

WASATIYYAH AS FOUNDATION COURSE AT UNIVERSITAS ISLAM INTERNATIONAL INDONESIA

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Abstract

The Islamic concept of *wasatiyyah* is reflected in the Qur'an, which refers to the Muslim community as a moderate people (*ummatan wasatan*). It means that a Muslim should be in the middle path in many aspects of life, which promotes benefits and avoids extremism. In doing so, education plays a significant role in promoting the concept of *wasatiyyah*. However, the concept itself has been neglected in the teaching and learning of Islamic higher education, which is an inseparable part of urban Muslim communities. This study is aimed to explore the implementation of the *wasatiyyah* course at Universitas Islam International Indonesia. The study was conducted qualitatively with a case study research design to investigate students' perspectives on the *wasatiyyah* course. A total of four participants with different backgrounds of study, cultures, and religions participated in this study. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed with the Miles and Huberman framework. Overall, the result of the study shows that the students perceive positively towards the course of *wasatiyyah* Islam. In addition, the study also demonstrates students' reflection on the practice of the concept of *wasatiyyah* in a plural context. Hence, it recommends reimagining the concept of *wasatiyyah* in Islamic universities by implementing the idea into the course subjects to promote tolerance and harmony within diversity.

Keywords: Harmony; Islamic education; Moderation; Tolerance; *Wasatiyyah* Islam.

A. Introduction

Diversity in various aspects of life, such as culture, language, and religion, is an affluence that might embrace differences or even segregation. For example, there are many theological schools in Islam, and some of them exist nowadays, and some of them are destroyed. The theological school that still exists today such as Sunni, Syiah, and Sufi, and each of these theological schools have distinctive characteristics and perspectives in terms of belief (Calis, 2022; Widigdo, 2017). Furthermore, in Sunni, three theological schools exist today, such as Asy'ari and Maturidi which are different

theological principles in terms of belief or Aqidah and Faith. Additionally, Sunni has four schools of thought, namely, Hanafi, Maliki, Syafi'i, and Hanbali, which have different understandings and interpretations of the Qur'an and Hadits on the implementation of Islamic laws (Syariah). Therefore, by understanding such different theological schools and Islamic thought, it is crucial to understand the concept of *wasatiyyah* or moderation and its significance.

The spirit of *wasatiyyah*, which means etymologically *the middle way* (al-Qaradāwī, 2009; Aziz, 2024; Soage, 2010), was, however, somehow abandoned, especially in the teaching and learning of Islamic higher education (Kamali, 2015), which is an inseparable part of urban Muslim communities. This also has affected other aspects of life, such as unbalanced practice in worship, social conflict, and inequality. Furthermore, the misunderstanding and negligence of the concept of moderation can also hinder and prohibit harmony within cultures and theological schools. Thus, the knowledge and understanding of the concept of moderation are significant in order to promote justice and harmony. Also, it develops a social, economic, cultural, and Islamic civilization as well.

The example of diversity in theological school above might create differences and conflict. For instance, the phenomena of radicalism and intolerance in the field of education like university. A quantitative study conducted by Baedowi & Chamadi (2023) found that around 27 students out of 576 participants at the university claimed that there were organizations on campus affiliated with radicalism. In addition, 3 participants stated that they followed banned organizations, and 0,5% of the participants agreed on suicide bombs. It shows that radicalism and extremism exist nowadays, especially in higher education (See also A'la, 2008; Jati, 2013).

Furthermore, according to the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) as cited in (Ridwan & Abdurrahim, 2023), it was reported that Indonesia is one of the biggest four countries affected by terrorism. Meanwhile, in a global context, Indonesia is ranked 37th out of 135 countries. The report showed that the practice of terrorism significantly impacts the country and even threatens its security. It also emphasizes the importance of preventing and countering terrorism, radicalism, and extremism (See more Fadlan & Saputra, 2017; Muzakki, 2014; Sirry, 2020).

