktik komunal, dialog, dan kepemimpinan. Masjid dan ruang pertemuan warga menjadi wadah sosial yang dinamis bagi reproduksi nilai-nilai inklusivitas. Namun, proses pedagogis semacam itu tidak luput dari konflik; perbedaan literasi keagamaan memicu ketidaksepakatan mengenai praktik tertentu, seperti azan. Ketidaksepakatan ini semakin diperparah oleh teknologi digital, khususnya WhatsApp, akibat kurangnya proses mediasi yang peka konteks dalam penyampaian perbedaan pendapat tersebut. Secara teoretis, temuan ini berkontribusi pada pemahaman mengenai kehidupan Muslim perkotaan dengan menunjukkan bahwa moderasi berfungsi sebagai praktik yang dibentuk oleh *habitus* social sebuah pedagogi yang dijalani dalam kehidupan sehari-hari, bukan sekadar seperangkat ketentuan doktrinal. Kasus di Indonesia ini memberikan wawasan komparatif yang lebih luas bagi studi tentang komunitas Muslim dalam mengelola keragaman agama dan kohesi sosial di lingkungan perkotaan yang majemuk secara global.

Kata Kunci: Moderasi Beragama; Agama Yang Dihayati; Kohesi Sosial; Islam Perkotaan

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary global landscape, the rise of identity polarization, religion-based conflicts, and social fragmentation poses significant challenges to the stability of plural societies. These phenomena are not only driven by political and economic dynamics but are also intensified by digital ecosystems that accelerate the dissemination of exclusive and intolerant narratives (Bliuc et al., 2024; Octavianne et al., 2024; Al-Obaidi, 2024). In this regard, education plays a strategic role as a transformative medium capable of fostering social cohesion through the internalization of dialogue, inclusivity, and social justice values (Upadhyaya, 2020; Chia & Abdulsamad, 2025). Recent studies indicate that the construction of peace-oriented narratives within curricula significantly influences how younger generations perceive differences and social conflicts (Shamsuddin & Raza, 2025). Therefore,

education should not be understood merely as a process of knowledge transmission but as a critical arena for the reproduction of values that shape future social relations.

Within the framework of Islamic education, the paradigm of religious moderation through the concept of *wasathiyah* has gained increasing relevance as both an epistemological and pedagogical response to such complexities (Author, 2026b). *Wasathiyah* represents principles of balance (*tawazun*), justice (*'adl*), and moderation (*i'tidal*), which hold integrative potential in multicultural societies (Mala & Hunaida, 2023; Mubin et al., 2023). Empirical findings demonstrate that moderate religious literacy effectively reduces tendencies toward radicalism among youth across religious backgrounds (Takdir, 2025). At the pedagogical level, the integration of *wasathiyah* values has been shown to contribute to the development of inclusive and dialogical learning environments (Maryanti et al., 2025; Muslih, 2025). Furthermore, interdisciplinary approaches in Islamic education including integration with social sciences and natural sciences highlight the epistemological flexibility of *wasathiyah* in addressing contemporary challenges (Tribrata et al., 2025; Faridah et al., 2025; Hady et al., 2025). However, most existing studies remain confined to conceptual discussions and macro-level policy designs, offering limited insights into how *wasathiyah* pedagogy is operationalized in everyday educational practices (Basu et al., 2020; Dwork et al., 2024; Jiang et al., 2023).

In Indonesia as a multicultural nation, the challenge of maintaining social cohesion becomes increasingly complex, particularly in urban areas characterized by intense cross-identity interactions (Hutabarat, 2023; Stefanizzi, 2022). Cities such as Surabaya and Sidoarjo represent plural and dynamic social spaces that are simultaneously vulnerable to identity-based tensions while also offering opportunities for dialogue and social integration (Puumala & Maïche, 2021). Preliminary data obtained through field observations and in-depth interviews indicate that Islamic educational practices in these urban settings have begun to integrate *wasathiyah* values through dialogical approaches, cross-group interactions, and the strengthening of spiritual and digital literacy dimensions. These findings align with prior studies highlighting adaptive dialogue and balanced practices within Islamic education in Surabaya ([Author, 2023; Author & Rofi'i, 2023]), as well as the emergence of empathy- and compassion-based pedagogical approaches aimed at fostering harmonious social character ([Author et al., 2025a]).

