

UNDERSTANDING TOLERANCE: STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

This study underscores the importance of teaching moderation in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) lectures at public universities (PU) to foster a climate of tolerance among students, countering radicalism and extremism. The primary objective is to explore student perceptions of tolerance learning within their religious courses. Employing a quantitative approach, the researchers conducted a descriptive survey involving 795 respondents, utilizing a cross-sectional design for data collection via a Likert scale questionnaire. Results revealed that a significant majority of students, 87.82%, hold a very good perception of tolerance learning in IRE lectures. Further analysis indicated that over 90% of respondents viewed the attitudes and thoughts of IRE lecturers on religious moderation positively (97.74%). Similarly, 95.37% appreciated the teaching methods and processes that enhance tolerance learning, while 93.38% positively assessed the teaching materials that promote these values. These findings indicate that tolerance learning is effectively occurring in IRE courses at PU. This research reinforces the strategic role of Islamic Religious Education in internalizing tolerant values among students, ultimately contributing to the promotion of religious moderation within the educational context.

Keywords: Diversity, Islamic Religious Education, Public Universities, Student Perception, Tolerance

INTRODUCTION

Tolerance, regarded as a universal value, plays a critical role in fostering peace, mutual respect, and cooperation in an increasingly diverse global society (Al-Kubise & Haq, 2023; Lundie et al., 2024). In modern contexts, tolerance is essential for individual freedom (Rodrigues, 2024) and human development (Valković, 2018). Recognizing this significance, many universities are increasingly committed to promoting tolerance among their students through various strategies (Anwar, 2018; Turebayeva & Doszhanova, 2013; Verbitskaya, 2019). Some institutions have even proposed establishing dedicated structural units within universities focused on fostering high moral standards and tolerance (Kaztaevna et al., 2015). There is also a growing movement advocating for the integration of these values into educational curricula, particularly within religious education (Abu-Nimer et al., 2016; Rahmat et al., 2019), spanning both schools and universities (Alhashmi et al., 2020; Raihani, 2011). In Indonesia, the government has initiated similar efforts through religious education (Mukminin, 2022; Parker, 2014), recognizing the role of tolerance in the nation's educational framework.

In Indonesia, religious education, including Islamic Religious Education (IRE), is a mandatory component of the national curriculum from elementary to tertiary levels (Masuda & Yudhistira, 2020). This requirement is rooted in the Indonesian National Education System, as outlined in National Education System Legislation No. 20 of 2003, which emphasizes the need for education to cultivate students' faith and piety (Raihani, 2007, 2011). At public universities, IRE is categorized as a General Education (GE) course that all students must undertake. This is further supported by the government regulation No. 4 of 2022, which mandates religion as a compulsory subject alongside courses in Pancasila, citizenship, and Bahasa.

Ideally, IRE should extend beyond mere Islamic teaching content to actively promote the development of students' personalities based on Islamic teachings. In this context, IRE is integrated into Personality Development courses. According to the Decree of the Director General of Higher Education No. 38 of 2002, the primary aim of IRE is to equip students with a foundation for becoming intellectuals who possess faith, piety, noble ethics, and broad perspectives while actively engaging in interfaith cooperation for the advancement of science and technology for national interests (Zaki, 2015). This framework positions IRE courses strategically as mandatory subjects for all university students, thereby emphasizing their potential role in personality development.

Despite the strategic role of IRE in fostering students' personalities and addressing contemporary religious issues on campus, evidence suggests that its implementation has not been fully realized. There are ongoing challenges, including the presence of radicalism, liberalism, and secularism among university students. For instance, groups like NII KW IX have targeted campuses in Indonesia for indoctrination (Frimayanti et al., 2024; Lestari, 2021). A 2019 report by the Setara Institute highlighted the prevalence of Radical Islamic ideology in ten public universities (Basith & Labib, 2024). Alarmingly, a survey conducted by the Center for Islamic and Community Studies (PPIM) UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta revealed that 51.5% of student respondents held intolerant views toward minority Islamic sects, such as Ahmadiyah, while 34.4% expressed intolerance toward other religious groups (Aulia, 2024). This intolerance stems primarily from misunderstandings in interpreting texts related to the concept of jihad (Fanani, 2021; Fitriawan & Zen, 2023; Wahab et al., 2024) and other significant issues (Basyirah & Fuad, 2023; Lewoleba, 2023). Additionally, the focus of IRE on delivering Islamic content has often overlooked the essential goal of fostering personality development.

