

Exploring Religious Moderation through Student-Written Flash Fiction

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A B S T R A C T

This study examines the integration of religious moderation values through flash fiction written by students. The research design used mixed methods involving 25 students. The data collected consisted of quantitative and qualitative data. Data were collected through a questionnaire related to students' understanding of religious moderation. The results of the initial questionnaire became the basis for teachers in delivering the material to students. After being given the material, students were asked to create a short story containing religious moderation. After completing the story, students were asked to complete a questionnaire containing three questions related to their understanding of religious moderation, its application in the story, and its application in everyday life. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The results showed a strong understanding of religious moderation and creative application of it in narratives. Quantitative findings showed an average increase of 20%. These results indicate that flash fiction is a promising educational tool for promoting religious moderation. The initial survey results showed that most students had experienced incidents of intolerance. Data from student-generated stories indicate that the majority of students understand religious moderation as "accepting and respecting the beliefs of others," practicing tolerance through fictional stories, and applying it in daily life. Religious moderation can be effectively implemented through learning models, such as writing flash fiction. Practically, this study offers a replicable framework for educators to integrate moral education into literacy development. These findings suggest that implementing student-centered activities, such as flash fiction, into the curriculum can foster empathy, tolerance, and social harmony in diverse classroom environments. The results of this study are expected to provide alternatives for teachers when teaching the same or other materials.

Keywords: flash fiction; Indonesian student; religious moderation; writing skills

Menggali Moderasi Beragama melalui Karya Flash Fiction Siswa

Penelitian ini mengkaji integrasi nilai-nilai moderasi beragama melalui flash fiction yang ditulis oleh siswa. Desain penelitian menggunakan mixed methods yang melibatkan 25 siswa. Data yang dikumpulkan terdiri dari data kuantitatif dan kualitatif. Data dikumpulkan melalui angket terkait pemahaman siswa tentang moderasi beragama. Hasil angket awal menjadi dasar bagi guru dalam menyampaikan materi kepada siswa. Setelah diberi materi, siswa diminta untuk membuat cerita pendek yang memuat moderasi beragama. Selesai membuat cerita, siswa diminta mengisi angket yang memuat tiga pertanyaan terkait pemahaman moderasi beragama, penerapannya dalam cerita, dan penerapannya dalam kehidupan sehari-hari. Data kuantitatif dianalisis menggunakan statistik deskriptif, sedangkan data kualitatif dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan pemahaman yang kuat tentang moderasi beragama dan secara kreatif menerapkannya dalam narasi. Temuan kuantitatif menunjukkan peningkatan rerata sebesar 20%. Hasil ini menunjukkan bahwa flash fiction merupakan alat edukatif yang menjanjikan untuk mempromosikan moderasi beragama. Hasil survei awal menunjukkan bahwa Sebagian besar siswa pernah mengalami peristiwa intoleransi. Data dari cerita yang dibuat oleh siswa menunjukkan bahwa mayoritas siswa memahami moderasi beragama sebagai "menerima dan menghormati keyakinan orang lain", menerapkan toleransi melalui cerita fiksi, dan menerapkannya dalam kehidupan sehari-hari. Moderasi beragama dapat diterapkan secara efektif melalui model pembelajaran, seperti penulisan fiksi kilat. Secara praktis, studi ini menawarkan kerangka kerja yang dapat direplikasi bagi para pendidik untuk mengintegrasikan pendidikan moral ke dalam pengembangan literasi. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa penerapan kegiatan yang berpusat pada siswa, seperti fiksi kilat, ke dalam kurikulum dapat mendorong empati, toleransi, dan harmoni sosial dalam beragam lingkungan kelas. Hasil penelitian ini diharapkan dapat menjadi alternatif bagi guru ketika mengajar materi yang sama atau materi lain.

Kata kunci: fiksi kilat; keterampilan menulis; moderasi beragama; pelajar Indonesia

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a multicultural country with diverse ethnicities, religions, cultures, customs, politics, etc. While this diversity is a strength, it may also give rise to various social challenges, including intolerance (Anas et al., 2025; Mavridis, 2015). Intolerance often results from a lack of empathy and mutual respect. These values are traditionally embodied in *tepo seliro*, a Javanese principle emphasizing acceptance of differences (Laila & Abdullah, 2022). When individuals view their beliefs as superior and reject others as wrong or deviant, intolerance can grow, leading to polarization and even radicalism (Kelihi et al., 2022). Such attitudes are not in line with the principles of Pancasila and the peaceful coexistence it promotes. Therefore, instilling a shared vision of tolerance is essential, particularly among Generation Z as the generation who will shape the nation's future (Slepian et al., 2023; Williams & Page, 2011). Strengthening understanding of diversity and peaceful coexistence is essential in preventing the spread of extreme ideologies. One promising approach is through the promotion of religious moderation.