Higher education levels, like university and Islamic *pesantren* higher schools (*ma'had 'aly*), play a significant role in reducing the effect of terrorism by encouraging and improving students' understanding of the importance of harmony and tolerance (Abubakar & Hemay, 2020; Afrianty, 2012; Sirry, 2024). In this case, the students at university are often the main target of radical and extremist ideologies. Thus, it is crucial to protect the young generations from propaganda such ideologies by promoting the concept of moderation and tolerance (Basit, 2016). Additionally, other problems, such as interreligious conflicts (Ridwan & Abdurrahim, 2023) in several universities, are caused by religious differences among the students or between students and lecturers. This also proves that the young generation needs to raise their action, thoughts, and personalities to develop integrity by developing an attitude of tolerance among various religious communities on campus. In doing so, it starts by integrating the concepts of moderation, tolerance, and interfaith discourse into the curriculum. So, the young generation can think critically and become an agent of change that protects unity at the national level from segregation.

The integration of religious moderation at the university level was promoted according to the Decree of the General Director of Islamic Education number 102 of 2019 (Ridwan & Abdurrahim, 2023). In this context, the policy emphasizes the implementation of Islamic religion into the curriculum. So, students at the university

are expected to learn and understand the religion, including the concept of moderation and its practice.

However, most of the universities integrate the concept of moderation into Islamic subjects rather than implement it in special courses like the *wasatiyyah* course at Universitas Islam International Indonesia (UIII). In this case, UIII implement the *wasatiyyah* course as a foundation subject which is mandatory for all students at the university. Furthermore, none of the studies explore students' perceptions of the implementation of moderation classes at higher education levels. Hence, this paper aims to fill the gap by exploring students' perspectives towards the *wasatiyyah* class as a foundation course in the university with the following research questions: What are international students' perceptions towards the course of *Wasatiyyah* of Islam at Universitas Islam International Indonesia? and how do international students reflect the concept of *Wasatiyyah* of Islam in a pluralistic society?

The purpose of the study is to explore the students' views and experiences towards the implementation of the *wasatiyyah* class in the university. Consequently, this paper will contribute significantly to reimagining the concept of *wasatiyyah* and its practice in the education field. Also, this study will spread and recommend the implementation of *wasatiyyah* Islam as a course within Islamic universities. In addition, this paper will promote the concept and the practice of tolerance, harmony, and balance in many aspects of life.

Although almost all groups subscribe to the concept of religious moderation that occupies a very important position in the life of a Muslim individual, one thing one must take into account in attempts to implement it amidst the community is hence to provide enough room for it to be implemented in the curriculum taught at various levels of Islamic educational institutions. For, education, with its various types and methods, serves as a platform where educated people – a small group of a large society – are educated and molded, and they are the ones who will then have an impact on society in a wider and more diverse context. This importance multiplies when considering the fact that Islamic educational institutions, particularly those at the higher levels, are the inseparable ingredients of the urban Muslim community. In this way, it is hoped that the dissemination and implementation of religious moderation will be much more effective and efficient.

In the Indonesian context, through large projects that have been launched since 2019 (Hanafi, et al, 2022; Tim Kelompok Kerja Moderasi Beragama Kementerian Agama RI, 2020; Tim Penyusun Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2019a, 2019b), the Government has paid immense attention to the implementation of religious moderation. This seems to be the reason why there is so much attention, especially from the circles of scholars – including from the general public – towards this concept. However, in the context of this research's literature review, not all works on religious moderation can be thus included here. Considering the title of this research which seeks to sew the thread of connection between religious moderation and education, this literature review section may only need to mention and briefly review several selected researches works that include at least two elements within themselves: religious moderation and education.

Among those that can be mentioned here is *Keeping the middle path: mainstreaming religious moderation through Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia* carried out by Muhammad Nasir and Muhammad Khairul Rijal (Nasir & Rijal, 2021). This research takes case studies of three large institutions known in the Islamic higher education landscape in Indonesia, namely UIN Malik Ibrahim Malang, Darussalam Gontor University Ponorogo, and Ma'had Ali As'adiyah South Sulawesi. Among the

conclusions mentioned in this work is that the model of religious moderation applied in the three institutions has one thing in common: a leaning to a spirit of eclecticism. That is, in each institution mentioned, various teaching materials considered suitable, best, and supportive for the implementation of its respective vision and mission, are selected and included in the curriculum. It is this that ultimately gives birth to several indicators of religious moderation such as the spirit of nationalism, tolerance, non-violence, and accommodation of local wisdom.

