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A Multicultural Approach Based On Islamic Moderation (*Wasathiyah*) According To Prof. M. Quraish Shihab

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Abstract

Indonesia's ethnic, religious, and cultural plurality makes Islamic education a strategic arena for cultivating religious moderation and multicultural awareness. This study aims to analyze the multicultural approach grounded in Islamic moderation (*wasathiyah*) according to M. Quraish Shihab and to examine its relevance for the development of Islamic education in Indonesia. It employs a qualitative *library research* design. Shihab's *Wasathiyyah: Wawasan Islam tentang Moderasi Beragama* serves as the primary source, supported by secondary literature on multiculturalism and religious moderation, and the data are analyzed through *content analysis* consisting of data reduction, data display, interpretation, and conclusion drawing. The findings show that Shihab's *wasathiyah* rests on four principles: moderation (*tawassuth*), balance (*tawazun*), tolerance (*tasamuh*), and justice (*i'tidal*). Together with deliberation (*musyawarah*) and human fraternity (*ukhuwah insaniyah*), these principles form a coherent multicultural approach. When mapped onto Banks's five dimensions of multicultural education, the approach translates into concrete implications for curriculum, character education, dialogical pedagogy, and school culture. The study concludes that the approach offers a normative-theological foundation for inclusive Islamic education, although its effectiveness still requires empirical testing.

Keywords: Multicultural Approach; *Wasathiyah;* Religious Moderation; M. Quraish Shihab; Islamic Education.

Abstrak

Keberagaman suku, agama, dan budaya di Indonesia menjadikan pendidikan Islam sebagai ruang strategis untuk menumbuhkan moderasi beragama dan kesadaran multikultural. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis pendekatan multikultural berwawasan Islam kemoderatan (*wasathiyah*) menurut M. Quraish Shihab serta mengkaji relevansinya bagi pengembangan pendidikan Islam di Indonesia. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif jenis kepustakaan (*library research*). Sumber primer adalah buku *Wasathiyyah*: Wawasan Islam tentang Moderasi Beragama karya Shihab, didukung literatur sekunder tentang multikulturalisme dan moderasi beragama. Data dianalisis dengan analisis isi (*content analysis*) melalui reduksi data, penyajian data, interpretasi, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa *wasathiyah* menurut Shihab bertumpu pada empat prinsip, yaitu sikap pertengahan (*tawassuth*), keseimbangan (*tawazun*), toleransi (*tasamuh*), dan keadilan (*i'tidal*). Bersama prinsip *musyawarah* dan persaudaraan kemanusiaan (*ukhuwah insaniyah*), keempat prinsip tersebut membentuk pendekatan multikultural yang utuh. Jika dipetakan pada lima dimensi pendidikan multikultural Banks, pendekatan ini berimplikasi pada kurikulum, pendidikan karakter, pedagogi dialogis, dan budaya sekolah. Penelitian menyimpulkan bahwa pendekatan ini dapat menjadi landasan normatif-teologis bagi pendidikan Islam yang inklusif, meskipun efektivitasnya masih perlu diuji secara empiris.

Kata Kunci: Pendekatan Multikultural; *Wasathiyah;* Moderasi Beragama; M. Quraish Shihab; Pendidikan Islam.

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1. Introduction

Plurality is a defining characteristic of Indonesian society, which is home to numerous ethnic groups, religions, languages, cultures, and traditions living side by side within a single nation. This diversity is a national asset that must be safeguarded, yet it can also become a source of conflict when it is not accompanied by mutual respect and tolerance (Nasution & Albina, 2024). Education, and Islamic education in particular, is therefore expected to prepare learners who are able to live together peacefully in a plural society.

In recent decades, intolerance, radicalism, and religious exclusivism have emerged as serious challenges that may threaten unity and harmony in plural societies (Mashuri, 2025). Responding to them requires an approach that cultivates awareness of how to live peacefully amid difference. One approach considered relevant is a multicultural approach grounded in the values of Islamic moderation (*wasathiyah*) (Bulkhani et al., 2024). *Wasathiyah* is understood as a middle position that rejects every form of extremism in both thought and religious practice, and it stresses balance, justice, tolerance, and respect for human rights (Amalia et al., 2025).