Religious moderation refers to understanding and practicing religious teachings in a more fair, balanced, and non-extremist way. Religious moderation offers an effective response to religious intolerance and the growing influence of radical ideologies in everyday life (Zulkifli et al., 2023). Religious moderation encourages individuals to uphold national harmony while embracing religious differences. Key principles such as *tasamuh* (tolerance), *musawah* (equality), *tawasuth* (moderation), and *ukhuwwah* (brotherhood) form a solid ethical foundation for youth (Zulfatmi, 2023). Formal education plays a vital role in fostering these values, and schools are strategic spaces for shaping inclusive attitudes (Aflahah, Nisa, & Aldeia, 2023). By internalizing the spirit of religious moderation, students can contribute to a respectful and harmonious school environment. Educators, therefore, have a crucial responsibility to promote openness, discourage fanaticism, and help learners develop a tolerant worldview (Nugroho & Wahyono, 2023).

The illustrative case of how religious moderation can be observed in a diverse educational environment can be found at Madrasah Aliyah (MA) Mabdaul Falah, located in Kaduara Barat Village, Larangan Sub-district, Pamekasan Regency. This school is under the Mabdaul Falah Foundation. The school serves students from various villages along the border between Pamekasan and Sumenep districts. As a result, the students from those diverse regions are characterized by diversity in cultural backgrounds, personal characters, and Islamic affiliations. This diversity, while enriching, also presents challenges in fostering mutual understanding and respectful interaction among students. From the results of observations and interviews with school authorities, there are concerning patterns encountered in student behavior, including a lack of respect for teachers, the use of harsh or impolite language, reduced social solidarity, and sometimes mockery among peers. These behaviors reflect broader issues that extend beyond the school environment.

Several external factors contribute to the rise of intolerant attitudes among students. These include family background, parental modeling, the influence of the surrounding community, the pervasive impact of social media, and peer group dynamics (Botero-Carvajal et al., 2023; Kolhar, Kazi, & Alameen, 2021; Rahmania, 2024; Prasetyo et al., 2020). In the context of MA Mabdaul Falah, these influences are identified as the cause of signs of a moral crisis among students manifested in declining manners, empathy, and social awareness. If this is allowed to happen among students, these conditions could foster an environment susceptible to radical ideologies. The spread of radical movements within educational settings must be systematically countered, particularly in schools where youth are still shaping their values and beliefs (Hermawan, 2020). Strengthening religious moderation in such environments is, therefore, essential to promote tolerance and prevent the escalation of extreme attitudes.

One of the efforts or approaches that can be applied to educate students to have good character, live in harmony, peace, balance both in personal life, family, society, state, and religious life is to instill the values of religious moderation in everyday life. They could be integrated into lesson plans, learning materials, teaching and learning activities, and evaluation (Sholeh et al., 2022). Furthermore, the students are accustomed to constantly improving their literacy skills, both reading and writing, to

support the school program. Therefore, instilling the values of religious moderation can also be taught through writing flash fiction. It is a genre of fiction defined as a very short story. Flash fiction is chosen because, based on research results, the message in flash fiction forms a “theatre of mind.” The hanging story makes the readers imagine in their minds (Liliani, Kusmarwanti, & Budiyanto, 2022).

Integrating religious moderation into education has become essential to shaping students’ character and fostering harmony in diverse societies (Putra, Arnadi, & Putri, 2024). In the Indonesian context, it is in line with national efforts to promote values such as *tawasuth* (moderation), *tasamuh* (tolerance), *musawah* (equality), and *ukhuwwah* (brotherhood). These values are foundational to peaceful coexistence in religiously and culturally plural environments (Siswanto, 2020). Several research has already studied how these values can be embedded not only in classroom discussions but also across learning materials (Hasibuan, Rahman, & Nasution, 2025). These values should also be integrated with lesson plans and student-centered activities that support holistic character development (Nor et al., 2024; Setinawati et al., 2025). This research contributes to the idea that moderation values can create a more inclusive and respectful school environment where students can practice in their daily school interactions.