Compared to the present research which also examines the relationship between religious moderation and education, both researches do have similarities. Among them is, to be sure, that they share two variables in discussion: religious moderation and education. In addition, both also set as case studies one and/or several educational institutions that have formal academic activities and also non-formal dormitory life. However, what differentiates the two is that the UIII, which is the present research's case study, may be different in several aspects compared to the three institutions studied by Nasir's research. At a relatively young age, with the full support of the government, the UIII has been quite successful in declaring itself a vibrant, modern, and open Islamic university. Based on this difference, it can be clearly seen that the case study of the implementation of religious moderation education at the UIII would not be found in Nasir's research, so its presence is very important to know.

Including research in connection with religious moderation education that is worth noting here is an article written by Benny Afwadzi and Miski with the title *Religious Moderation in Indonesian Higher Educations: Literature Review* (Afwadzi & Miski, 2021). This research can be deemed to be quite comprehensive because it was designed as a literature review that collects and reviews various research results regarding the relationship between religious moderation and the implementation of the existing education system in various higher education institutions in Indonesia. It sought to emphasize that the spirit of religious moderation is part of the core and therefore cannot be separated from Islamic teachings themselves. Furthermore, by emphasizing the influence of various trans-national religious organizations such as *al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun* (Muslim Brotherhood) and *Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia* (HTI) on various campuses, it is concluded that among the indicators of religious moderation that an Indonesian higher educational institution must have been a commitment to nationalism, tolerance, non-violence, and accommodating local culture.

Even though it is quite comprehensive in presenting and analyzing data, this research did not mention how religious moderation education is implemented in the UIII environment. This is quite reasonable because, in that year, the UIII had just opened its educational program. For information, even though it was founded in 2016, this university's physical construction only started in 2018 and the opening of the first class was only held in 2021. Therefore, it would be very logical if the research written by Afwadzi did not cover the development of religious moderation education at the UIII at all. For this reason, a study that attempts to capture these developments as the present research does deserves attention.

Another research also worth reviewing here is a book recently published in 2023: *Religious Moderation Education* by Heri Gunawan (2023). This work, which was originally the author's dissertation at the UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, is quite comprehensive in incorporating various aspects of religious moderation and relating them to the discourse of Islamic education. Taking two major Islamic boarding schools in West Java, i.e., Darussalam Ciamis and Cipasung Tasikmalaya, as case studies, this research concluded that the religious moderation material implemented in those two institutions is intended to engender in the self of each student a tolerant mentality,

namely not feeling the most righteous in religion. This goal is then reportedly achieved with at least two approaches: theoretical and practical. The first is through teaching material in class while the second is through exemplary efforts in the lives of students and *kyai* (the chairman and central figure of the school).

Henri Gunawan's research has to do with the present research, namely in the sense that both are researching religious moderation education in Islamic educational institutions. However, it also needs to be clarified that even though both are Islamic educational institutions, Islamic boarding schools, and Islamic universities certainly have several differences. Among them is that if the two Islamic boarding schools, both Ciamis and Cipasung, tend to be local, then the UIII which is the present research's case study can be seen to be at a global level, combining academic activities in the classroom and student dormitory life where students from all over the world partake. This is one reason why the exploration of religious moderation education at the UIII was not found in Gunawan's research. Therefore, it is also interesting to know to what extent religious moderation education is formulated, taught, and practiced in the UIII environment – which is the present research's subject matter – that is also an Islamic education cluster in Indonesia.

Among other recent research carried out on how to implement religious moderation in educational institutions in Indonesia is an article written by Rahmadi and Hamdan with the title *Religious Moderation in the Context of Islamic Education: A Multidisciplinary Perspective and its Application in Islamic Educational Institutions in Indonesia* (Rahmadi & Hamdan, 2023). In general, this research emphasizes the importance of educational institutions in implementing religious moderation. To explore this, the author offers four approaches to how moderation can be understood: theology, sociology, anthropology, and cross-cultural communication. Theologically, moderation is understood under the umbrella concept of *wasatiyyah* which is clearly mentioned in the Qur'an. Sociologically and anthropologically, moderation is defined as an individual Muslim's efforts to socialize and acculturate with the surrounding community. From a cross-cultural communication perspective, a moderate Muslim is someone able to communicate well with those who have different cultures and traditions from themselves. The concept of religious moderation can then be applied in three Islamic education clusters, namely formal madrasas, Islamic boarding schools mostly called *pesantren*, and universities. It is also emphasized that the concept of religious moderation will be successful if it is not only taught in classrooms, but also included in the form of curriculum, both hidden and extracurricular activities.

