

Qiraat and Identity Challenges; Strengthening Islamic Moderation Through Studying Variations in Al-Qur'an Readings

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ABSTRACT

Qiraat, as a variation of the reading of the Qur'an, has an important role in strengthening Islamic moderation, as well as answering the challenges of the identity of Muslims in the contemporary world. This study aims to examine the contribution of qiraat, a variation of the reading of the Qur'an, in strengthening Islamic moderation and overcoming the challenges of the identity of Muslims in the contemporary world. The method used in this study is a qualitative approach with a literature study design, in which relevant literature is analyzed descriptively-analytically. Data were obtained from primary sources, such as the text of the Qur'an with various variations of the reading of qiraat, as well as tafsir works that discuss the influence of qiraat on religious understanding. The results of the study show that qiraat not only reflects diversity in the text of the Qur'an, but also becomes a symbol of tolerance and inclusiveness in Islam. In addition, this variation of reading plays an important role in building a moderate Islamic identity by respecting differences in interpretation, avoiding extremism, and strengthening the unity of the community. This study makes an important contribution to the development of contemporary Islamic thought, especially in encouraging acceptance of Muslim groups.

Keywords: Qiraat, Islamic moderation, Islamic identity, diversity, tolerance, extremism

INTRODUCTION

Islam, as the religion with the second largest population in the world (Isnanto 2025), has an extraordinary wealth of intellectual and religious traditions. One of the most important aspects of this wealth is the Qur'an, which is considered by all Muslims in the world as the final revelation and a guide to life for Muslims (Septina et al. 2023:127–35). The Qur'an, as an irreplaceable source of teachings (Siregar et al. 2024:358–62), is delivered in the form of a very clear and profound text, but in practice, there are various ways to read it. One phenomenon that reflects this diversity is qiraat, namely variations in reading the Qur'an that have a major impact on understanding the holy text (Febra et al. 2024:267–73). Even because of this qiraat, the orientalist through his thesis Christoph Luxenberg, claimed the Qur'an as an inauthentic book and its authenticity is doubtful. However, it was firmly denied by (Zakiyah et al. 2024:57–71) by stating that Christoph Luxenberg's accusations were baseless and asserting that variations in the reading of the Qur'an are part of the rich oral tradition in Islam. Therefore, understanding the Qur'an must be done in the historical and cultural context in which it was revealed, as well as the importance of understanding Arabic as a rich and complex language.

However, although qiraat has been known in the tradition of tafsir and qiraat science, its role in strengthening Islamic moderation and overcoming identity challenges has received little attention in academic studies. Most studies related to qiraat tend to focus on technical or historical aspects. For example, studies conducted by z and many others are similar, while its relationship to contemporary issues such as Islamic moderation and identity challenges is still rarely explored. This is an academic problem that needs further investigation.

Qiraat as a phenomenon of diversity in reading the Qur'an (Muslikhun 2003:137–45) is not

merely a variation in the pronunciation of letters or words, but reflects a deeper view of how Muslims understand their religious teachings. For example, differences in readings of several verses can give rise to differences in meaning that have the potential to provide broader nuances to Islamic teachings (Esa Prasastia Amnesti dan Yusam Thobroni 2021:1572–81; Irham 2020:54–61; Kumullah et al. 2024:305–16; Mustofa 2022:55–73). This diversity is a characteristic that can enrich Muslims' understanding of their holy texts, as well as being a challenge in maintaining the unity of the community. In this context, qiraat functions as a bridge that allows Muslims to acknowledge differences without having to sacrifice the unity of faith.

Based on this, the biggest challenge faced by Muslims in understanding qiraat is the existence of misunderstandings that tend to worsen polarization in the Muslim community (Nashoih 2016:93–113). In many places, differences in the reading of the Qur'an are often considered a source of division, not as something that enriches the diversity of Muslims. In an increasingly polarized socio-political context, this can worsen the condition of Muslims who are already divided by various schools of thought and religious understanding. Therefore, it is very important to understand how qiraat can strengthen Islamic moderation, which encourages Muslims to remain steadfast in their teachings, but with a tolerant and inclusive attitude towards differences.