Over the past decade, the study of anti-radicalism and tolerance education in higher education has gained traction among researchers. Studies globally, such as those by Biney, Ewemoeje, and Amoateng (2021) at the University of Ghana and North-West University, and Amoateng (2016) at the University of Johannesburg, have explored students' attitudes toward tolerance. In Indonesia, several researchers have examined students' perceptions of religious tolerance and moderation. For example, Mujahidin, Hafidhuddin, and Kusumah (2021) investigated Islamic higher education students' perceptions of interreligious tolerance, while Salmah, Mujahidin, and Syafrin (2022) focused on how students and lecturers perceive the concept of religious tolerance and community relations. Other studies, such as those by Ramdhani et al. (2021) and Rohmah et al. (2022), have looked into student perceptions of religious moderation and radicalism on campuses. More recently, Nandasari, Isnata, and Irvan (2023) and Widiandari, Muhsin, and Sabarudin (2023) have contributed to this discourse by examining student perceptions of religious radicalism in general.

However, despite the growing interest in this area, there is a notable gap in research specifically examining how university students perceive tolerance learning within IRE courses. This study aims to address this gap by evaluating the implementation of IRE lectures at universities, particularly focusing on the promotion of Islam that embodies *rahmatan lil 'alamîn*, as a framework for tolerance learning. Given the concerning trends of radicalism on campuses, this research will explore the realities of IRE learning across several universities in Bandung, West Java, Indonesia.

To achieve these objectives, a survey will be conducted utilizing questionnaires aimed at students who have completed IRE courses at three universities in Bandung. The questionnaire is designed to gather insights into students' perceptions of tolerance learning within IRE lectures. Three key aspects will be assessed through the survey: first, students' perceptions of IRE lecturers as exemplars of moderate religious practice; second, the effectiveness of IRE lecture methods and processes in reinforcing religious moderation; and

third, students’ perspectives on the learning materials that contribute to their understanding of religious moderation.

METHOD

This qualitative study aims to explore student perceptions of tolerance learning through Islamic Religious Education (IRE) lectures at public universities, employing a descriptive-survey method (Creswell, 2012; Fraenkel et al., 2012) with a cross-sectional design (Gall et al., 2003). The focus is on a single variable—student perception—quantified as interval data, assessed through three indicators: perceptions of lecturers' moderation in religious practice, IRE lecture methods and processes, and IRE teaching materials. A total of 795 university students from various institutions in Bandung, West Java, voluntarily completed a Google Forms questionnaire. The gender distribution of respondents revealed a majority of women (75.72%) compared to men (24.28%), a disparity attributed to the convenience sampling technique employed (Ludigdo & Mashuri, 2021; Mashuri et al., 2021).

To gather data on university students' perceptions of tolerance learning through Islamic Religious Education (IRE) lectures, a questionnaire was developed using a quantitative Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5. This interval-type quantitative data aims to measure students' perceptions across three indicators: perceptions of the attitudes and thoughts of IRE lecturers (A1), perceptions of IRE lecture methods and processes (A2), and perceptions of IRE lecture materials at public universities (A3). Specific items for each indicator are provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Sample Student Perception Question Item

No.	Sample Questionnaire Questions	Perceptual Indicators
1.	Lecturers have become role models for students in thinking and being moderate in religious practice.	Attitudes and Thoughts of IRE Lecturers
2.	The lecture method used by lecturers makes students have a moderate understanding of Islam (tolerant in religion).	IRE Lecture Methods and Process
3.	Teaching materials delivered in Islamic lectures provide insight to students to have understanding and moderate (tolerant) attitudes in religion	IRE Teaching Materials

The indicators for measuring student perceptions of tolerance learning are developed into various statements, including both positive and negative forms. The measurement criteria for these statements are outlined, where positive statements are scored as follows: "always" (5), "often" (4), "sometimes" (3), "infrequently" (2), and "never" (1). conversely, negative statements are scored inversely: "always" (1), "often" (2), "sometimes" (3), "infrequently" (4), and "never" (5). Once the questionnaire is finalized, it is distributed to respondents via Google Forms (Khabour et al., 2020).