Considering the wording of the title, this research does appear to offer a quite comprehensive analysis and exploration. For, it tried to depict various aspects of religious moderation implemented in Indonesia. However, for a journal article, this seems less effective – something that could be indeed achieved by writing a book or even an encyclopedia. Among the examples of ineffectiveness are the range of educational levels studied such as madrasas, Islamic boarding schools, and universities. The result is, in the context of higher education, for example, the information provided is based more on DIKTIS (director general of Islamic higher education) sources. Of course, this makes sense because DIKTIS is an organization that serves as an umbrella for many Islamic higher education institutions. However, what then happens is generalization so that the information displayed is too general and lacks detail. This is simply because, in Indonesia, each university has its own characteristics – despite their several similarities. Taking four perspectives, namely theology, sociology, anthropology, and cross-cultural communication, is also good. However, because it is too broad, there is no detailed background information for each

of these perspectives and their relationship to religious moderation education in Indonesia. As a result, among the consequences of the too-general information the previous studies conveyed, information regarding the implementation of religious moderation at the UIII could not also be found. Therefore, the presence of this research, which focuses on the UIII as a case study, deserves attention.

B. Methods

This study used a qualitative method with a case study approach to know what students' perspectives and their reflections regarding the *wasatiyyah* class at the university. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), the qualitative method is used to gain detailed and complex information on complicated scenarios or problematic conditions which is difficult to explain and understand by traditional methods. In this case, we chose to explore cases of individual perceptions and reflection by which the perspectives of international students are understood. Thomas (2011) defined case study in qualitative as follows: "Case studies are analyses of persons, events, decisions, periods, projects, policies, institutions, or other systems that are studied holistically by one or more methods. The case that is the subject of the inquiry will be an instance of a class of phenomena that provides an analytical frame - an object - within which the study is conducted and which the case illuminates and explicates".

In doing so, we sought out international students who had completed the *wasatiyyah* course in the first semester. This was grounded on the reason that, despite coming from different backgrounds, they must have certain benefits and lessons from the course they studied. To ensure that we had access to various perspectives, the selection of participants was based on the awareness to include those participants from different faculties, ages, religions, and citizens by convenience sample. In the end, four students were invited in person and by WhatsApp to participate in the study, and all gave consent.

A total of four international students who had completed the course of *wasatiyyah* participated in this study. Participants were involved in this study, which represented various fields of study like education and economics, including higher education. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews as a research technique. Each participant agreed to participate in a 30-minute interview. During the interviews, participants described their understanding, perceptions, and experience towards the *wasatiyyah* course. In addition, participants also shared their expectations for the improvement of the *wasatiyyah* course in the future.

For the first research question regarding students' perspective towards *wasatiyyah* course, we constructed three questions to gain the answers. This involves students' understanding of the concept of *wasatiyyah* before coming to the current university. Also, their perspectives on the implementation of the course as the mandatory course and its materials. Next, two questions were constructed in order to gain the answer to the second research question regarding students' reflections on their understanding of the concept of *wasatiyyah* within diversity.

The data was analyzed using the content analysis method developed by Miles and Huberman (Onwuegbuzie & Weinbaum, 2016) in three phases, i.e., data reduction, data display, and verification. The first step, which is data reduction, is used to summarize, choose, and gather the data around students' perceptions towards the *wasatiyyah* course. The second step is displaying data in order to understand the whole result and to plan the next step. The last is to draw a conclusion by concluding and verifying the results. To validate the data, we asked the participants to recheck the data interpretation gathered from the interviews to get participants' feedback and reflection.

In this regard, the participants' confirmation and validation reflected their perspectives and experiences accurately. Additionally, a double-check from the lecturer of *wasatiyyah* course and peer-debriefing were also conducted in order to get constructive feedback on data analysis and interpretation.