The aim of this research is to examine in depth the role of qiraat in strengthening Islamic moderation and how it can help overcome the identity challenges faced by Muslims in the contemporary world. This research also aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between variations in reading the Koran and Islamic values of moderation, as well as to explore the potential of qiraat in creating unity in diversity among Muslims.

Although there has been a lot of research discussing qiraat, as mentioned previously, most of this research has not touched on aspects of Islamic moderation and broader identity challenges. This research seeks to fill this gap by combining qiraat studies with relevant contemporary issues, especially moderation in Islam and how qiraat can be an instrument to strengthen these values. The existing research gap lies in the lack of studies that combine the historical and technical aspects of qiraat with the very dynamic socio-political dynamics of Muslims, which are related to Islamic moderation.

The novelty of this research lies in its approach that examines qiraat not only as a linguistic or historical phenomenon, but as a tool to strengthen moderation and face the challenges of identity. This research not only provides insight into how qiraat influences the understanding of the Qur'an, but also how the differences in readings can be seen as a means to strengthen Islamic moderation, a value that is much needed in this modern era, when Muslims are often trapped in extremism and polarization.

This study also introduces the concept of "moderate qiraat", which is an understanding of qiraat that not only respects differences, but also encourages an attitude of tolerance and respect for various interpretations in Islam. By viewing qiraat as part of the intellectual and spiritual wealth of Muslims, this study aims to show that qiraat can be a tool to strengthen the unity of the community in diversity, not the opposite, becoming a divisive factor.

Significantly, this research is expected to contribute to the development of contemporary Islamic thought, especially in the context of moderation. This research also has the potential to provide new insights for Muslim society, especially for those involved in the study of the Qur'an, that

variations in readings are not a difference that must be contested, but an intellectual heritage that needs to be appreciated and understood as a wealth. Thus, this research is not only useful for the academic world, but also for the formation of moderate and tolerant attitudes in the daily lives of Muslims.

This research also has great significance in contributing to global efforts in promoting interfaith and intercultural tolerance. By understanding how qiraat plays a role in Islamic moderation, Muslims can play an active role in promoting peace and unity amidst existing differences. This is important considering the challenges faced by Muslims, both globally and locally, related to a narrow understanding of religious teachings that often lead to conflict.

METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative approach (Afrizal 2019:12; Sugiyono 2013:1) to analyze the relationship between qiraat (variations in reading the Qur'an) and Islamic moderation, as well as the challenges of identity in the context of the contemporary Muslim world. This approach was chosen because the purpose of the study is to explore social and intellectual phenomena that cannot be explained through numbers or statistical data, but rather to a deeper understanding of their meaning and impact in society. The focus of this study is on the study of how qiraat as an interpretive element in the Qur'an can play a role in strengthening Islamic moderation and facing the challenges of Muslim identity in an increasingly global and plural world.

This research design uses a descriptive-analytical literature review (Sugiyono 2013:35–36). This design was chosen with the consideration of exploring, reviewing, and analyzing various literatures relevant to the theme of qiraat, Islamic moderation, and identity challenges in the socio-political context of Muslims. This literature review utilizes various primary and secondary sources, including books, scientific journal articles, research reports, and other academic works relevant to the topic. In this case, the literature used focuses on theoretical studies and thoughts that discuss phenomena that include variations in readings of the Qur'an, Islamic moderation, and identity challenges faced by Muslims in contemporary social and political dynamics.

The main data sources in this research include literature that discusses three major themes: *first*, qiraat, which includes books and articles that review history, types of reading, and their influence on the interpretation of the Qur'an; *second*, Islamic moderation, which is obtained from articles that discuss the concept of moderation in theological and socio-political contexts, as well as Islamic responses to the challenges of extremism and radicalization; *third*, identity challenges in the Islamic world, which includes studies on globalization, religious pluralism, and internal polarization of Muslims. These sources include Al-Qur'an texts with varied readings, classical exegetical works, scientific articles, and research reports that focus on understanding qiraat and Islamic moderation.