The data collected in this study were analyzed using descriptive analysis to assess student and lecturer perceptions related to tolerance learning in IRE lectures at public universities. This analysis utilizes Likert scale questionnaire data, which categorizes student perceptions into four levels: "very poor" for scores ranging from 12 to 24, "poor" for scores from 25 to 35, "good" for scores between 36 and 48, and "very good" for scores ranging from 49 to 60, as outlined in Table 3. By employing this categorization, the study aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the effectiveness of IRE lectures in fostering tolerance among students at public universities.

Meanwhile, the elaboration of each perception indicator is carried out by calculating the percentage of respondents. The percentage of respondents is calculated by the formula of

frequency or number of respondents divided by the total number of respondents. Furthermore, the percentage of each item will be interpreted based on the criteria/categories in Table 2.

Table 2. Interpretation Criteria for Percentage of Respondents' Answers

No.	Answer Percentage Range	Description of Interpretation
1.	$P = 0\%$	No one
2.	$0\% < P < 25\%$	Small Percentage
3.	$25\% \leq P < 50\%$	Almost half
4.	$P = 50\%$	Half
5.	$50\% < P < 75\%$	Most
6.	$75\% \leq P < 100\%$	Almost entirely
7.	$P = 100\%$	Entirely

Source: Pramswari (2016)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study aims to explore student perceptions of tolerance learning in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) lectures at public universities. Data were collected through a Google Form questionnaire completed by 795 students across several public universities in Bandung, West Java, Indonesia. The questionnaire included 12 items distributed across three perception indicators: three items (A1.1 to A1.3) focused on respondents' perceptions of IRE lecturers' attitudes and thoughts, six items (A2.1 to A2.6) assessed perceptions of IRE lecture methods and processes, and three items (A3.1 to A3.3) evaluated perceptions of IRE teaching materials.

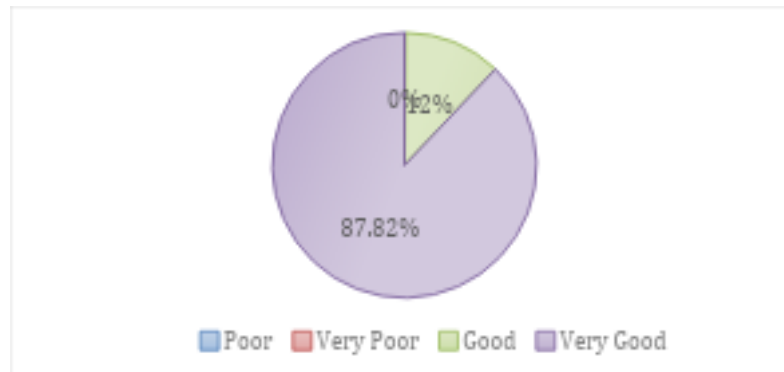


Figure 1. Level of Student Perception of Tolerance Learning in IRE Courses at public university

Overall, the average student scored 54.9 out of 60, indicating a very good perception of tolerant learning in IRE lectures, with 87.82% (699 out of 795) of students expressing very good perceptions. Additionally, 11.95% of students reported good perceptions, while only one student (0.13%) indicated a bad perception. The detailed percentage of student perception levels is illustrated in Figure 1

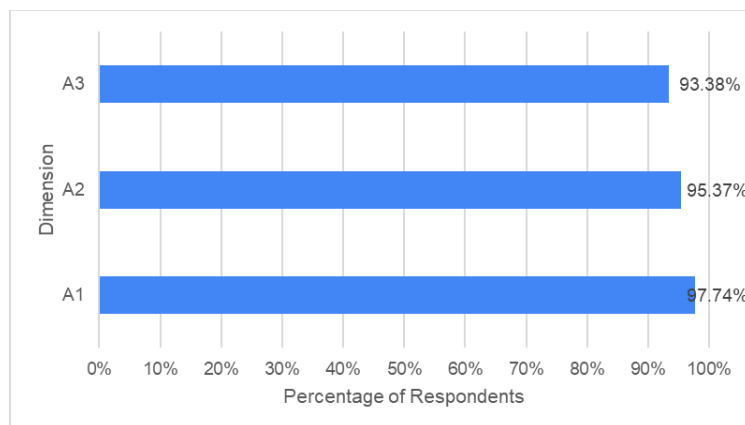


Figure 2. Average Percentage of Student Perception of Tolerance Learning in IRE Courses at public university