C. Findings and Discussion

The findings from the interview are presented using two main research questions given earlier: 1) what are international students' perceptions towards the course of *Wasatiyyah* Islam in an Islamic university? 2) How do international students reflect the concept of *Wasatiyyah* Islam in a pluralistic society? Each of the research questions consists of sub-questions in order to gain a comprehensive finding.

There were four participants who joined this study, and they all had different backgrounds, fields of study, ages, and citizenship. The first participant is a master's student in the Faculty of Education for the first semester. Also, she is a Muslim and holds Thai citizenship. The second participant is a non-Muslim female student from Nigeria. Currently, she is a master's student at the Faculty of Economics. The third and fourth participants are Indonesian female students at the Faculty of Islamic Studies and the Faculty of Social Science, respectively. Overall, the participants represent all the faculties and, as a reflection, the diversity at UIII with different backgrounds of religion, culture, and identity.

First Research Question

What are international students' perceptions towards the *Wasatiyyah* of Islam course at the Islamic university?

At the beginning of the interview, the participants were asked if they knew the term *wasatiyyah* before they enrolled in the university. The first student said that she just knew the term in Arabic but had no idea about the concept of *wasatiyyah*. In addition, the second participant, who is a non-Muslim student, had no idea at all about the term *wasatiyyah* before coming to UIII. On the other hand, the third student, who has an Islamic education background, already knew and understood the *wasatiyyah*, so for her, the *wasatiyyah* class is like repeating what she learned before her bachelor's degree. However, the last student knew that the term *wasatiyyah* was liberal perception before she enrolled in UIII.

The result shows that the term *wasatiyyah* Islam or moderate Islam is an unfamiliar term for some students for some factors. First, there is a lack of information about the term *wasatiyyah*. Secondly, the effect of political and social aspects in spreading the religious issues dominantly and even it was manipulated to emerge some polarization, hence the information of *wasatiyyah* was neglected with political and social conflicts. Thirdly, lack of information in the education field (Kamali, 2015).

In the context of Indonesia, the term *wasatiyyah* Islam has become popular since it was promoted by the Ministry of Religious Affairs a year ago. In addition, since Indonesia is known with the largest population of Muslims, it is advantageous to broadcast the term to the Indonesian people. However, the promotion process still finds challenges, especially in the education field.

Table 1. What is your understanding of the concept of *wasatiyyah* of Islam after taking the course?

Participants	Interview Quotations
1	"... the basic concept of <i>wasatiyyah</i> Islam was moderate or balance, and how to become a moderate Muslim..."

2	"... <i>wasatiyyah</i> Islam is moderation how to avoid extremism, also how-to live-in unity in our modern life, also how a citizen can be corporated to avoid the segregation..."
3	"... I am practicing that concept in this university, and now I can distinguish people who practice the <i>wasatiyyah</i> Islam and those who do not practice..."
4	"... it is a middle path for being a Muslim to practice their religion by appreciating the differences views with others..."

Table 1. above shows students' understanding of the concept of *wasatiyyah* Islam after taking the course for one semester. They understood that the basic idea of *wasatiyyah* Islam is moderation, balance, and a middle position between different points of view. This is in link with the definition of *wasatiyyah* Islam which is a moderation or middle position between two extremities. In addition, in the Arabic language *wasatiyyah* means *tawassut*, *iqtisad*, *I'tidal*, and *tawazun* (Kamali, 2015). Interestingly, the third participant stated that UIII gives her opportunities to practice the concept within diversity. This is because she learned *wasatiyyah* Islam at her bachelor's degree. Overall, it can be said that students have learned something from the course and understood and practice the concept of *wasatiyyah* Islam.

Table 2. How do you see the implementation of the *wasatiyyah* course as a mandatory subject at UIII?

Participants	Interview Quotations
1	"... it's a positive step to broaden our understanding of the values of <i>wasatiyyah</i> Islam and balancing in Islam. That helps to create the moderate perspectives and inclusive in the aspect of life..."
2.	"... I think its effective implementation to help students to balance in whatever is the field..."
3	"... It is good for an international university like UIII, and not all the students are Muslim, to learn something new..."
4	"... I agreed, and I don't have a problem with that..."

