



Religious Moderation As An Educational Strategy; Examining Its Role In Shaping Teachers' And Students Religious Behaviour At Islamic Senior High School (MAN) Insan Cendekia Gowa South Sulawesi

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Abstract

Religious moderation has emerged as a strategic approach in Islamic education to foster inclusive, tolerant and balanced religious attitudes amid increasing social and ideological polarization. This study examines the implementation and the role of religious moderation as an educational strategy in shaping religious behaviour of student and teacher at MAN Insan Cendekia (IC) Gowa. The objective of this study is to determine the conceptual understanding and manifestation of moderate religious behavior among educators and students, identify strategies for implementing religious moderation values in various educational activities at the school. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation Focus Group Discussion, and curricular document searches. The collected data were analyzed qualitatively using data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing techniques. The research findings reveal that religious moderation is systematically integrated into pedagogical practices, school culture and extra-curricular activities. The understanding of the principles of religious moderation such as tolerance, balance, non-violence, and commitment to national values is generally deeply ingrained, both in educators and students. This conceptual understanding is then actualized in daily behavior that reflects openness, respect for differences, and rejection of radicalism. Educators actively and creatively integrate the values of religious moderation into the learning process, both through learning models, material content, and the creation of an inclusive discussion climate. This systematic implementation has significant implications for the formation of students' religious character. Religious behavior is formed that is not only moderate in its expression but also reflective and critical. This study confirms that MAN IC Gowa has functioned as an effective laboratory of moderation in shaping moderate insights and behavior, thus making a real contribution to preventing extremist ideologies and strengthening national harmony from an early age.

Keywords: Religious Moderation, Strategy, Education, Madrasah, Religious Behavior.

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Introduction

In recent years, the phenomenon of radicalism has infected Indonesian education, including madrasah (Islamic school), and is increasingly becoming a serious concern. A report from the National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT) indicates the spread of radical ideology through educators, including religious teachers (BNPT RI, 2022). This phenomenon poses a serious threat to the mission of education, particularly Islamic education, which is supposed to instill values of peace. Teachers, who should be agents of positive change, sometimes become conduits for the spread of intolerant ideologies. This phenomenon raises questions about the effectiveness of implementing religious moderation policies in educational settings.

In the context of formal education, many Islamic school teachers exhibit signs of religious thinking that tends toward exclusivity, even leading to radicalism. This aligns with Musa's findings, which indicate the infiltration of radical ideology into the education sector, including by certain educators. Teachers exposed to radicalism have the potential to spread intolerant views to students, ultimately leading to a tendency toward exclusive religious behavior (Musa, 2011). This phenomenon demonstrates that madrasahs are not immune to the influence of radicalism that develops through various channels. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the extent to which religious moderation programs have reached teachers, the frontline in religious education.

The religious behavior of students in Islamic schools (Madrasah) is greatly influenced by how religious values are conveyed by teachers. If teachers possess a moderate understanding of religion, students are more likely to develop a peaceful and inclusive religious spirit. Conversely, if teachers are exposed to exclusive and intolerant religious views, students will carry these values into society. Therefore, the implementation of religious moderation by teachers is a crucial determinant in creating a healthy religious culture in madrasahs. Shihab stated that moderate Islamic teachings need to be taught contextually, not simply textually. Therefore, examining how madrasah teachers implement religious moderation is crucial to understanding its impact on students' religious behavior (Shihab, 2007).

The reality on the ground shows that there is still resistance from a small number of teachers at MAN Insan Cendekia Gowa to the discourse of religious moderation, which is considered a form of secularization or blurring of Islamic identity, even though this is certainly not done openly by educators because it has become a government policy and program, especially at the Ministry of Religious Affairs. This often occurs due to a lack of comprehensive understanding of the substance of religious moderation itself. Therefore, systematic efforts are needed to explain that religious moderation is not a compromise with religious teachings, but rather a way to maintain balance in a pluralistic social life.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs, as the government institution responsible for religious education, has launched various programs to support religious moderation, such as teacher training, curriculum strengthening, and moderation literacy. Muhtarom et al. stated that the Ministry of Religious Affairs' moderation program emphasizes four main indicators: national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and acceptance of local culture (Muhtarom et al., 2021). However, the effectiveness of this program still needs further testing, especially in madrasah environments. This is because teachers' understanding and implementation of moderation can vary greatly, depending on their background, education, and social context. However, the extent to

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which this program is understood and implemented concretely by teachers in madrasahs remains questionable. Many teachers only understand religious moderation as administrative jargon without internalizing it into their teaching practices and daily lives (Supriansyah, 2024). This indicates a gap between the concept and its implementation in the field.