Despite these developments, a significant research gap remains. There is still a lack of comprehensive studies that simultaneously examine how *wasathiyah* pedagogy is reconfigured as a framework for inclusive Islamic education oriented toward strengthening social cohesion in urban contexts (Author, 2025c). Previous research tends to separate conceptual, policy, and practical dimensions, thereby failing to provide an integrated empirical understanding of how values, pedagogical strategies, and social impacts interact in real educational settings. This study, therefore, offers novelty by positioning *wasathiyah* pedagogy not merely as a normative concept but as a form of *lived pedagogy* within complex urban environments. This perspective contributes theoretically to the development of inclusive Islamic education models and practically to the reinforcement of social cohesion in plural societies (Author, & Sariyani, 2026).

Based on the above considerations, this study aims to analyze the practice of *wasathiyah* pedagogy as a reconstruction of inclusive Islamic education in the urban contexts of Surabaya and Sidoarjo. The study is expected to contribute theoretically by developing a contextual and

adaptive model of *wasathiyah* pedagogy, and practically by strengthening social harmony through inclusive and sustainable Islamic education. If a quantitative approach is applied, the proposed hypothesis is that the implementation of *wasathiyah* pedagogy has a positive effect on enhancing social cohesion within urban communities (Author, 2026a).

Theoretically, this study is grounded in practice theory, particularly the Bourdieuan notion of habitus as a system of durable, transposable dispositions that structure everyday action (Bourdieu, 1990; Vakalopoulos, 2023). Applied to religious communities, habitus offers a lens through which the internalization of *wasathiyah* values can be understood not as deliberate instruction but as the sedimentation of repeated social practices. This theoretical orientation aligns with the sociology of lived religion, which foregrounds how faith is experienced and enacted in mundane, embodied, and relational contexts rather than exclusively through doctrinal transmission (McGuire, 2008). Together, these frameworks allow the present study to analyze *wasathiyah* pedagogy as a field of social practice where moral orientations are continuously reproduced through community life.

From a comparative perspective, the challenge of sustaining moderate Islamic identity in plural urban settings is not unique to Indonesia. Studies from Malaysia have documented how *wasathiyah* serves as a state-endorsed framework for managing intra-Muslim diversity and interethnic relations, though often through top-down institutional mechanisms (Hanapi, 2014; Sulistyoko et al., 2024). In Western Europe, Muslim minorities navigate social cohesion differently, facing symbolic and institutional boundaries that shape their religious identities from the outside (Schaeffer, 2024). Indonesia's context is distinctive in that moderation has been institutionalized through decentralized civil society organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, which function as grass-roots agents of moderate Islam rather than as arms of the state (Hady et al., 2025; Kamali, 2015). This makes the Indonesian case theoretically generative for understanding how *wasathiyah* pedagogy can emerge from below, grounded in community practice rather than policy mandate.

Against this backdrop, Surabaya and Sidoarjo offer an analytically rich fieldsite for examining how *wasathiyah* functions at the community level. As two of East Java's most populous and ethnically diverse urban centers, they host a dense network of mosques, *majelis taklim*, and community organizations that serve as informal sites of Islamic pedagogy. The coexistence of different Islamic organizational traditions and the intensity of intergroup interaction within these spaces make them especially suitable for investigating how moderation is socially enacted, contested, and negotiated in real time. Existing literature on *wasathiyah* in Indonesia has largely approached moderation through state policy, national curricula, or formal institutions such as *pesantren*, leaving the informal, everyday sites of urban religious life comparatively underexamined. This study addresses that gap by shifting the analytical focus from doctrine and policy to practice, positioning itself at the intersection of Islamic education studies, the sociology of religion, and urban social cohesion research.

2. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative field-based design to examine the implementation of *wasathiyah* pedagogy in non-formal Islamic educational settings. The research was conducted over four months (March–June 2026) in urban communities in Surabaya and Sidoarjo, Indonesia, across five research sites three mosques and two *majelis taklim* selected to

represent variation in organizational affiliation and neighborhood demographic composition. These locations were selected purposively based on their heterogeneous socio-cultural and religious characteristics, as well as the intensity of intergroup interactions within community-based religious activities. The research subjects consisted of mosque administrators (*takmir*), majelis taklim managers, religious leaders, and community members actively involved in religious and social activities. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure the inclusion of information-rich cases relevant to the research focus (Campbell et al., 2020). Variation in roles and levels of participation was considered to capture diverse perspectives. Sample size was guided by the concept of information power (Malterud et al., 2016), whereby a smaller, purposively selected sample was deemed sufficient given the narrow study aim, the specificity of participant roles, and the strength of dialogue achieved during interviews. The final number of participants was confirmed once data saturation was observed, indicated by the repetition of patterns and themes across interviews.

The main instrument in this study was the researcher, supported by a semi-structured interview guide and an observation checklist. The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions focusing on relational interaction, inclusivity, leadership practices, and intergroup dynamics, and was piloted with two participants prior to fieldwork to refine question clarity and sequencing. The observation checklist was used to systematically record behaviors, interactions, and contextual conditions during religious gatherings and community activities. Field notes were used to document additional contextual information and emerging insights during data collection.

Data were collected through participatory observation and in-depth semi-structured interviews. A total of 22 observation sessions were conducted across the five research sites, encompassing routine religious gatherings, communal activities (e.g., *pengajian*, communal meals, and neighborhood social events), and informal interactions, to capture naturally occurring practices. Nine in-depth interviews were conducted using open-ended questions and lasted approximately 30–60 minutes each. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim. Field notes were compiled immediately after each session to ensure data completeness and support triangulation.

Data analysis was conducted using reflexive thematic analysis. The process included data familiarization, initial coding, theme development, and interpretative analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Coding was performed iteratively and manually by identifying meaningful units related to the dimensions of *wasathiyah* pedagogy, using an initial coding framework informed by practice theory and refined inductively as data collection progressed. Themes were developed by grouping similar codes and refined through continuous comparison across data sources and research sites. The analysis aimed to identify patterns of practice and construct an interpretative understanding of how *wasathiyah* pedagogy is enacted in urban contexts.

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, this study applied data source triangulation, member checking, and audit trail documentation (Nowell et al., 2017).

Triangulation was conducted by comparing data from observations, interviews, and field notes. Member checking was carried out by confirming key findings with selected participants. An audit trail was maintained to document all stages of data collection and analysis. The reporting of this study followed the Standards for Reporting Qualitative Research (SRQR) to ensure transparency and methodological rigor (O'Brien et al., 2020).

A total of 9 participants were involved in this study across two research sites in Surabaya and Sidoarjo, comprising three mosque administrators (*takmir*), three majelis taklim managers, two religious leaders (*ustadz* and *ustadzah*), and one active community member. Participants ranged in age from 28 to 67 years, with varied levels of formal Islamic education. Gender representation included 5 male and 4 female participants, reflecting the gendered structure of community roles in the research settings. The decision to include female participants was deliberate, given the significant role of women-led majelis taklim in shaping inclusive religious practices in both Surabaya and Sidoarjo. Data saturation was reached after 7 interviews, with the remaining 2 conducted to confirm the stability of emerging themes.

Researcher positionality was explicitly considered throughout the study. As a researcher with insider familiarity with Indonesian Islamic community settings, close attention was paid to the risks of confirmation bias and over-rapport with participants. Reflexive journaling was maintained throughout fieldwork to document emerging assumptions and interpretive tensions (Hall et al., 2023). This reflexive stance ensured that the analysis remained anchored in participant accounts rather than in pre-existing frameworks. The dual position of researcher as both observer and interpreter was treated as a methodological resource rather than a limitation, consistent with established practices in qualitative Islamic education research (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Results and Discussion

Relational Interaction And Inclusive Religious Engagement

The study's findings reveal that inclusive Islamic pedagogy in urban settings manifests primarily through everyday relational interactions. Rather than being confined to formal teaching environments, pedagogical values are embedded in routine social practices within the community. Informants consistently highlighted that simple actions such as greeting neighbors, maintaining interpersonal closeness, and actively engaging in shared activities play a crucial role in fostering inclusive religious engagement. As a mosque administrator explained, "greeting neighbors is an expression of our care and familiarity, and proof that there are no issues between us" (Participant 1, mosque administrator).