The data presented in Figure 2 is supported by the analysis of the average percentage of respondents across three dimensions, with over 90% of respondents providing positive perceptions. Specifically, the highest percentage was found in students' perceptions of the attitudes and thoughts of IRE lecturers regarding religious moderation (A1), which received a positive rating from 97.74% of respondents. This was followed by students' perceptions of IRE lecture methods and processes that enhance tolerance learning (A2), which garnered positive responses from 95.37% of participants. Lastly, perceptions of IRE teaching materials that promote tolerance learning (A3) were positively viewed by 93.38% of respondents. Overall, the data from Figures 2 and 3 indicate that tolerance learning is effectively perceived in IRE lectures at public universities, and the detailed analysis of respondents' perceptions in each dimension will be presented next.

Student Perceptions of IRE Lecturers' Attitudes and Thoughts

The study includes three items designed to assess students' perceptions of the attitudes and thoughts of IRE lecturers. The first item (A1.1) inquires about the lecturer's example in demonstrating moderate thinking and behaviour in religious practice. The second item (A1.2) evaluates the extent to which lecturers exhibit moderate thinking in religious understanding, while the third item (A1.3) focuses on the degree to which lecturers display moderate attitudes and behaviours in their religious practices. Analysis of these items reveals that an average of 97.74% of respondents perceive IRE lecturers as having moderate attitudes and thoughts, indicating a generally positive view of their approach.

The summary of the percentage of students' perceptions regarding the attitudes and thoughts of IRE lecturers regarding A.1 indicates that 97.23% of respondents perceive lecturers as exemplary in thinking and demonstrating moderation in religious practice. Item A.2 shows an even higher percentage, with 98.36% of students believing that lecturers exhibit moderate thinking in religious understanding. Furthermore, 97.61% of respondents perceive that lecturers display moderate attitudes and behaviours in practicing religion, resulting in an overall average perception of 97.74%. This data highlights the positive views students hold about their lecturers' approach to religious moderation. Students' perceptions of PAI lecture methods and processes.

Six items assess students' perceptions of IRE lecture methods that promote tolerance learning. Item A2.1 examines the effectiveness of lecture methods in fostering a moderate understanding of Islam; item A2.2 evaluates how actively IRE lecturers encourage tolerant interpretations of Islam; item A2.3 looks at how well lecturers convey the diversity of opinions within Islam; item A2.4 measures the extent to which lecturers avoid indoctrinating students with specific ideologies; item A2.5 considers how effectively lecturers facilitate the recognition

of differing viewpoints; and item A2.6 assesses the opportunities provided for students to ask questions during lectures.

Students' Perceptions of IRE Lecture Methods and Process

The analysis of the six items indicates that 95.37% of respondents have a positive perception of IRE lecture methods and processes, concluding that these approaches effectively promote a moderate understanding and practice of Islam, as demonstrated in Table 3.

Table 3. Summary of the Percentage of Student Perception of IRE Lecture Methods and Processes

No.	Statement of Item Indicator II	Percentage
A2.1.	The lecture method used by lecturers makes students have a moderate understanding of Islam (tolerant in religion)	94.34%
A2.2.	Lecturers promote a tolerant (moderate) understanding of Islam	96.48%
A2.3.	Lecturers provide insight into the variety of dissent in Islam	96.60%
A2.4.	Lecturers do not indoctrinate students with certain Islamic groups	91.82%
A2.5.	Lecturers facilitate students to get to know differences of opinion in Islam	94.34%
A2.6.	Lecturers provide opportunities for students to ask questions in Islamic religious lectures	98.62%
	Average	95.37%

Student Perceptions of IRE Lecture Teaching Materials

The assessment of students' perceptions of tolerance learning in IRE lecture teaching materials includes three items. Item A3.1 evaluates the effectiveness of the materials in fostering students' understanding and promoting moderate, tolerant attitudes toward religion. Item A3.2 investigates how well IRE lecturers present materials that encourage moderation in practicing Islam. Item A3.3 examines the provision of diverse teaching resources by IRE lecturers, ensuring they are not aligned with specific beliefs or schools of thought within Islam. Analysis indicates that 93.38% of respondents view the teaching materials positively, suggesting they effectively promote a moderate understanding and practice of Islam, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Summary of the Percentage of Student Perception of PAI Lecture Teaching Material