Table 2 demonstrates the positive perspectives of four participants on the implementation of *wasatiyyah* class as the mandatory subject for all students at UIII. It also shows that they need that course in order to welcome diversity on campus. Especially in this era of globalization, there are several extremist and radical groups such as Jemaah Islam (JI) which is affiliated with Al-Qaeda, Mujahidin Indonesia Timur (MIT), and Jamaah Ansharud Daulah (JAD) (Ridwan & Abdurrahim, 2023). Thus, the *wasatiyyah* course is crucial so that students are able to distinguish such groups.

In addition, the finding shows that by means of *wasatiyyah* class, they understood the notion of diversity and how to embrace it in daily life. Following that, the first participant said that she previously felt strange to the non-Muslim people, but after learning *wasatiyyah*, she could communicate and work together with the different beliefs in the class. This links to the concept of moderation by Rahmadi & Hamdan (2023) based on cross-cultural communication and social lens. That moderation can be understood by communicating and socializing with the surrounding community. Also, from the cross-cultural communication perspective, moderation can be defined as an individual's ability to communicate with different cultures and beliefs.

Table 3. What do you learn from the *wasatiyyah* class?

Participants	Interview Quotations
1	"... such the concept of moderate Islam from other countries like Gambia and Nigeria. We learn some important issues or challenges in moderate Islam..."
2.	"... introduction the concept, organizations, and practice of <i>wasatiyyah</i> from other countries..."
3	"... the definitions of <i>wasatiyyah</i> from traditional books (<i>kutubut thurats</i>), and <i>wasatiyyah</i> from different perspectives of Islamic organizations such Nahdatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah..."
4	"... Understanding Islam, perspectives from outside Islam, history of <i>Wasatiyyah</i> , organizations in Indonesia..."

Table 3 above asks the participants about the material they learned for the *wasatiyyah* class. It can be seen that the learning materials are almost similar for all faculties and levels of study at UIII. It includes the definition of the term *wasatiyyah*, its theology, the concept of *wasatiyyah* Islam, and its practice from several perspectives and countries. Consequently, by the end of the class, students are expected to understand *wasatiyyah* Islam in-depth, recognize the characteristics of *wasatiyyah* Islam, and also identify some issues and challenges of the *wasatiyyah* practice. In my opinion, the learning material, such as a broad set and comprehensive materials, can broaden students' understanding of the concept.

In addition, during the interview session, we asked the participants about the teaching methods used in the class. The first, second, and fourth participants used English as the instruction language in the classroom. The class is conducted offline for most of the time, and the teaching methods used are presentation, discussion, and assignments. However, the last participant said that the class was quite boring and less interactive because it used presentations from the first meeting up to the last meeting. Meanwhile, the third participant uses Arabic as the instructional language in the classroom since she is in the faculty of Islamic studies. Also, she stated that the references used in the *wasatiyyah* class were mostly from traditional books (*kutubut thurats*). This shows that the process of teaching and learning focuses on student-centered learning, which provides advantages for students to gain more information, knowledge, and experiences.

Table 4. Do you think the materials in the *Wasatiyyah* course are relevant to your daily life?

Participants	Interview Quotations
1	"... such the concept of moderate Islam from other countries like Gambia and Nigeria..."
2.	"... it suits the context of UIII..."
3	"... balancing physically and spiritually..."
4	"... Yes, it's very relevant, like having a classmate with different beliefs, so we can manage our attitude and welcome the diversity..."

Table 4 above discusses students' points of view regarding the relevance of *wasatiyyah's* materials to the participants' daily lives. In this context, the term daily life refers to the student life within the diversity at the university. By understanding the definition of *wasatiyyah*, such as *tawassut*, *iqtisad*, *i'tidal*, and *tawazun*, students develop their attitudes and welcome the diversity inside and outside the campus. Hence, it

creates such harmony and avoids segregation in society. The quotations above show that the *wasatiyyah* course its (its or is?) applicable in the context of UIII. One of the materials discussed in the *wasatiyyah* class is about the practices of *wasatiyyah* Islam in some countries. In this case, the international student can present the information and practice of moderation based on their country. As a result, it broadens their understanding of *wasatiyyah* Islam.