Madrasahs as Islamic educational institutions, have a strategic position in building the nation's civilization (Rumra et al., 2025). However, this strategic role can turn counterproductive if the religious values taught actually create social polarization. Therefore, this study aims to determine the implementation of religious moderation education at MAN Insan Cendikian Gowa and identify the implications of religious moderation education on the religious attitudes of educators and students. It also seeks to explore the understanding and religious behavior of educators and students, the implementation of religious moderation in educational activities, and the implications of the implementation of religious moderation on the religious behavior of students at MAN IC Gowa. This is in line with the grand vision of the Ministry of Religious Affairs to make religious moderation the spirit of Islamic education in Indonesia (Taufiq & Alkholid, 2021). In this way, madrasahs will not only produce graduates who are intellectually intelligent, but also spiritually and socially mature.

This research is relevant to several studies conducted by previous researchers. Salsabila and Frinaldi in their research stated that the implementation of the religious moderation program has been carried out well through activities, policies/rules and learning materials in madrasahs. Factors influencing the religious moderation program in madrasahs were analyzed using Edward's theory, namely communication, disposition and bureaucratic structure as supporting factors, while resources were a factor inhibiting the implementation of the religious moderation program in madrasahs (Salwa & Aldri, 2023). Kohar in his research showed that teachers of MTsN 6 Cianjur and MTs Al-Ihsan Baleendah Bandung stated that implementing religious moderation is very important. The challenges are the lack of special hours for religious moderation material, low application to religious norms, and the persistence of taboo views on religious moderation. The solution is to integrate the values of religious moderation into subjects, provide discussion space about religious moderation in extracurricular and routine activities such as ceremonies, provide role models in behavior, and create flyers or banners about the values of religious moderation in the madrasah environment (Kohar et al., 2024). Ismunandar and Iswandi demonstrated that while the program successfully improved students' understanding of the values of religious moderation, challenges arose, including resistance from some groups and limited resources. More effective program implementation requires the full support of teachers, parents, and the community. This study provides recommendations for improving teacher training, strengthening collaboration between madrasahs and the community, and expanding the application of technology in Islamic religious education to achieve the goal of more inclusive religious moderation (Ismunandar & Iswandi, 2025).

This research is different from other researches. It not only analyzes religious moderation policies conceptually but also explores how these policies are understood, interpreted, and implemented by madrasah teachers. This research emphasizes the relationship between teachers' concepts of religious moderation and the manifestation of students' religious behavior as its outcome. Therefore, this research seeks to fill the existing gap and complement other aspects not yet uncovered in previous research.

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The research emphasizes the importance of establishing a madrasah education ecosystem based on the principles of inclusivity, tolerance, and nationalism. This will be realized if collective awareness grows across all elements of education, from madrasah principals, educators, madrasah supervisors, students, and parents. This study also contributes to building awareness that religious moderation is not merely a government project but rather an urgent social need. Thus, policy implementation is no longer *top-down* but rather participatory and sustainable.

Review of Literature

a. Religious Moderation: The Noble Values of Religion and Culture

Indonesia is a nation built on a foundation of religious, cultural, linguistic, and ethnic diversity. In this context, religious life plays a crucial role in shaping national identity, while also presenting a challenge in maintaining social cohesion. One approach the government has prioritized to foster this diversity is the concept of religious moderation. This concept was developed and intensively promoted by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia as a policy strategy to achieve social harmony and interfaith harmony.

Religious moderation is a national strategic agenda spearheaded by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia in response to the increasingly complex development of religious diversity in society. This concept aims to instill a just, tolerant, and respectful perspective and attitude toward religion, preventing the easy fall into extremism. In Indonesia's multicultural context, religious moderation is an urgent need to maintain harmony between religious communities. Shihab stated that Islam teaches balance (*wasathiyah*) in religion and society. This concept is the foundation for building a peaceful and harmonious civilization (Shihab, 2007).