These practices are not merely spontaneous or incidental behaviors but rather patterned interactions reflecting core values of humility, openness, and social connectedness. Observations at a mosque in Surabaya noted that initial encounters involved initiating greetings, inquiring about each other's well-being, and sharing positive news. Through sustained engagement in these relational practices, community members build mutual familiarity and trust. This demonstrates that inclusivity in Islamic pedagogy is cultivated

through repeated social contact, allowing these values to be naturally internalized within the social environment.

Furthermore, relational interactions serve as a bridge connecting individuals from diverse social and religious backgrounds. In highly heterogeneous urban settings, such interactions act as a mechanism to reduce social distance and foster a sense of togetherness. A majelis taklim manager described this dynamic: "when organizing study sessions, we do not limit speakers to a single group or organization; we are open to anyone, provided that harmony is maintained" (Participant 4, majelis taklim manager). An emphasis on accessibility and approachability in communication enables individuals to participate more comfortably in both religious and social activities.

However, the study's findings also indicate that managing the diverse backgrounds of the congregation presents interpersonal challenges. Informants noted that differences in personality, communication styles, and levels of religious understanding often require adaptive strategies. For instance, a religious leader recounted an incident in which a particular *ustad* declined to attend a study session due to differing views from the organizers despite the session otherwise attracting a large audience when led by other speakers (Participant 7, religious leader). Community leaders and members must continuously adjust their approaches to ensure that interactions remain inclusive and respectful.

To address these challenges, dialogic processes such as *musyawarah* (deliberative discussion) are widely employed. During fieldwork, the researcher observed a *musyawarah* session in Surabaya where the schedule for weekly study sessions was coordinated among various groups. This approach facilitates participatory decision-making and fosters collective problem-solving, allowing differences to be resolved through constructive negotiation. Consequently, inclusive Islamic pedagogy is not merely instructional but also dialogic and socially constructed, emerging through ongoing interaction and negotiation within the community.

Community-Based Activities as a Venue for Social Cohesion

Findings indicate that inclusive Islamic education in urban settings is not limited to formal instruction but is also integrated into daily social and community activities. Programs such as weekly morning exercise sessions and communal meals serve as structured yet flexible spaces where individuals from diverse backgrounds can interact. As observed by a community member, "whenever a study session is held, breakfast is provided for a shared meal; a communal meal is also served after the Maghrib prayer, and every Saturday morning, there is a group exercise session" (Participant 9, community member). These activities create an informal environment that fosters openness, participation, and accessibility for all community members.

Such community practices play a vital role in reducing social distance among participants. During observations of the Saturday morning group exercise sessions, the researcher documented how participants shared meals before and after the exercise and discussed upcoming activities. Through regular engagement in these activities, individuals

have the opportunity to interact outside of formal religious contexts, allowing interactions to develop more naturally and casually. This environment supports the growth of inclusive social relationships within the community.

Furthermore, repeated participation in community activities contributes to the gradual building of mutual trust and solidarity. Informants emphasized that consistent interaction enables individuals to establish familiarity and emotional bonds, which in turn strengthens the sense of togetherness. A majelis taklim manager noted: "by knowing our neighbors for a long time, we become familiar with their habits and activities" (Participant 5, majelis taklim manager). These processes underscore that social cohesion is forged through sustained engagement rather than merely incidental or isolated encounters.

Overall, these findings indicate that informal community practices serve as a crucial mechanism for maintaining social cohesion within urban Muslim communities. By integrating social interaction into daily activities, values of inclusivity are internalized through lived experience, thereby strengthening harmony amidst diverse organizational and social backgrounds.

Challenges in Implementing Wasathiyah Pedagogy

The findings indicate that the implementation of inclusive Islamic pedagogy faces several challenges, particularly those stemming from varying levels of religious understanding among community members. Tensions frequently arise regarding audible religious practices, such as the *adhan* (call to prayer), Quranic recitation, and *tarhim* (pre-dawn prayers/recitations). While some individuals view these practices as vital expressions of religious devotion, others find them disruptive or interpret them differently based on their own socio-religious perspectives. A mosque administrator recounted a specific incident: "There were negative comments from the community regarding *tarhim* and the *adhan* being too loud, disturbing non-Muslims or the sick" (Participant 2, mosque administrator).