Additionally, the *wasatiyyah* class also discusses issues and challenges in the practice of *wasatiyyah* Islam. For example, the issue of factors that may weaken religious moderation, like the conservative religious doctrines in some Islamic schools in Indonesia (Zuhdi, 2018). Also, the lack of religious literacy among Indonesian people may cause some problems in the society like multiculturalism, tolerance, and prejudice (Zuhdi & Sarwenda, 2020). Thus, by knowing and understanding the current issues and problems, students can update their information and insights. This result can be a recommendation for other universities to implement the *wasatiyyah* course into their curriculum.

Second Research Question

How do international students reflect the concept of *Wasatiyyah* of Islam in a pluralistic society?

In order to gain the answer to the second research question, two questions were constructed regarding students' reflections on their understanding of the concept of *wasatiyyah* within diversity.

Table 5. Does the *wasatiyyah* course have an impact on the way you practice your religion?

Participants	Interview Quotations
1	"... I was felt like indoctrinated with the concept of <i>wasatiyyah</i> ..."
2.	"... <i>wasatiyyah</i> does not have any impact on the way I practice my religion..."
3	"... No, it's the same for me..."
4	"... Yes, it affects the way I practice my belief..."

Table 5 above shows the students' views on the effect of *wasatiyyah* class on the way they practice their religions. Two participants claim that it affected the practice of their beliefs. The first participant said that, somehow, she felt indoctrinated by the concept of *wasatiyyah*. This often happens to her because her background of study was in pesantren (boarding school), which is different from the knowledge she just learned at UIII. Before, in pesantren, she perceived the traditional understanding of Islam, which is quite strict in terms of social activities with other beliefs. As a result, she keeps rethinking the concept. In this case, it could happen to other students who come from a pesantren background as well. Firstly, in the context of pesantren where all students there are Muslims, and they are used to it. Hence, they have no experience in meeting and communicating with other religions. Secondly, they used to learn and practice only the Islamic knowledge from Al-Quran and Hadits. Thus, they tend to be more too strict on their belief rather than moderate. As a result, the *wasatiyyah* class looks like indoctrination for some students. That is why the *wasatiyyah* should make students understand the concept of *wasatiyyah* and its in-depth practice, so they do not feel in doubt anymore.

On the other hand, the last participant claims that the *wasatiyyah* class changed her mind about its concept. She previously perceived that *wasatiyyah* Islam was a

radical term that was called Islam Nusantara. After taking the *wasatiyyah* course, she knew the true definitions and knowledge that were based on Al-Quran and Sunnah. So, it had a positive impact on her. Consequently, it can be said that the *wasatiyyah* course has a positive impact on students at UIII.

The second and the third participants stated that there is no impact of *wasatiyyah* course on the way they practice their beliefs. The second participant claims that her belief also teaches such tolerance and balanced knowledge. Also, she said that *wasatiyyah* is one direction that avoids extremism and assures moderation. The concept is generally accepted, and it is widely practiced in her religion. so, it is not a problem in the way she practices her religion. Meanwhile, the third participant had some experiences before coming to UIII in both knowledge and practice, so she felt that the *wasatiyyah* class had no impact on her activities. However, in terms of social interaction, she stated that *wasatiyyah* has a positive effect on being a wise person who is always in the middle position. Overall, it can be said that there are two impacts on students' belief towards the *wasatiyyah* concepts which are positive and negative impacts.

Table 6. How do you reflect the concept of *Wasatiyyah* Islam in a pluralistic society?

Participants	Interview Quotations
1	"... I reflect that from <i>wasatiyyah</i> I know that we no need to limit ourselves from the non-Muslim friend and make our-self become balanced and to be friends with them..."
2.	"... it promotes harmony, for instance, in the case of UIII, students from another background can live peacefully without any segregation or rejection, so everyone is given an equal privilege to experience individual in the university..."
3	"... it reflects on being a balance between physically and spiritually..."
4	"... it reflects on my attitude become more friendship..."