Simultaneously, advancing efforts in literacy skills, particularly reading and writing, is central to many educational programs. In this regard, creative writing, specifically flash fiction, emerges as a unique pedagogical medium. As a short form of storytelling, flash fiction does not have a clear definition as a genre in terms of length; a story can be told in less than 100 words, another, less than 300 words, or 1500 words. Whatever its length, flash fiction presumably has the elements of a classic story, such as plot, setting, characters, point of view, conflict, and resolution (Tarrayo, 2019). By writing fictional texts that contain religious moderation values, it is hoped that students can tell a story of a life event so that in addition to being entertained, they also imagine the values of religious moderation and will then apply them in their daily lives. Writing fictional texts is also one of the materials in Indonesian language subjects at Madrasah Aliyah schools, so this research greatly supports students’ literacy skills in writing.

Previous studies have explored the integration of religious moderation into educational contexts, including language learning. Nor et al. (2024), explored the Incorporation of religious moderation values into Effective English language teaching practices, resulting in a finding that the English lecturers have already instilled the values of religious moderation in various ways. Similarly, Fasyiransyah, Warsah, & Istan (2025), demonstrated how contextual teaching methods based on religious moderation frameworks encouraged respect for diverse perspectives. A closely related study by Azizah et al. (2024), examined how integrating religious moderation values into short story writing enhanced students’ understanding of these values, improved their writing skills, and effectively reflected religious moderation in their narratives. However, there remains a gap in the literature regarding the use of flash fiction as a tool to integrate religious moderation values, particularly in the context of Madrasah Aliyah students. This study seeks to address that gap by examining how student-written flash fiction can be used not only to strengthen writing competence but also to cultivate tolerance and social harmony in a religiously diverse school environment.

The uniqueness of flash fiction in this context lies in its conciseness and focus on narrative essentials, such as character, conflict, and resolution, which engage students in expressing meaningful life experiences and moral values through written stories. This literary form aligns naturally with the core values of religious moderation. These values serve as this study’s operational indicators to evaluate both students’ understanding and the thematic contents of their flash fiction. The novelty of this research lies not only in employing flash fiction as a pedagogical strategy but also in how it operationalizes religious moderation through the students’ creative writing, specifically within the under-researched context of Islamic senior high schools (*Madrasah Aliyah*). Therefore, this study investigates how integrating religious moderation values into student-written flash fiction can foster social harmony and mutual respect in culturally and religiously diverse educational settings. The findings are expected to offer a replicable model for integrating character education into literacy instruction and promoting religious moderation values in diverse school communities.

METHOD

Research Design

This study utilized a convergent parallel mixed methods design, combining quantitative and qualitative data to gain a comprehensive understanding (Adhikari & Timsina, 2024; Creswell, 2015; Finlay & Kobayashi, 2018). The study employed a quantitative method using pre-test and post-test surveys to examine students' baseline understanding of religious moderation concepts, and a qualitative method to explore themes of religious moderation in students' flash fiction writing. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted to verify that the stories aligned with relevant themes as perceived by the students.

Participants

This study involved 25 students from Madrasah Aliyah Mabdaul Falah, consisting of 15 female and 10 male students aged 16–18. The students were selected using purposive sampling based on their willingness and availability to participate in all research activities. The students came from different villages surrounding the school, contributing to a mix of cultural and religious backgrounds (see table 1). The study examines the demographic characteristics of participants, including their gender, age, and residential location.

Table 1. The Demographic Characteristics of The Participants

	Characteristics	Frequency
Gender		
* Female		15
* Male		10
Age		
* 16 years old		4
* 17 years old		12
* 18 years old		9
Location		
* East Kaduara		6
* West Kaduara		9
* Lancar		3
* Others (including Talang Siring, Bangkes, Kadur, Larangan Luar)		7

Data Collection Procedures

Pre-survey

The pre-survey questions were designed to assess the extent of students' understanding of religious moderation. Participants completed a pre-treatment questionnaire consisting of three closed-ended questions, each with four response options on a Likert-type scale (e.g., "Often," "Few Times," "Once," "Never"). Closed-ended questions were selected for their ability to generate quantifiable, consistent responses, which allow for efficient statistical comparison between the pre- and post-surveys (Hansen & Świderska, 2023). These questions delve into the participants' experiences with intolerance and their understanding of religious moderation. The first question is, "Have you ever experienced events demonstrating intolerance among your friends?" It inquires whether the participant has ever encountered an incident of intolerance. The second question is, "Have you ever mocked or belittled your friends?" It specifically asks if the participant has ever exhibited intolerance towards their friends. Finally, the third question, "How familiar are you with the concept of religious moderation?" examines the participant's knowledge of religious moderation.