One of the Indonesian Muslim scholars who has written most extensively on this concept is Prof. M. Quraish Shihab. In *Wasathiyyah: Wawasan Islam*

tentang Moderasi Beragama, he explains that Islam teaches balance between worldly and spiritual life, between rights and obligations, and between individual and social interests (Shihab, 2019). He regards moderation as the main character of the Muslim community, as expressed in QS. Al-Baqarah [2]: 143, which describes Muslims as *ummatan wasathan* (Putri & Fadlullah, 2022). His thought on religious moderation is also closely related to the multicultural approach, since both treat diversity as *sunnatullah* that must be accepted and respected (Mashuri, 2025). Islamic education is consequently required to internalize *wasathiyah* values so that learners develop moderate, tolerant, and open characters (Suwandi & Supriyanto, 2022).

Previous studies have examined this theme from several angles. A first group explains the concept of *wasathiyah* in Shihab's thought, including its relation to tolerance and its critical comparison with other Muslim thinkers (Darman, 2022; Putri & Fadlullah, 2022; Sukirno et al., 2025). A second group discusses the educational values contained in Shihab's concept of religious moderation (Suwandi & Supriyanto, 2022). A third group addresses Islamic multicultural education through its implementation in a particular institution (Sumadiyah, 2024), or through the multiculturalism discourse in classical and contemporary exegesis (Riksanda et al., 2026). These studies provide an important foundation, but in the literature reviewed here they tend to treat *wasathiyah* and multicultural education as separate discussions, or they focus on particular institutions or exegetical discourse rather than formulating Shihab's *wasathiyah* as one integrated multicultural approach. What remains underexplored is (a) how the principles of *wasathiyah* can be articulated as a systematic multicultural approach, and (b) how that approach can be linked analytically to a recognized framework of multicultural education and translated into implications for Islamic education.

This study addresses that gap. Its novelty lies in synthesizing Shihab's *wasathiyah* principles into a multicultural approach and mapping them onto Banks's (2004) five dimensions of multicultural education, thereby moving from conceptual description to analytical and practical implications. The study aims to analyze the multicultural approach based on Islamic moderation (*wasathiyah*) according to M. Quraish Shihab and to examine its relevance for the development of Islamic education in Indonesia.

2. Methods

This study uses a qualitative approach with a *library research* design. This design was chosen because the object of study is a body of thought and concepts found in written sources, namely books, journal articles, and other scholarly documents on multiculturalism and *wasathiyah* according to Shihab.

The data consist of primary and secondary sources. The primary source is Shihab's (2019) *Wasathiyyah: Wawasan Islam tentang Moderasi Beragama*. The secondary sources are national journal articles, books, and previous studies on religious moderation, multicultural education, and Shihab's thought, listed in the reference section. Data were collected through documentation: identifying, inventorying, and reviewing relevant sources, and then classifying them into

themes, namely the concept of multiculturalism, the principles of *wasathiyah*, and their implementation in Islamic education.

The data were analyzed using *content analysis* in four stages. In data reduction, information relevant to the research focus was selected. In data display, the selected information was arranged systematically into themes and matrices. In interpretation, Shihab's concept of *wasathiyah* was analyzed in relation to the multicultural approach, using Banks's (2004) dimensions of multicultural education as the analytical framework. Conclusions were then drawn from this analysis. To maintain the credibility of the interpretation, the findings drawn from the primary source were cross-checked against secondary studies.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1 Multiculturalism in an Islamic Perspective

Multiculturalism is a view that recognizes and values diversity of culture, religion, ethnicity, language, and tradition in social life, and emphasizes mutual respect, tolerance, and acceptance of difference (Nasution & Albina, 2024; Ubadah, 2022). In the Islamic perspective, diversity is a divine decree (*sunnatullah*) that cannot be avoided. The Qur'an explains that humankind was created in various tribes and nations in order to know one another (*ta'aruf*), as stated in QS. Al-Hujurat [49]: 13:

> "O humankind, We created you from a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another. Indeed, the most honored among you in the sight of Allah is the most pious."

The verse shows that difference is not a reason for hostility but a means of building harmonious social relations. Islam does not reject diversity; it teaches appreciation of difference as part of human reality (Muksin, 2022). Multicultural education in this view is not limited to knowledge. It also forms character that upholds humanity, justice, and tolerance (Muksin, 2022).

To make the discussion analytical, this study uses Banks's (2004) framework, which identifies five dimensions of multicultural education: content integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and an empowering school culture and social structure. The framework allows Shihab's ideas to be examined not only as abstract values but as components of an educational approach.