As a data collection method, this study uses a literature study technique by tracing relevant literature (Arikunto 2011:274). The data obtained consists of primary sources such as the text of the Qur'an with various readings, as well as works of interpretation and science that examine Islamic moderation and identity challenges. Secondary sources are obtained from journal articles, books, and research reports that discuss these concepts in the context of contemporary Islam. The process of searching and selecting literature is carried out through academic platforms such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, and SpringerLink, as well as university libraries that have collections of related literature.

This technique includes a series of procedures consisting of three important stages, namely: systematic data collection, grouping data based on certain categories, and evaluative analysis of data processed using a descriptive approach (Ashshofa 2013:16). Operationally, the first stage involves identifying the main themes that emerge in the literature related to qiraat, Islamic moderation, and identity challenges. These themes will be analyzed to find significant relationships between variations in Qur'anic readings and the concept of Islamic moderation, and how qiraat can be a means to face identity challenges in Muslim society. This analysis process involves in-depth categorization and interpretation of each identified theme, to then be synthesized into a more comprehensive understanding of the role of qiraat in strengthening Islamic moderation and overcoming the challenges of Muslim identity. This structured approach strengthens the validity and reliability of the data collected, thus providing a solid foundation for more in-depth analysis and interpretation in the next stage.

To maintain the validity and reliability of the research results, the author only uses sources that have high credibility, such as literature that has gone through a peer review process or published by leading academic publishers. All data analysis will be carried out objectively and transparently, considering various relevant perspectives and based on strong evidence from existing literature. However, this study has limitations, including only covering studies on qiraat, Islamic moderation, and identity challenges in the context of the Muslim world, without exploring similar phenomena outside the Islamic world, and limited to library studies without including empirical data from surveys or direct interviews.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Role of Qiraat in Strengthening Islamic Moderation

Qiraat, or variations in the reading of the Qur'an, is an integral part of the Islamic interpretation tradition that has great potential in strengthening Islamic moderation. Although qiraat is often considered as merely a technical difference in reading, this phenomenon actually reflects a deeper theological dimension (Husain dan Wahyuni 2024:115–28). For example, differences in the reading of some verses can give rise to different meanings that enrich Muslims' understanding of their holy texts (Febra et al. 2024:267–73; Irham 2020:54–61). This not only opens up space for differences in interpretation but also encourages acceptance of the diversity of understandings in Islam (Fadli et al. 2025:97–112).

In the tradition of Islamic moderation, which emphasizes tolerance, inclusiveness, and openness to differences, qiraat can serve as a symbol of legitimate diversity in religion (Ramadhan 2023). A number of qiraat, for example, show differences in the reading of certain verses, but do not change the fundamental meaning contained therein (Nugroho dan Harianto 2023:159–76). In the treasury of qiraat of the Qur'an, there are differences in reading that not only enrich linguistically, but also emphasize the depth of meaning of the word of God without changing the core of its message. One prominent example is in Surah Al-Fatiha verse 4, where in Qiraat Warsh it is read "*Maaliki yawmi d-din*", which means Owner of the Day of Judgment, while in Qiraat Shu'bah it is read "*Maliki yawmi d-din*", which means King of the Day of Judgment. Although different in the choice of words, both describe the greatness of Allah as the absolute Ruler on the Day of Judgment, both as the King who rules and the Owner who has full authority (Hasan 2020).

The difference in reading is also seen in Surah Al-Baqarah verse 255, or better known as the Ayat Kursi. In the qiraat Sho'bah and Warsh, the difference appears in the pronunciation of the phrase "*la ta'khudhuhu sinatun wa la nawm*", the difference is only in the length of the letter "wāw". However, in terms of meaning, nothing has changed: this verse still emphasizes that Allah is never sleepy, let alone sleep, a symbol of the perfection and eternity of His power. Another example is in Surah Al-A'raf verse 157, which describes the followers of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. Qiraat Khalaf reads it as "*an-nabiyya al-ummīyyal*", while qiraat Al-Suddi calls it "*an-nabiyyal*". This difference touches on the aspect of mention, but still refers to the Prophet Muhammad as the Messenger of the ummi, who does not write and does not read, but is the recipient of revelation and the bearer of guidance for mankind. Finally, in Surah Al-Qamar verse 52, there is a variation in the reading between "mastūr" in the qiraat Hafs and "mashūr" in the qiraat Al-Duri. The first means written, while the second gives the impression of hidden or guarded. Although linguistically different, the meaning of the verse still explains that Allah's revelation is neatly recorded in a book whose authenticity is maintained (Hasan 2020).