Intervention

Following the pre-survey, participants took part in a two-week intervention designed to enhance their understanding of religious moderation and develop their flash fiction writing skills. The intervention included instructional sessions on the core values of religious moderation, including *tawasuth* (moderation), *tasamuh* (tolerance), *musawah* (equality), and *ukhuwwah* (brotherhood) (Zulfatmi, 2023). As well as on the fundamentals of flash fiction, including plot, character, conflict, and resolution. Each session involved the presentation of educational materials, guided discussions linking religious values to everyday experiences, and targeted writing exercises using flash fiction

prompts that encouraged students to creatively express themes of tolerance, empathy, and peaceful coexistence. In this context, the researchers acted as facilitators, providing feedback, encouraging critical reflection, and monitoring student engagement. By the end of the intervention, each participant had produced a flash fiction story that embedded at least one of the religious moderation values discussed during the sessions.

Post Survey

After the intervention, participants completed a post-survey designed to evaluate how their understanding of religious moderation had evolved through the flash fiction writing process. The post-survey format is similar to the pre-survey format, consisting of three closed-ended Likert-type questions with four response options. These questions assessed (1) the participants' current understanding of religious moderation values, (2) the extent to which their flash fiction stories reflected those values, and (3) how they envisioned applying religious moderation principles in real-life situations. The use of a consistent format allowed for direct comparison between pre- and post-survey results to identify any shifts in awareness or perspective following the intervention.

Data Analysis

This study employed both quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques to comprehensively evaluate the impact of flash fiction writing on students' understanding of religious moderation. The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods by using SPSS version 24, focusing on frequencies and percentages to identify trends in students' understanding and attitudes toward religious moderation in their flash fiction writing (Kotronoulas et al., 2023). Since the pre- and post-surveys employed different questions (as mentioned above) and were designed for various stages of learning, the results were not directly comparable. Therefore, no inferential statistical tests (e.g., t-tests) were conducted.

This is in line with research by Artino et al. (2014), who argue that notes when a series of questions designed to capture the different facets of a specific satisfaction construct, then a single measurement may be adequate, in this case descriptive statistical data. Moreover, the primary objective of the analysis was to provide a general overview of changes in understanding and attitudes before and after the educational intervention. The goal was to determine if writing flash fiction resulted in a statistically significant improvement in their understanding of religious moderation concepts. This quantitative analysis helped test the research hypothesis: that flash fiction fosters a deeper understanding of religious moderation.

Qualitative data were collected from two primary sources: (1) student-written flash fiction and (2) semi-structured interviews with selected participants, chosen based on thematic analysis of their texts. The interview questions addressed three key areas: participants' understanding of religious moderation, the potential of flash fiction to promote religious moderation values, and the challenges encountered in writing flash fiction on this theme. The analysis followed the thematic analysis framework proposed by Creswell (2015), which involves systematically coding data, identifying categories, and developing overarching themes. The coding framework was aligned with four operational indicators of religious moderation: *tawasuth* (moderation), *tasamuh* (tolerance), *musawah* (equality), and *ukhuwwah* (brotherhood).

This research began by conducting an initial open coding of the flash fiction texts and interview transcripts to identify key concepts and develop ideas. These codes were then grouped into broader categories based on similarities and relevance to the four operational indicators of religious moderation. From these categories, key themes emerged, such as tolerance, peacemaking, social justice, collaboration, and conflict resolution through dialogue. To enhance validity and reliability, a second coder, in this case, another researcher, independently reviewed the data. The inter-coder agreement was reached through discussion, ensuring consistency in coding and interpretation (Cheung & Tai, 2023; Clarke et al., 2023; O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). Additionally, participants' identities were anonymized using pseudonyms (e.g., Participant 1, Participant 2) to maintain ethical standards.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results of a study investigating how students can understand religious moderation values by writing flash fiction that can then be applied in everyday life.

The Result of the Quantitative Data

The tables below present the participants' responses obtained from a pre-survey (table 2) on their experiences of intolerance and their knowledge of religious moderation.