These differing interpretations often spark friction within the community, especially in urban environments where diverse backgrounds coexist. The situation becomes more complex when such issues are discussed in digital spaces such as WhatsApp groups where opinions are voiced more openly, sometimes without an adequate understanding of the context. For instance, a heated discussion arose in a WhatsApp group arguing that the mosque should be managed by locals rather than newcomers (Participant 6, religious leader). Informants noted that these discussions could exacerbate misunderstandings if not managed carefully.

This situation indicates that variations in religious literacy and perception significantly influence how religious practices are received and evaluated within the community. Consequently, implementing inclusive Islamic pedagogy requires ongoing sensitivity, dialogue, and an adaptive approach to ensure that differences do not escalate into conflict but are instead managed constructively.

Leadership and Conflict Mediation

The findings underscore the crucial role of local leadership in managing tensions within diverse urban communities. Mosque administrators and local community figures play an active role in conflict resolution by providing clarifications, facilitating dialogue, and offering balanced perspectives when issues arise. A mosque administrator described a practice of consulting with neighborhood (RT/RW) leaders to counsel community members who felt disturbed by the noise (Participant 3, mosque administrator). Their involvement demonstrates that leadership is not merely administrative in nature but is also relational and responsive to the dynamics of community interaction.

Leadership is exercised through various means, including direct communication with residents, mediation within local forums, and ongoing efforts to foster mutual respect. During fieldwork, the researcher observed an instance of mediation in Sidoarjo involving mosque administrators, neighborhood leaders, and community figures; the process entailed proposing alternative lectures and worship practices aligned with the views of various organizations, ultimately leading to a consensus. These approaches enable leaders to address misunderstandings at an early stage and create space for constructive dialogue. Consequently, differences among community members can be managed more effectively without causing further division.

Equality and Collective Identity In Religious Spaces

The findings further indicate that social harmony within urban Muslim communities is reinforced through practices that emphasize equality and mutual recognition. Informants explained that religious gatherings are deliberately organized in a way that places all participants on an equal footing, regardless of their social or professional background. This intentional structuring creates an inclusive atmosphere where individuals feel valued and respected as members of the same community.

Such an egalitarian approach is further strengthened through shared activities, including eating and drinking together. These practices function not only as social interactions but also as symbolic expressions of unity, where distinctions based on status are temporarily dissolved. Through these interactions, community members experience a sense of closeness that transcends formal social boundaries.

In addition, these practices contribute significantly to minimizing hierarchical differences within the community. By engaging in equal participation, individuals develop a shared understanding of belonging that is not defined by position or authority. This process fosters mutual respect and encourages more open and inclusive forms of interaction among participants. Consequently, the mosque emerges not only as a place of worship but also as a dynamic social space where inclusivity and equality are actively practiced. Everyday interactions within this space become a medium through which collective identity is constructed and reinforced, ultimately contributing to the sustainability of social harmony in diverse urban contexts.

Negotiation Of Intra-Religious Diversity

The findings indicate that intra-religious diversity within urban Muslim communities, particularly between groups such as Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, is managed through processes of negotiation and adaptation. Differences in ritual practices sometimes lead to the establishment of separate worship spaces as a way to accommodate varying religious preferences. However, this structural differentiation does not necessarily result in social division within the community. Despite these differences, inter-group relationships remain constructive and cooperative. Informants highlighted that communication is consistently maintained through regular interaction, joint religious activities, and the exchange of religious speakers. These forms of engagement provide opportunities for continued dialogue and mutual understanding across organizational boundaries.

As a result, social ties (*silaturahmi*) and mutual respect are preserved even in the presence of diversity. The findings demonstrate that intra-religious differences are not inherently a source of conflict but can be managed through adaptive and collaborative strategies. This suggests that diversity within urban Muslim communities can function as a foundation for cohesion when supported by ongoing interaction and shared social values.