No.	Statement of Item Indicator III	Percentage
A3.1.	Teaching materials delivered in Islamic lectures provide insight to students to have understanding and moderate (tolerant) attitudes in religion	97.11%
A3.2.	Lecturers deliver materials or teaching materials that promote moderation in carrying out Islam	92.20%
A3.3.	Lecturers facilitate students to get various sources or teaching materials (not based on certain beliefs or madzhab in Islam)	90.82%
	Average	93.38%

The results of the present study provide valuable insights into student perceptions of tolerance learning within IRE lectures at public universities. A significant majority of respondents demonstrated a positive perception of the attitudes and teaching methods employed by IRE lecturers, highlighting the effectiveness of these educators in promoting a moderate understanding of Islam and fostering a tolerant learning environment. Additionally, the analysis of teaching materials revealed that they contribute to students' understanding of religious moderation. These findings underscore the importance of pedagogical approaches and resources in cultivating tolerance among students, setting a solid foundation for further discussion of the research results and their implications for Islamic religious education.

The results of this study underscore the strategic role of IRE courses in promoting tolerance learning at public universities in Indonesia. As a compulsory subject in the higher education curriculum, IRE is crucial for de-radicalization efforts through its emphasis on tolerance education. This conclusion aligns with previous research highlighting the need to strengthen IRE to combat radicalism, particularly in schools (Zulfatmi, 2023; Abdurrohman & Syamsiar, 2017) and universities (Arifin, 2016). Additionally, as part of the personality development curriculum, IRE plays a significant role in internalizing moral values, including tolerance, into students' lives (Budiman, 2013; Nurlaila, 2011; Wibowo, 2014). Referring to the research findings, at least three key efforts can be made to optimize the internalization of tolerance values through IRE courses at public universities.

To effectively promote tolerance learning in IRE courses, several strategic efforts can be implemented. First, enhancing the role and awareness of lecturers is crucial; educators should exemplify attitudes, thought processes, and language that reflect religious moderation, particularly tolerance. Researchers such as Amin (2017), Nurchaili (2010), and Sutisna et al. (2019) emphasize that educators' conduct plays a vital role in instilling positive values, including religious moderation. M. Natsir aptly noted that teachers serve as respected figures who should not only impart knowledge but also embody the values they teach. Second, developing IRE lecture methods that specifically aim to strengthen the internalization of tolerant values among students is essential. Such approaches can mitigate the spread of radical ideas, as highlighted by the National Agency for Countering Terrorism of Indonesia (BNPT), which identified several public universities showing signs of radicalism (Beni & Rachman, 2019). Our research indicates that universities led by IRE lecturers have undertaken preventive measures against radicalism.

Furthermore, Susanto (2018) asserts that radicalism can be countered by emphasizing key principles of Islamic religious education, such as avoiding misinterpretations of the Qur'an and maintaining a balanced understanding of religious practice (Mutawali, 2023). The intensity of interaction with diverse beliefs and cultures has also been shown to influence students' tolerance levels (Khoirunnisa et al., 2022). Finally, developing teaching materials that provide insights into diversity is crucial for the internalization process. IRE teaching materials should serve as tools to combat radicalization, rather than facilitate it. Research by Wahyudi (2017) indicates that textbooks can sometimes introduce radical ideologies into educational settings, highlighting the need for careful material development. Initiatives like the Moderate Student Movement program by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Lumajang Regency (Hefni & Muna, 2022) exemplify proactive measures to promote moderation in Islamic education, emphasizing the importance of developing a moderate character to counteract radicalism among students, as noted by Saifuddin (2011) and supported by findings from Widodo (2019) at the FKUB in Singkawang City, Kalimantan.

The internalization of religious values, or good character, is a strategic role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) courses in General Universities (PTU), particularly within the frameworks of General and Character Education. This internalization process not only shapes students' lives but also fosters personal maturity, especially concerning self-regulation and social

arrangements (Ahsan et al., 2024) and their capacity to build harmony and maintain diversity in their life (Syarif et al., 2024). The implementation of this process involves three main components of character: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action (Lickona, 1992; Subiyantoro, 2022). These components are interrelated; moral knowledge influences moral feelings, which in turn affect moral actions. Ultimately, moral action emerges as a product of both moral knowing and moral feeling, highlighting the reciprocal influence of these character elements (Lickona, 1992; Nashuddin, 2020).