Table 2. The Experience and Understanding of The Religious Moderation Concept

Question & Answer	Frequency	Percentage
Have you ever experienced events demonstrating intolerance among your friends?		
<i>Yes, often</i>	10	40%
<i>Yes, a few times</i>	7	28%
<i>Once</i>	5	20%
<i>Never</i>	3	12%
Have you ever mocked or belittled your friends?		
<i>Often</i>	9	36 %
<i>A few times</i>	11	44 %
<i>Once</i>	3	12 %
<i>Never</i>	2	8 %
How familiar are you with the concept of religious moderation?		
<i>Very familiar</i>	0	0%
<i>Somewhat familiar</i>	0	0%
<i>Not very familiar</i>	5	20%
<i>Not familiar at all</i>	20	80%

The pre-survey results give various responses of participants' experiences of intolerance events: 40% often, 28% a few times, 20% once, and 12% never experienced it. Similarly, when participants were asked about their experiences with mocking or acting intolerantly towards their friends, 36% admitted to engaging in such behavior frequently, while another 44% acknowledged doing so occasionally. However, it is noteworthy that a small group of 12% of participants claimed only once, and 2 participants, or 8%, had never engaged in such actions. It indicates that behavior of intolerance also occurs in the lives of students, especially from different backgrounds. In line with this, the findings of Prasetyo et al. (2020) revealed intolerance arises because of the backgrounds of students usually coming from heterogeneous environments. Moreover, the survey results indicate that a large majority, 80%, of participants are not familiar with the concept of religious moderation. This suggests a significant lack of awareness or knowledge among the target audience. The remaining 20% of participants reported being "not very familiar" with the topic, indicating that they may have some basic understanding but require further knowledge.

To provide a picture of participants' comprehension levels, Table 3 illustrates the distribution of their understanding of religious moderation and flash fiction writing.

Table 3. Understanding of Religious Moderation and Flash Fiction Writing

Question & Answer	Frequency	Percentage
What is your understanding of religious moderation values?		
<i>Ignoring all differences and treating everyone the same</i>	6	24%
<i>Putting up with things you dislike to avoid conflict</i>	7	28%
<i>Accepting and respecting others' beliefs and practices</i>	12	48%
<i>Feeling superior to those who hold different beliefs</i>	0	0 %
Did your story in flash fiction depict practicing differences (tolerance) in daily life?		
<i>Yes, definitely.</i>	18	72%
<i>Maybe</i>	2	8%
<i>No, not really</i>	0	0 %
<i>I don't know</i>	5	20%
How do you think religious moderation values can be applied in daily life?		
<i>Only interacting with people who share your exact views</i>	0	0%
<i>Being open to learning about and understanding different cultures and religions</i>	20	80%
<i>Avoiding all discussions about potentially sensitive topics</i>	5	20%
<i>Mocking or belittling those with different viewpoints</i>	0	0%

Table 3 shows the survey results that explored participants' understanding of religious moderation values. The most common response (48%), indicating nearly half the participants, selected "Accepting and respecting others' beliefs and practices" as the core concept of religious moderation. This highlights a positive trend, as it aligns with a key value of religious moderation: tolerance and valuing diverse beliefs within a religious framework. "Putting up with things you dislike to avoid conflict" received the second-highest response (28%).

This suggests that a significant portion associate moderation with conflict avoidance, even if it means tolerating disagreements. While conflict avoidance can be a positive outcome of religious moderation, it is important to distinguish it from simply ignoring differences. "Ignoring all differences and treating everyone the same" received fewer responses (24%). While some might view this as moderation, true moderation acknowledges differences but promotes peaceful coexistence despite them. Pleasingly, none of the participants chose "Feeling superior to those who hold different beliefs," which goes against the core principle of religious moderation, respect for all beliefs. Overall, the survey results are encouraging. A large majority (nearly 76%) selected options that align with core values of religious moderation: respecting others' beliefs and tolerating differences to maintain peace. This suggests a positive understanding of the concept among the participants.

The second question of the post-survey aimed to gauge whether the flash fiction story depicted the practice of tolerance in daily life. The participant answered "Yes, definitely" with 18 responses, 72%. The majority of participant, over 70%, believe their story clearly showed tolerance for differences in daily life. This is a positive outcome, suggesting the story effectively conveyed the message. The response, "Maybe," is 2 responses, 8 %. A small portion (around 20%) were unsure if the story depicted tolerance. This could be due to the story's lack of clear details about overcoming differences. Next, "No, not really," was zero responses. This means that no one felt that the story lacked tolerance entirely. "I don't know" with five responses or 20%. A few participants were unsure about the story's message. This might indicate that the story needed more clarity or that the survey question could have been phrased differently. Overall, the results are encouraging. The high percentage of "Yes" responses suggests the story successfully portrayed tolerance in daily life.