The findings demonstrate that wasathiyah pedagogy is constructed through multiple interrelated dimensions that shape inclusive social practices. These dimensions are summarized in **Fig. 1**, which illustrates how relational interaction, social engagement, leadership, equality, and institutional diversity contribute to social cohesion in urban Muslim communities.



Figure 1. Key dimensions of wasathiyah pedagogy (Source: Author's analysis)

This figure illustrates the key dimensions of wasathiyah pedagogy derived from interview findings, including relational ethics, social engagement, negotiation and mediation, equality and recognition, and institutional diversity. These interconnected elements are operationalized through everyday practices such as communal activities, dialogical interaction, inclusive participation, and inter-group cooperation. Collectively, these processes contribute to the development of social cohesion and the maintenance of urban religious harmony in diverse Muslim communities. The model highlights that moderation (*wasathiyah*) is enacted as a lived social practice rather than merely a doctrinal concept.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study confirm that wasathiyah pedagogy in urban communities operates not merely as a normative framework but as a practical and lived response to increasing identity polarization and social fragmentation. While prior studies tend to conceptualize moderation at the level of discourse and policy (Bliuc et al., 2024; Upadhyaya, 2020), this study demonstrates that wasathiyah is enacted through everyday relational practices such as greeting, participation, and dialogical engagement. This finding extends existing literature by shifting the focus from abstract conceptualization toward embodied social practices as the primary site of pedagogical transformation.

Furthermore, the results reveal that inclusive Islamic pedagogy extends beyond formal instructional settings into informal communal spaces. Activities such as shared meals and collective gatherings function as alternative pedagogical arenas where values of inclusivity and mutual respect are internalized through interaction. While previous studies highlight the importance of dialogue in multicultural education (Chia & Abdulsamad, 2025; Shamsuddin & Raza, 2025), this study advances the argument by demonstrating that social cohesion is not only facilitated through structured dialogue but also through repetitive, informal, and socially embedded interactions. This suggests that wasathiyah pedagogy operates through a hybrid mechanism combining intentional and incidental learning processes.

In the context of multicultural urban Indonesia, the findings reinforce the role of wasathiyah values in mediating diversity and maintaining social harmony. However, unlike earlier studies that emphasize inclusivity at a conceptual level (Hutabarat, 2023; Mala & Hunaida, 2023), this research reveals that inclusivity is actively constructed through everyday negotiation and recognition of differences among Islamic groups. This indicates that urban religious harmony is not a static condition but a dynamic process shaped by continuous interaction and adaptation.

At the same time, this study identifies critical challenges in the implementation of wasathiyah pedagogy, particularly related to differences in religious literacy and interpretive frameworks. While previous literature acknowledges the potential for tension in plural societies (Stefanizzi, 2022; Puumala & Maïche, 2021), this study provides a more grounded explanation by showing how such tensions emerge in specific practices and how they are negotiated at the community level. This highlights the importance of contextual sensitivity in applying inclusive Islamic education.

A key contribution of this study lies in highlighting the central role of local leadership in mediating these challenges. In contrast to prior research that focuses on macro-level policy interventions (Basu et al., 2020; Dwork et al., 2024), this study demonstrates that micro-level leadership plays a decisive role in translating abstract values into socially accepted practices. Mosque administrators and local leaders function as pedagogical agents who actively shape community responses and maintain social cohesion through communication, mediation, and guidance ([Author, 2025b]; Muslih, 2025).

Moreover, the coexistence of different Islamic organizations, such as Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, reveals that diversity does not necessarily lead to fragmentation. This study extends previous findings (Faridah et al., 2025; Hady et al., 2025) by demonstrating that institutional diversity can become a resource for collaboration when supported by shared

values and continuous interaction. This challenges dominant assumptions that intra-religious differences inherently generate conflict.

The conceptual model proposed in this study further strengthens this argument by illustrating that wasathiyah pedagogy operates as a relational and dynamic system. Unlike existing models that frame moderation as a static principle, this study conceptualizes it as a lived process emerging from the interaction of relational ethics, social engagement, leadership, equality, and institutional diversity. This model represents a novel contribution by integrating micro-level social practices into a broader pedagogical framework, thereby offering a more comprehensive understanding of inclusive Islamic education in urban contexts.