Through this variety of qiraat, it is very clear that Muslims in the world not only see the beauty of the language of the Qur'an, but also witness how the great meanings are maintained in various forms of reading, showing the perfection of God's word that goes beyond differences in sound and pronunciation. This shows that differences in the reading of the Qur'an are not a threat to the unity of Islamic teachings, but are an expression of diversity that can be accepted within the broader framework of Islam.

The Islamic Moderation Theory developed by contemporary thinkers such as Tariq Ramadan and Mohammed Arkoun introduces the concept of moderation that is contextual and inclusive. Tariq Ramadan, for example, argues that moderation in Islam is not only related to being tolerant of others, but also to the diversity of religious interpretations (Ramadan 2009:45). In this context, qiraat can be an instrument that enriches the way Muslims view their religion, by emphasizing the acceptance of legitimate differences. Mohammed Arkoun also emphasizes the importance of intellectual openness in understanding sacred texts, including differences in readings in qiraat, which enrich the framework of Islamic thought without threatening the unity of religious teachings (Arkoun 2019:78; Hajam et al. 2024:30; Mu'min 2022:341). These two thinkers show that moderation in Islam can be a foundation for building a more harmonious and diverse society, by emphasizing the importance of dialogue and understanding between various interpretations of the teachings.

By accommodating differences in the reading of the Qur'an, qiraat not only shows the diversity of the text but also strengthens the values of moderation. This study reveals that understanding qiraat can be a tool to prevent extreme thinking, which often arises from a rigid interpretation of religious texts. An open attitude to diversity in the reading of the Qur'an can help avoid a literalistic approach that often leads to narrow and intolerant interpretations. Qiraat, with its differences, provides a space for dialogue and compromise within the Islamic tradition, which supports the inclusive values necessary to create a more peaceful and harmonious society. The widely accepted differences in readings within the Islamic tradition also reflect an acceptance of the plurality and unity of the wider Muslim community, regardless of technical differences in reading.

Qiraat as a Tool for Overcoming Identity Challenges in Islam

The challenge of identity in the contemporary Islamic world is very relevant, especially with the increasing globalization and religious pluralism (Sakup et al. 2025:232–42). Globalization brings significant social and cultural changes, creating identity confusion for Muslims. They often feel caught between traditional Islamic values and the demands of modernity that often conflict with religious principles (Laju Peduli 2024; Varisi 2024). This phenomenon requires Muslims to face various forms of internal polarization, both in political, social, and religious contexts. One of the main challenges is the formation of an inclusive Islamic identity amidst differences in schools of thought and interpretation of religion. Variations in practice and understanding can cause internal conflict, but also offer opportunities for dialogue and deeper understanding (Tasya Avionia dan Syahidin Syahidin 2024:107–14). Qiraat, as one of the linguistic and theological phenomena in the Qur'an, can play an important role in building a more moderate and tolerant identity in the Islamic world. This means that the variations in readings of the Qur'an reflect a diversity of interpretations that can encourage acceptance of legitimate differences, as well as strengthen moderation and tolerance within the Muslim community.

Qiraat shows that differences in the reading of the Qur'an are not only part of linguistic richness, but also a manifestation of diversity in the legitimate understanding of religion in Islam. Understanding qiraat allows Muslims to appreciate and accept differences as part of the strong oral tradition in Islam. For example, the difference in the reading of "*Mālik*" and "*Malik*" (as found in Surah Al-Fatiha 1:4) reflects theological diversity that does not contradict the concept of tawhid (the oneness of God). *Maalik* refers to the meaning of "owner" while *Malik* means "king", but both refer to the same understanding of the absolute power of Allah (Hasan 2020). This provides space for legitimate differences in understanding without damaging the essence of Islamic teachings.