Within the first element, moral knowing, there are six key aspects to strengthen in IRE courses at public universities: moral awareness, understanding moral values, perspective-taking, moral reasoning, decision-making, and self-knowledge (Lickona, 1992; R & Casim, 2021). These components collectively shape an individual's moral knowledge. The second element, moral feeling, encompasses the emotional aspects of character, distinguishing it from the cognitive nature of moral knowing. Recognizing what is right or wrong does not guarantee the correct action; hence, moral feelings play a crucial role in motivating behavior (Kuang, 2023). There are six emotional components that can be developed in educational contexts, including conscience, self-esteem, empathy, love for goodness, self-control, and humility (Lickona, 1992; Syarif et al., 2017). Finally, the third element, moral action, involves three essential aspects: competence, will, and habit (Lickona, 1992). These aspects drive individuals to take actions aligned with humanist and universal Islamic values, demonstrating that moral actions stem from the quality of both moral knowledge and feelings (Amrullah et al., 2023; Kuang, 2023). In religious terms, these moral actions are often referred to as morals or charity.

In the Indonesian Large Dictionary, tolerance refers to an attitude of acceptance or allowing differences, while the English adjective "tolerant" conveys two meanings: first, the ability to happily accept differing feelings, habits, or beliefs (Rahman & Shapie, 2023), and second, the acceptance of situations that deviate from one's norm. This understanding emphasizes that tolerance involves recognizing and accepting conditions or situations that differ from personal experiences (Verkuyten, 2022). Scholars argue that the concept of tolerance has evolved from merely recognizing differences (old tolerance) to actively accepting and respecting those differences (new tolerance) (Anwar, 2016; Verkuyten, 2022). This perspective suggests that a truly tolerant attitude involves treating differing beliefs, ideas, and opinions as equally valid (Palomares, 2009), promoting respect for the rights of others (Tokkulina et al., 2015). Consequently, tolerance extends beyond mere understanding or acknowledgment of differences (Raihani, 2011; Almond, 2010); it embodies an awareness that diverse opinions and beliefs can coexist harmoniously, positioning tolerance as a fundamental value for social harmony in modern society (Çalışkan & Sağlam, 2012). Ultimately, tolerance reflects a desire for mutual respect and understanding (Rosenblith & Bindewald, 2014) and signifies the maturity of an individual's religious level.

A key criticism of contemporary religious education is its emphasis on teaching religion rather than fostering true religiosity (Harris & Moran, 1998). When educators focus solely on religious instruction, they risk positioning religion and students as mere objects of study. In contrast, a grounded approach to religious teaching allows students to engage with religion as a source of meaningful values that can be applied in daily life, a concept referred to as "learning from religion" by Grimmit (1987). This approach emphasizes the importance of recognizing religious rights, particularly amid diverse communities (Sukestiyarno et al., 2022), making religious tolerance essential. Tolerance can be viewed as either a passive acceptance of different beliefs or an active, dynamic engagement with others' rights to practice their faith. While passive tolerance lies between exclusivity and pluralism—allowing others to practice their beliefs without genuine understanding—dynamic tolerance evolves from mere recognition to actively supporting diverse religious practices. Thus, promoting tolerance within Religious Education is

an essential effort to cultivate social harmony in a diverse society, recognizing everyone's right to practice their beliefs while respecting differences.

CONCLUSION

This research highlights that strengthening religious moderation, a core aspect of Islam's identity as *rahmatan lil'alamin*, is a primary objective of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) lectures at public universities. The findings indicate that a significant majority of respondents (87.82%) hold a very positive perception of tolerance learning in their IRE courses, with only 0.13% perceiving it negatively. This suggests that IRE lectures play a crucial role in promoting and internalizing tolerance among students. The study proposes three strategic approaches to enhance this role: first, IRE lecturers should model moderate religious perspectives; second, course design should facilitate experiences that expose students to diverse Islamic understandings, such as dialogues with various Islamic organizations; and third, lecture materials should reflect the richness of Islamic teachings and the importance of understanding diversity in interpretations. Based on the findings, the study offers three recommendations: conducting regular evaluative studies on IRE's effectiveness in promoting moderate Islamic teachings, using stratified sampling to ensure diverse respondent representation in future research, and incorporating multiple variables to assess actual learning outcomes and behavioural changes related to tolerance. While the study provides valuable insights, further research could enhance understanding by employing longitudinal designs and broader samples for a more comprehensive evaluation of tolerance education's impact.

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