The last post-survey explored how people believe religious moderation values can be applied daily. "Being open to learning about and understanding different cultures and religions" is 20 responses or 80%. This received the vast majority of responses, indicating a strong understanding that religious moderation involves openness and interfaith dialogue. "Avoiding all discussions about potentially sensitive topics" is 5 responses or 20%. While avoiding heated debates might be prudent sometimes, true moderation encourages respectful discussions about differences. "Only interacting with people who share your exact views." None of the participants chose this option, which goes against the core principle of moderation - interacting peacefully with those who hold different beliefs. "Mocking or belittling those with different viewpoints (0 responses, 0%): Similarly, no one chose this disrespectful option. Overall, the survey results are very positive. A vast majority, 80%, selected the option that aligns with religious moderation, "being open to learning and understanding different beliefs."

The result of Qualitative Data

This section explores the findings from the thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews conducted as part of the research. The random participant from diverse characters, cultures, and backgrounds participated in the interviews, aiming to understand their perceptions of religious moderation and how writing flash fiction might influence these views. Qualitative data provides further insight and elaboration on the quantitative data. There are three key themes in this interview: (1) understanding of religious moderation, (2) the potential of flash fiction to promote these values, and (3) the challenges encountered when writing flash fiction.

Understanding of Religious Moderation

The concept of religious moderation was explored through interviews with participants to uncover their understanding of religious moderation. The responses varied, but a common theme emerged around respect for differing beliefs and openness to learning about others' perspectives below:

"I think it's about being respectful of other people's beliefs, even if I don't agree with them. It's about being open-minded and willing to learn about different religions." (Participant 1)

"I think moderation means being respectful of the differences that exist among us, whether it's in our personalities, our cultural backgrounds, or our interpretations of Islam. It's about recognizing that we all have unique perspectives and experiences to offer." (Participant 3)

"Religious moderation means practicing our own faith without trying to force it on others. It's about understanding that everyone has the right to their own beliefs." (Participant 20)

These participants offer a well-rounded perspective on religious moderation. Participant 1 emphasizes *respect for diverse beliefs*, coupled with a willingness to learn about different religions, highlighting open-mindedness and understanding. Participant 3 broadens the concept of moderation to encompass respecting differences in personality, cultural background, and even interpretations within Islam. This suggests that moderation extends beyond just religious tolerance. A moderate attitude extends beyond mere tolerance or the acknowledgment of equality; it also promotes active efforts to understand others through constructive engagement (Hefni & Muna, 2022). Participant 20 focuses on individual freedom, stating that religious moderation involves practicing one's faith without coercion and acknowledging everyone's right to their own beliefs. These responses paint a picture of religious moderation as a multi-faceted concept that promotes respect, understanding, and peaceful coexistence in a diverse society.

The Potential of Flash Fiction to Promote Religious Moderation Values

Participants clearly believed in the power of flash fiction to reflect and promote the values of religious moderation. Their responses highlighted several key themes.

"I think one way to incorporate religious moderation values into flash fiction is to focus on stories that emphasize common human experiences, such as love, loss, and friendship. These are themes that resonate with all people. By highlighting these shared experiences, flash fiction can help to bridge the gap between different faiths and promote understanding and empathy." (Participant 6)

"I wrote so simple story talking about tolerance among my classmates. We appreciate each other so there is no problem, no conflict, no bullying, etc., although we have different characters. In brief, writing flash fiction can be a powerful way to connect with people." (Participant 15)

"I believe that flash fiction can be a powerful tool for promoting religious literacy. By sharing stories about different faiths, cultures, characters, and so on, we can help people to learn more about each other's beliefs and practices. This can lead to greater understanding and tolerance in our society." (Participant 25)

These participants all highlight the potential of flash fiction to promote religious understanding and social harmony. Participant 6 suggests focusing on universal themes like love, loss, and friendship that resonate across faiths. By showcasing these shared experiences, flash fiction can bridge the gap between different religions and foster empathy. Participant 15 emphasizes the power of flash fiction to depict tolerance in everyday life. Their story exemplifies how celebrating differences and promoting appreciation can create a peaceful and respectful environment. Finally, participant 25 sees

flash fiction as a tool for religious literacy. Sharing stories about diverse faiths and cultures allows people to learn about each other's beliefs and practices, ultimately promoting greater understanding and tolerance within society. Moreover, the student-focused model aims to equip students with the ability to write diverse forms of text while fostering an understanding of religious moderation. By developing these skills, students will gain valuable life skills and hone their abilities as professional writers (Hakim, 2021).