3.2 The Concept of Wasathiyah According to M. Quraish Shihab

Shihab explains that *wasathiyah* is a middle attitude that places everything proportionally and in balance (Ubadah, 2022). The concept derives from the word *wasath*, which means middle, just, and best. In the Qur'an it is expressed in QS. Al-Baqarah [2]: 143, which calls the Muslim community *ummatan wasathan*, a community that does not take extreme positions and is able to maintain balance in various aspects of life (Shihab, 2019). Moderation, he stresses, does not mean reducing religious values. It means understanding and practicing Islamic teachings proportionally and avoiding excess (*ghuluw*), including fanaticism that can trigger conflict and division in society (Amalia et al., 2025).

Four main characteristics of *wasathiyah* can be identified in his thought:

1) *Tawassuth* (the middle position): taking the middle way and avoiding extremes both in understanding and in practicing religious teachings, so that one acts wisely and proportionally.
2) *Tawazun* (balance): maintaining balance between worldly and spiritual life, between rights and obligations, and between individual and communal interests, without privileging one aspect at the expense of another.
3) *Tasamuh* (tolerance): respecting differences in society. For Shihab, tolerance does not mean mixing creeds but honoring each person's right to practice his or her own belief.
4) *I'tidal* (justice): acting justly and putting things in their proper place, a principle to be realized in social, economic, and political life (Shihab, 2019).

Two analytical observations follow. First, the four principles function as a system and not as a list. *Tawassuth* and *tawazun* regulate how a person holds his or her own religious understanding, while *tasamuh* and *i'tidal* regulate how that person treats others. Second, the formulation of *tasamuh* is important for the multicultural debate, because it sets a boundary: tolerance is respect for the other's right to believe, not the dissolving of one's own creed. This distinguishes Shihab's position from relativism and answers a common concern that multicultural education may weaken religious commitment.

3.3 Multicultural Values in Shihab's Thought

Shihab's view of *wasathiyah* is closely connected with multicultural values, as seen in his position that diversity is a decree of God to be accepted and respected (Shihab, 2019). He holds that Islam teaches good relations with all people regardless of religion, ethnicity, race, or culture, and that mutual respect and the upholding of human values are the basis of peaceful life (Suwandi & Supriyanto, 2022). Seven multicultural values can be identified, and Table 1 shows how each can be traced to the *wasathiyah* principles.

Table 1 *Multicultural values in Shihab's wasathiyah and the principles from which they derive*

No.	Multicultural value	Underlying *wasathiyah* principle
1	Recognition of diversity as *sunnatullah*	*Tasamuh*
2	Respect for human dignity without discrimination	*I'tidal*
3	Upholding justice in social life	*I'tidal*
4	Development of a culture of dialogue and deliberation (*musyawarah*)	*Tawassuth*
5	Strengthening human fraternity (*ukhuwah insaniyah*)	*Tasamuh*
6	Respect for the rights of minority groups	*I'tidal* and *tasamuh*
7	Rejection of extremism and radicalism	*Tawassuth* and *tawazun*

Note. The mapping is the author's analytical interpretation based on Shihab (2019) and Suwandi and Supriyanto (2022).

Moderation therefore works at two levels. At the personal level it disciplines religious attitudes against extremes; at the social level it generates values that recognize diversity and protect the vulnerable. This is why Shihab's moderation aligns with the aims of multicultural education, which emphasize tolerance, appreciation of difference, and harmonious coexistence (Riksanda et al., 2026).

3.4 The Multicultural Approach Based on Wasathiyah

A multicultural approach based on Islamic moderation is an approach that integrates multicultural values with the principles of *wasathiyah* in order to build moderate, tolerant, and inclusive attitudes in plural society (Sumadiyah, 2024). From Shihab's thought, five basic principles can be formulated:

1) *Justice.* Justice is the foundation of social life. Every person has an equal right to fair treatment regardless of religion, ethnicity, or culture.
2) *Balance.* Balance prevents people from falling into extremes. It allows a person to practice religion proportionally while still respecting the existence of others.
3) *Tolerance.* Tolerance is the key to plural society because it makes harmonious interaction possible amid diversity.
4) *Deliberation (musyawarah).* Problems are resolved through dialogue and deliberation. A culture of dialogue strengthens unity and prevents social conflict.
5) *Human fraternity (ukhuwah insaniyah).* Brotherhood among human beings is not limited by differences of religion or cultural background (Putri & Fadlullah, 2022).

The five principles are interdependent. Justice without balance may become rigid legalism, tolerance without justice may mask unequal treatment, and dialogue without a shared commitment to fraternity may become mere procedure. The strength of the approach lies in this mutual reinforcement.

3.5 Relevance to Islamic Education in Indonesia

Table 2 maps the *wasathiyah* principles onto Banks's (2004) five dimensions and derives the implications for Islamic education. The mapping is an analytical synthesis by the author and not a claim that Shihab himself used this framework.