With this understanding, Muslims can strengthen their collective identity as one people, despite differences in how to read and interpret the Qur'an. Qiraat provides a strong foundation for building Islamic brotherhood based on intellectual diversity, not narrow or exclusive understanding. In this case, qiraat is not only seen as a reading technique, but also as a tool to strengthen the unity of the pluralistic Muslim community.

An inclusive and moderate Islamic identity can be formed through a broader understanding of diversity in Islamic tradition, including in terms of qiraat. Pluralism in Islam, as put forward by Islamic thinkers such as Abdulaziz Sachedina and John Esposito, emphasizes the importance of accepting differences in religious interpretation as part of a complex social reality. Sachedina argues that understanding diversity in Islam can strengthen the values of moderation that encourage peaceful coexistence between religious communities and between groups within Islam itself (Sachedina 2001:45). Sachedina emphasizes the importance of active involvement and deep understanding of differences as a basis for harmonious coexistence (Rizal 2021). Qiraat can be a model of how differences in religious interpretation can be managed with an attitude of respect for others. Esposito in his work states that Islam as a religion not only accepts internal diversity, but also teaches respect for differences (Esposito 2013:112). In this context, qiraat provides a concrete example of how Muslims can manage differences in a positive way and build a moderate Islamic identity.

These two thinkers show that by applying the principles of pluralism and moderation, Muslims can develop an identity that is inclusive and responsive to diversity, including through a better understanding of qiraat as a linguistic and theological phenomenon in the Qur'an. This not only enriches the individual's religious experience but also strengthens the Muslim community as a whole in facing the challenges of globalization and pluralism.

In the era of globalization, Islamic identity is often tested by external influences that bring values that conflict with religious traditions (Laju Peduli 2024). In this case, qiraat can be a balance that helps Muslims understand that Islam is a flexible and adaptive religion, although it still adheres to the basic principles of religious teachings. Through qiraat, Muslims are taught to appreciate differences as part of the diversity of traditions that have existed since the early development of Islam (Umar 2019:35–41). By understanding qiraat as part of the diversity in Islamic tradition, Muslims can more easily accept differences and build peaceful coexistence between groups. This is in line with the principle of moderation that encourages acceptance of diversity of understanding in the context of religion.

For example, qiraat is not only found in countries with strong reading traditions, such as Egypt or Mecca, but also in countries with social and cultural diversity such as Indonesia and India (Amin 2019:1–17; Li'izzah Nur Diana 2020:99–113; Mustofa 2011:221–45). Here, qiraat can be a catalyst for the acceptance of social and cultural diversity, and strengthen the concept of Islam Nusantara which is very well known in Indonesia. Islam Nusantara, which prioritizes moderation and diversity, teaches people to accept various differences in religious practices, including in qiraat, without losing the deep essence of religion (Qomar 2015:198–217).

Qiraat also serves as a way to strengthen the moderate Islamic identity by prioritizing dialogue between Muslims and between religions (Arif 2020:22–43; Mubakkirah 2018:241–61). In an increasingly polarized world, qiraat is a symbol that differences are not a threat, but rather part of a normal religious dynamic. Open dialogue towards differences in the reading of the Qur'an will help build an attitude of tolerance and respect for diverse religious beliefs and practices among Muslims. With a deeper understanding of qiraat, Muslims can reduce tensions that arise from differences in interpretation, and prefer to focus on the common principles contained in Islamic teachings, namely monotheism, justice, and the welfare of the people. This will strengthen the unity of Muslims amidst the differences that exist, both within Islam itself and in interactions with other religions.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that qiraat, variations in the reading of the Qur'an, have an important role in strengthening Islamic moderation and overcoming the challenges of Muslim identity in the modern era. These variations in reading not only enrich the understanding of the text of the Qur'an, but also support the values of tolerance, inclusiveness, and openness to differences in interpretation in Islam. Qiraat helps build unity amidst diversity by respecting legitimate differences in the reading of the Qur'an without damaging the essence of religious teachings. Thus, qiraat can function as an effective instrument to prevent extreme thinking and strengthen moderate Islamic identity. This study contributes to the development of contemporary Islamic thought, and can be a reference in encouraging acceptance of diversity in the Muslim community, while strengthening the unity of Muslims in diversity.

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