As illustrated in Fig. 2, the conceptual model synthesizes the findings by demonstrating how relational ethics, communal activities, leadership mediation, equality, and institutional coexistence interact dynamically to produce social cohesion in diverse urban Muslim communities.

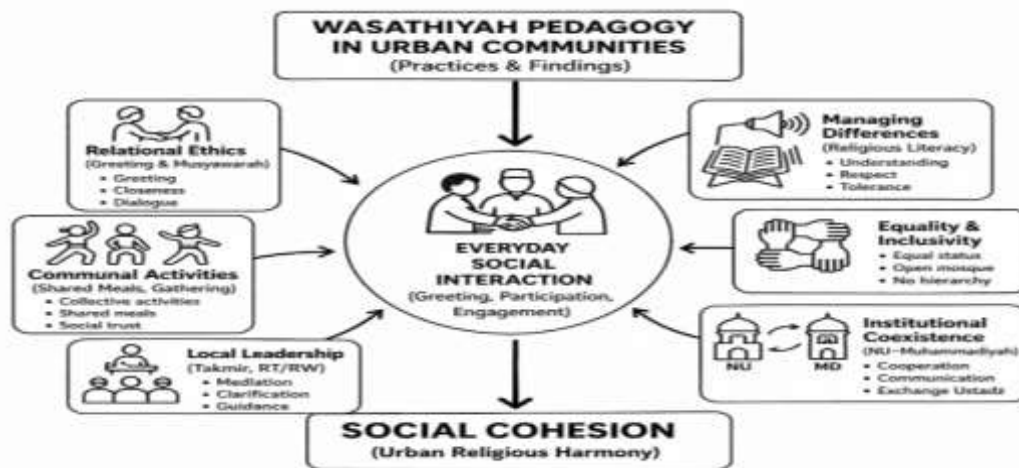


Figure 2. Conceptual model of wasathiyah pedagogy in urban social cohesion (Source: Author's analysis)

This figure illustrates how wasathiyah pedagogy is operationalized in urban communities through everyday social interaction as its central mechanism. Five key dimensions relational ethics, communal activities, local leadership, equality and inclusivity, and institutional coexistence collectively shape inclusive religious practices. These elements interact dynamically to foster mutual understanding, cooperation, and social harmony across diverse Islamic groups. The model highlights that moderation (wasathiyah) is enacted not only through formal instruction but through lived social engagement embedded in daily community life.

The conceptual model demonstrates that wasathiyah pedagogy in urban contexts operates as a lived and relational process centered on everyday social interaction. Practices such as greeting, communal participation, shared meals, and dialogical engagement function as key mechanisms for internalizing inclusive values. These are further strengthened by the roles of local leadership in mediating tensions, as well as the recognition of equality across diverse social and religious backgrounds. The coexistence of different Islamic groups, such as Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, illustrates that diversity can be managed

constructively through communication and cooperation. Overall, the model confirms that social cohesion in urban Muslim communities is not achieved through uniformity, but through continuous negotiation, inclusivity, and shared social experiences grounded in wasathiyah principles.

When examined through the lens of practice theory, the wasathiyah pedagogy observed in this study can be understood as the formation of a religious habitus (Bourdieu, 1990; Vakalopoulos, 2023). The values of moderation, balance, and relational openness are not simply taught as doctrines but are inscribed into the bodily and cognitive dispositions of community members through repetitive participation in shared practices. The act of greeting, sharing food, and engaging in deliberative discussion gradually produces a habituated orientation toward difference that makes inclusive behavior feel natural and unremarkable rather than effortful. This Bourdieuan reading extends the analysis beyond intentional pedagogy to account for how wasathiyah is reproduced as a social structure, even in the absence of formal instruction.

The findings of this study carry implications that extend beyond the Indonesian context. In Malaysia, the wasatiyyah framework has been institutionally promoted through state agencies, yet empirical studies suggest that community-level practices remain the primary driver of social cohesion among Muslims (Hanapi, 2014; Sulistyoko et al., 2024). The present study contributes comparative insight by demonstrating that when moderation is embedded in relational community life rather than state-administered programs, it tends to be more adaptive and locally responsive. For Muslim communities in Western Europe, where moderation is frequently discussed as an external expectation imposed by host societies (Schaeffer, 2024), the Indonesian experience of wasathiyah as a self-generated communal practice offers an alternative model one generated from within Islamic tradition rather than negotiated under conditions of minority pressure.