Table 6 illustrates students' reflections on *wasatiyyah* class within the diversity. The four participants have a positive reflection on some aspects of life. It also shows the advantage of learning *wasatiyyah* Islam, especially in the context of a pluralistic society. It is natural to live in plurality and people cannot avoid it. For example, in the classroom, it must be a multiplicity of gender, age, economic, and perspectives. Furthermore, different individuals will have different minds and characteristics. Consequently, a sense of openness is needed in order to live in harmony and respectfully.

UIII, as a real picture of inclusivity and heterogeneity, shows the picture of tolerance and open-mindedness towards differences. In this case, the first participant shared her experience; since she has non-Muslim friends in the class, she used to interact with them and welcome their views. She also noticed that her attitudes, such as thriftiness and moderation sin terms of finances, show the concept of *wasatiyyah* in Islam.

While from the non-Muslim point of view, it reveals equality for all individuals in the university. In this case, she felt that she was respected and appreciated by others, even though she was a minority in the class. In the discussion, she said that Indonesian people are friendly compared to other countries. That is why she felt safe and comfortable staying in the dormitory on campus. In addition, based on the third participant's experience in practicing the concept of *wasatiyyah* at the university, it is revealed that she is able to balance many aspects of life, including physical and

spiritual. For example, in practicing the idea of *wasatiyyah* class, she changed her perspective to those who were strict in doing prayer (*ibadah*). It means that she has become wise and stopped labeling someone who has a different view from her. This positive impact should be spread widely, so the practice of labeling or classifying someone or groups can be avoided.

Moreover, the last participant reflected that she understands and learns diversity from the *wasatiyyah* class. This is because the materials in it also provide some discussion on different cultures and traditions of countries that are presented by international students in her class. As a result, it affected her attitude toward welcoming multicultural awareness.

Table. 7 What is your recommendation for this course in the future?

Participants	Interview Quotations
1	'... more explanation and practice on the concept of tolerance...'
2.	"... I expect a continued positive impact from the <i>wasatiyyah</i> class..."
3	"... the material should involve some phenomena as reasons for <i>wasatiyyah</i> class as foundation subject at UIII..."
4	"... the teaching method should be varied, so the student will not feel bored by the presentations only..."

The last table above displays students' expectations towards the *wasatiyyah* class in the next semester. It also has recommendations for lecturers and administration to consider improving the quality of the teaching and learning *wasatiyyah* course at UIII. Overall, it includes teaching material, teaching methods, and facilitations.

First, in terms of teaching material, the *wasatiyyah* course should be more relevant and include up-to-date issues regarding moderation and its challenges. In doing so, lecturers can provide the material such as articles from the international journal and various databases. Secondly, mixed methods of teaching are needed in order to create an inclusive learning environment. For example, by varying the activities such as games to encourage students' participation in the classroom. In addition, the assessment can be replaced from the paper-based method to the project-based method.

D. Conclusion

In conclusion, education plays a significant part in reimagining the concept of *wasatiyyah* of Islam, which was neglected by Islamic education. Universitas Islam International Indonesia is an example of implementing the concept of *wasatiyyah* as a mandatory course for all students at the university. The results of the study as evidence of the positive effects of its implementation. First, students show a positive attitude in understanding the knowledge of *wasatiyyah*, including its issues and challenges. Secondly, they also show a positive reflection towards the practice of *wasatiyyah* of Islam in a diverse setting. The limitations of this study are: first, it is limited in terms of the number of participants, which is four students, which may not fully represent the entire student population. Additionally, the case study approach and interviews alone may not cover all aspects of the implementation and impact of the *wasatiyyah* course completely. Moreover, the implications of this study reflect that the implementation of *wasatiyyah* courses at the Universitas Islam International Indonesia has a positive impact on the understanding and practice of moderate Islam among students. This study suggests that the integration of *wasatiyyah* courses in the Islamic education curriculum can be expanded to promote more inclusive, harmonious, and tolerant practices in the multicultural context of education.

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F. Author Contributions Statement

Both authors contributed to the writing of the present article. Nurhalimah Siregar, as the main author, was generally responsible for providing the first draft with Muhammad Abdul Aziz, as the co-author, being specifically assigned to draft the Literature Review and References. The review and subsequent revision were made possible by both together.

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