The challenges encountered when writing flash fiction

Several noted significant writing challenges after participants recognized the value of using flash fiction to promote religious moderation. These challenges involve the following:

"It's tough to show how cool it is to respect everyone 'iefs and cultures in a short story. I want to make it clear, but also keep the story quick and fun." (Participant 5)

"I think it can be tricky to balance talking about respecting everyone with making the story exciting. Flash fiction needs to move fast and keep you hooked, so it can be hard to explain everything perfectly." (Participant 10)

"I enjoy writing flash fiction containing religious moderation values. However, the challenge in this task is writing in English." (Participant 12)

These participants acknowledge the challenges of incorporating religious moderation themes into flash fiction. Participant 5 highlights the difficulty of conveying *respect for diverse beliefs and cultures* within a short story while maintaining its entertainment value. Similarly, participant 10 acknowledges the need to strike a balance between promoting respect and keeping the narrative *exciting and fast-paced*. This suggests that achieving depth and brevity in flash fiction can be challenging. Furthermore, incorporating flash fiction into writing instruction can offer a double benefit for students. Not only will they develop their writing skills in specific areas, but they will also hone their critical thinking abilities (Setyowati, 2016). Finally, participant 12 adds another layer of complexity by mentioning the additional challenge of *writing in English*. This suggests that for some participants, language itself might be a barrier to effectively expressing their ideas within the flash fiction format.

Discussion

This study described integrating religious moderation values into student-written flash fiction as a way to foster harmony in culturally and religiously diverse school environments. By analyzing both quantitative survey data and qualitative narrative responses, the research assessed the effectiveness of flash fiction as a pedagogical medium for promoting tolerance, understanding, and respect across different faith and cultural backgrounds.

Perception of Religious Moderation in Student Writing

From the quantitative data, it can be revealed that 40% of participants frequently experienced intolerance, while 36% admitted to engaging in intolerant behavior toward their peers. This aligns with the findings of Verkuyten, Yogeeswaran, & Adelman (2023), who argue that diversity often exposes individuals to beliefs, values, or practices they disapprove of, thereby increasing the potential for conflict and fostering intolerant behavior. Furthermore, 80% of students were unfamiliar with the concept of religious moderation, highlighting a significant knowledge gap.

Despite this lack of formal understanding, qualitative data from student interviews and writings suggested an intuitive understanding of moderation values, particularly around the themes of empathy and coexistence. For instance, Participant 6 reflected on the importance of "common human experiences" like love and friendship to overcome religious divides. This resonates with Sidorkin (2022), pedagogy of relation, which positions emotional and relational connections, such as love,

care, and friendship, as foundational components of the learning process. In this context, intuitive understanding stems from personal and peer-based interactions rather than explicit instruction.

These findings suggest that, despite limited formal knowledge, students can express core values of tolerance and empathy through flash fiction. This is in line with the findings from Azizah et al. (2024), which state that integrating the concept of religious moderation values into learning materials, such as writing skills, enables the students to reflect on the values of religious moderation in their project. Not only that, Nurhaedah et al. (2024), research even suggests that religious moderation values, such as tolerance, can be formed in students' play patterns. This contrast between formal, conceptual knowledge and intuitive understanding underscores a key pedagogical implication: educators should raise abstract values like religious moderation through lived experiences, reflection, and dialogic engagement. Embedding these values in creative tasks like story writing allows students to internalize principles that might otherwise remain theoretical or detached from their daily realities.

The Potential of Flash Fiction to Promote Religious Moderation Values

Analysis of post-survey responses showed that 48% of students defined religious moderation as "accepting and respecting others' beliefs and practices." This response maps directly onto the three-dimensional model of tolerance proposed by Cuadrado et al. (2021) and Hjerm et al. (2020), which consists of: 1) acceptance of others' right to differ; 2) respect for their identity and values; and 3) appreciation of diversity as enriching to the community. Furthermore, the data indicated that while students were unfamiliar with the term, many instinctively comprehend the underlying principles of moderation.

These dimensions were found in the students' flash fiction narratives. For example, several stories depicted interfaith friendships, peaceful conflict resolution, and characters learning to embrace religious differences. These findings clearly illustrate tolerance as not just passive acceptance but an active appreciation of diversity. This tolerance acts, whatever the situation, can become a vehicle for overcoming barriers to learning in diverse settings (Gebert, Buengeler, & Heinitz, 2017). This suggests that flash fiction can be a powerful vehicle for cultivating the affective and cognitive components of tolerance.

Participant reflections also supported this. One noted that storytelling helped them "*focus on universal human experiences*," while *Participant 15* emphasized its role in creating *a tolerant, conflict-free classroom*. These insights echo the findings of Hadiyanto, Putri, & Fazli (2025), who argue that moderation supports balance and equity in religious life by resisting both extremism and hedonism.