The role of musyawarah (deliberative discussion) as a conflict resolution mechanism identified in this study resonates with Habermasian theories of communicative action, whereby social integration is achieved through rational discourse oriented toward mutual understanding rather than strategic interests (Habermas, 1984). In the community settings studied here, musyawarah functions as a culturally embedded practice that channels tensions over religious literacy and ritual differences into constructive dialogue. This finding suggests that wasathiyah pedagogy does not suppress or deny intra-religious differences but provides a procedural ethic for managing them. The alignment between wasathiyah values and communicative rationality thus offers a theoretical bridge between Islamic educational thought and broader sociological frameworks of democratic deliberation.

This study also highlights a dimension of wasathiyah pedagogy that has received insufficient attention in the literature: its dependence on local leadership as a social infrastructure for inclusive practice. Kamali (2015) has argued that moderation requires institutional cultivation, but the present findings show that the most effective agents of moderation in urban Indonesian communities are not formal institutions but responsive local leaders who exercise what might be called relational authority. Their capacity to de-escalate tensions, reframe misunderstandings, and model balanced behavior creates a social climate in which inclusive values can take root. This leadership dimension is especially significant for

policy implications: investment in the formation of community-level religious leaders may be more effective in sustaining *wasathiyah* than curriculum reform alone.

4. CONCLUSION

The most significant finding of this study reveals that *wasathiyah* pedagogy in urban Muslim communities is not primarily transmitted through formal teaching or institutional curricula, but rather emerges as a lived social practice embedded in everyday interactions. This finding is particularly noteworthy as it challenges the dominant assumption that inclusive Islamic education is mainly delivered through structured learning environments. Instead, this study shows that practices such as relational interaction, communal engagement, dialogical negotiation, and inclusive participation function as the primary mechanisms through which values of moderation and social cohesion are internalized. This indicates that the sustainability of social harmony in urban contexts is largely shaped by habitual social practices rather than formal doctrinal instruction. It should be noted, however, that these mechanisms were identified within the specific socio-religious configuration of Surabaya and Sidoarjo, and their relative weight may vary in other urban settings with different demographic, organizational, or historical characteristics.

Theoretical Contribution

This study contributes to the development of Islamic educational scholarship by extending existing perspectives on *wasathiyah* pedagogy. While previous research has largely emphasized conceptual frameworks and policy-level implementation, this study offers a practice-based perspective that positions *wasathiyah* as a dynamic and relational process. The findings not only confirm the importance of inclusivity and dialogue in fostering social cohesion but also challenge earlier approaches by demonstrating that informal social spaces and micro-level interactions play a more decisive role than previously acknowledged. Furthermore, this study introduces a conceptual model that integrates relational ethics, social engagement, leadership mediation, equality, and institutional diversity as interconnected dimensions of inclusive Islamic pedagogy, thereby offering a more comprehensive and context-sensitive framework for understanding moderation in urban societies. This conceptual model is intended as an analytical lens that may be tested and refined in other Muslim urban contexts, rather than as a fixed or universally applicable template.

Research Limitations and Future Directions

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the research is limited to specific urban areas, namely Surabaya and Sidoarjo, which may not fully represent the diversity of Muslim communities in other regions; consequently, the findings should be understood as context-bound insights rather than broadly generalizable claims, and any comparative relevance to other settings should be treated as a starting point for further empirical testing rather than a confirmed pattern. Second, the number of participants and cases is relatively limited, focusing primarily on community-based religious actors, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Third, the study does not account for variations across different age groups, gender, or educational levels, which may influence the implementation of *wasathiyah* pedagogy. Finally, the use of a qualitative approach, while providing in-depth insights, limits the ability to measure the broader impact quantitatively. Therefore, future research is recommended to involve larger and more diverse samples, incorporate comparative contexts across other Indonesian regions and other plural Muslim-

majority societies, and employ mixed-method approaches to generate a more comprehensive understanding. Such efforts are essential for informing more effective policies and practices in strengthening inclusive Islamic education and social cohesion in plural societies.

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