Table 2 *Wasathiyah principles mapped onto Banks's dimensions of multicultural education*

Banks's dimension	***Wasathiyah* principle**	**Implication for Islamic education**
Content integration	*Tasamuh*, *i'tidal*	Integrate moderation, tolerance, and justice into Islamic education subjects such as Qur'an-Hadith, Aqidah Akhlak, Fiqh, and Islamic cultural history, so that they are not confined to a single topic.
Knowledge construction	*Tawassuth*, *tawazun*	Train learners to examine how religious understanding is formed and to recognize when interpretation drifts into excess (*ghuluw*), encouraging proportional and critical reading of texts.

Banks's dimension	*Wasathiyah* principle	Implication for Islamic education
Prejudice reduction	*Tasamuh*, *ukhuwah insaniyah*	Use dialogue-based and cooperative learning that brings learners into structured encounters with difference.
Equity pedagogy	*I'tidal*	Ensure fair treatment and equal learning opportunities regardless of religion, ethnicity, or background through inclusive teaching strategies.
Empowering school culture and social structure	*Musyawarah*, *ukhuwah insaniyah*	Build a deliberative school culture with equitable participation and protection for minority learners.

Note. Dimensions follow Banks (2004); the mapping is the author's analytical interpretation.

Several implications can be drawn. First, a curriculum based on religious moderation should embed tolerance, justice, and respect for diversity, so that learners develop an inclusive religious understanding. Second, character education offers a vehicle for forming honesty, tolerance, responsibility, and respect for difference, values that match the *wasathiyah* principles. Third, a culture of dialogue must be cultivated in the learning environment so that learners become accustomed to resolving differences through deliberation and mutual respect. Fourth, the internalization of moderation can serve as a preventive effort against the spread of intolerance and radicalism in educational settings. Fifth, appreciation of diversity as national identity can strengthen national unity (Shihab, 2019).

The mapping also clarifies what is distinctive in the Islamic approach. Where general multicultural education frameworks rest on principles of equity and human rights, Shihab's approach grounds the same aims in a theological identity, the Muslim community as *ummatan wasathan*. For Islamic education this matters in practice, because it allows multicultural values to be taught as an expression of faith and not as an external agenda.

3.6 Critical Reflection and Limitations

Three cautions should accompany these findings. First, *wasathiyah* can be reduced to a slogan if it is not translated into operational indicators. Educators need clear descriptors of what a moderate, tolerant learner does, for instance in dealing with a classmate of a different faith, so that the approach can be assessed. Second, the boundary Shihab places on tolerance requires careful pedagogy. Teachers must be able to distinguish respect for another person's right to believe from the dilution of one's own creed, otherwise the approach may be misunderstood from either direction. Third, the study is conceptual. It draws on one primary text and secondary studies, and the proposed implications have not been tested in classrooms. Future research should therefore examine the approach empirically, for example through case studies or action research in Islamic schools and universities.

Even with these limitations, the approach can contribute at the societal level by strengthening interfaith harmony, raising awareness of tolerance, and

reducing conflict rooted in differences of identity and religious understanding. These are plausible contributions that follow from the values analyzed above and from the studies reviewed (Putri & Fadlullah, 2022; Sumadiyah, 2024), but they should be read as potentials to be tested rather than demonstrated outcomes.

4. Conclusion

This study set out to analyze the multicultural approach based on Islamic moderation (*wasathiyah*) according to M. Quraish Shihab and to examine its relevance for Islamic education in Indonesia. The analysis leads to three conclusions. First, Shihab's *wasathiyah* rests on four principles, namely *tawassuth*, *tawazun*, *tasamuh*, and *i'tidal*, and it treats diversity as *sunnatullah* to be accepted wisely, with tolerance defined as respect for others' right to believe and not as a mixing of creeds. Second, together with deliberation and human fraternity, these principles can be synthesized into a coherent multicultural approach that yields seven multicultural values. Third, mapped onto Banks's five dimensions, the approach has concrete implications for Islamic education: curriculum integration, critical knowledge construction, prejudice reduction through dialogue, equitable pedagogy, and a deliberative school culture.

Theoretically, the study contributes an integrative framework that connects Shihab's *wasathiyah* with an established model of multicultural education. Practically, it offers educators and curriculum developers a set of principles and implications that can be adapted in Islamic education. Because the study is based on literature, future research is recommended to test the approach empirically and to develop measurable indicators of moderation and multicultural competence in learners.

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