The challenges encountered when writing flash fiction

The research results show that flash fiction is proven to be effective in promoting values of religious moderation. However, the students encountered notable challenges. The qualitative data revealed two primary difficulties: the limited amount of words in writing flash fiction and the limitations related to language proficiency. Another participant noted the difficulty of presenting respect for diverse beliefs in a concise yet engaging story, while another participant emphasized the difficulty of balancing moral messages with narrative. These responses reflect that the short form of flash fiction may limit students' ability to develop themes of tolerance and understanding fully. Furthermore, the students' limited language skills hinder them from articulating religious values with clarity and nuance even though they know the concepts. Limited understanding of grammar and spelling can pose significant obstacles in the writing process. Many students also struggle to construct coherent (Wafa & Rahmawati, 2024). These findings highlight the importance of instructional support in both language and narrative development when using creative writing to engage with complex social and religious themes.

In the broadest context, the findings indicate that despite the students' in-familiarity with the formal concept of religious moderation, they can still express its core values, such as tolerance, acceptance, and respect, via their flash fiction writing. Their understanding resulted from personal experiences and peer interactions during the writing process. This is consistent with Steenkamp &

Brink (2024), who highlight that peer discussions enhance students' communication skills and foster a sense of community. The integration of religious moderation values in narrative writing enabled students to engage with ethical and intercultural issues in a reflective and yet relatable manner, supporting previous studies that highlight that religious moderation values can be both internalized through verbal and also writing (Azizah et al., 2024; Wahyuningsih & Munawaroh, 2023).

The results of this study offer several practical strategies for educators that focus on fostering religious moderation through literacy instruction. Through literacy, individuals are able to comprehend various fields of knowledge from the perspective shaped by their literacy understanding (Arifah, Ifadah, & Andini, 2024). First, *integrate values into creative writing tasks*. In this context, Teachers can assign short narrative prompts such as flash fiction writing based on real-life conflict scenarios involving religious or cultural differences and guide students to apply moderation values in their story resolutions. Second, *use peer discussion for reflection*. As shown in this study, peer interaction enhances intuitive understanding. Educators should facilitate small-group reflections after each writing task, encouraging students to explain how their characters demonstrated tolerance or empathy—the third is *bridge intuition and formal concepts*. The teachers can introduce religious moderation indicators (tawasuth, tasamuh, musawah, ukhuwwah) explicitly after students have explored them through stories. This helps link experiential learning to conceptual knowledge. The fourth is to *Support Language Development*. Provide targeted language support—e.g., moral vocabulary banks, templates for narrative structure, or sentence starters for expressing ethical dilemmas.

These strategies align with Sidorkin's pedagogy of relation by promoting emotionally resonant learning and interpersonal connection. At the same time, they offer a pathway for students to engage with the three key tolerance dimensions (acceptance, respect, and appreciation) identified by Cuadrado et al. The findings imply practically that writing flash fiction offers a creative and easily accessible platform to instill complex moderation values in multicultural conditions in the classroom. However, linguistic support such as grammar and comprehensive vocabulary are essential to help students effectively articulate their values, particularly those studying to write in a second language. Its context and sample size limit the study. Therefore, future research should explore similar approaches across different educational contexts and examine the long-term effects of creative writing on students' attitudes toward religious and cultural diversity with a larger sample size.

CONCLUSION

The findings reveal that flash fiction can be used not only as a literacy practice but also as a medium that helps students demonstrate a meaningful understanding of religious moderation. Through the written stories, students expressed narratives of tolerance, conflict resolution, empathy, and mutual respect, reflecting both intuitive and developed comprehension of these values. Despite initial challenges in expressing moral values clearly within a concise format, especially when using English, students engaged deeply with the task, indicating that narrative writing fosters both ethical reflection and creative engagement. This study revealed intersection of character education and creative writing, demonstrating that abstract values such as religious moderation can be effectively applied through instructional models like flash fiction writing. Practically, it offers a replicable framework for educators to integrate moral education into literacy development. The findings suggest that implementing student-centered activities, such as flash fiction, into the curriculum can promote empathy, tolerance, and social harmony in diverse classroom settings. Future research should examine the long-term effects of such interventions on students' attitudes and behaviors, assess adaptability across varied educational contexts, and explore the role of teacher in promoting moral literacy. Expanding the sample size and including diverse school environments will also enhance the generalizability and depth of future findings.

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