The implementation of religious moderation is not only carried out within the community and civil service, but also in the formal primary and secondary education sectors. This is based on the awareness that education in schools or madrasahs plays a crucial role in internalizing the values of religious moderation in students. Teachers, as the primary agents of education, have a moral and pedagogical responsibility to shape the character of students to be moderate, tolerant, and inclusive. Nata stated that teachers are role models whose behavior and thoughts can significantly influence students. Therefore, it is important to examine how teachers understand and apply the values of religious moderation in the learning process (Nata, 2005). In this context, madrasahs, as religious-based educational institutions, have a crucial existence and role in cultivating these values of moderation.

Religious moderation, initiated by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, has four main indicators: national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and accommodation to local culture (Kementerian Agama RI., 2019). These four indicators serve as a guide for measuring the extent to which an individual or group practices religious moderation. Thus, religious moderation relates not only to theological aspects but also to social and cultural ones.

Religious moderation is crucial for teaching the younger generation. Through education that emphasizes the values of moderation, it is hoped that students will understand the importance of tolerance and respect for differences. This can prevent the emergence of intolerant and radical attitudes among the younger generation (Rozaq et al., 2024). Religious moderation is also related to efforts to create order in social life. By prioritizing moderation, individuals, especially the

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younger generation, can live harmoniously in a diverse society. This is crucial for creating a peaceful and respectful social environment (Warnisyah et al., 2024). This is a prerequisite for creating a society conducive to the proper implementation of religious teachings by all religious adherents in Indonesia .

Religious moderation in Indonesia is rooted in the nation's noble values, which uphold tolerance and diversity. Since pre-independence times, the nation's founders have emphasized the importance of unity amidst religious and cultural differences. Pancasila, as the foundation of the state, reflects this spirit of moderation by placing Belief in One Almighty God as the first principle, which accommodates diverse beliefs. In this context, religious moderation is not a new concept, but rather an integral part of Indonesia's national identity. This is reinforced by the role of religious organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, which have prioritized a moderate religious stance since their inception. (Hasbullah, 2024).

Religious moderation is legally supported by various national regulations, including the 2020–2024 National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN), which includes religious moderation as one of the national priority programs (Hidayat et al., 2021). This demonstrates the government's commitment to integrating the values of moderation into public policy. The legal basis for religious moderation in Indonesia was also strengthened by the issuance of Presidential Regulation Number 58 of 2023 concerning Strengthening Religious Moderation (Sahran, 2024). This regulation provides a legal framework for the Ministry of Religious Affairs to implement the religious moderation program in a more structured and systematic manner. However , strategic steps are needed to synergize with all parties, including the community, in strengthening the religious moderation policy program. This shows that the success of this program depends not only on regulations, but also on the active participation of all elements of society.

The values of religious moderation are integrated into the madrasah curriculum through various subjects, particularly Islamic Religious Education. This integration aims to ensure that students not only understand the concept of moderation theoretically but also are able to practice it in their daily lives (Romalina, 2025). The Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs plays a role in promoting and overseeing the implementation of religious moderation in madrasas, which play a significant role in creating a tolerant and harmonious society. Through various strategies, training, and collaboration, the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs strives to encourage and ensure that the values of religious moderation are firmly embedded in students.

The implementation of religious moderation has had a positive impact on increasing interfaith harmony and reducing the potential for religious-based conflict. Society has become more open and tolerant of differences, and is able to live side by side harmoniously (Asnita et al., 2024). This demonstrates that religious moderation is effective in building social cohesion.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs has established policies that support religious moderation through various regulations, such as Minister of Religious Affairs Regulation No. 18 of 2020 concerning the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs Strategic Plan 2020–2024. In addition, the Ministry of Religious Affairs has also released a guidebook for strengthening religious moderation in educational institutions, which includes a pocketbook for teachers, training modules, guidelines for integrating moderation into religious subjects, and a student handbook (Sani, 2021). The strategy for implementing religious moderation in madrasas includes four main approaches: inserting the value of moderation into teaching materials, integrating it into learning activities, inculcating moderate attitudes through habituation, and collaborating with various parties. This approach aims to create a madrasa environment

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conducive to the development of moderate attitudes among students. (Rohman et al., 2023).

The Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kemenag) is holding training for madrasah teachers to improve their understanding and skills in teaching the values of religious moderation. This training covers topics on tolerance, national commitment, anti-violence, and respect for cultural and religious diversity. Thus, teachers are expected to become effective agents of change in disseminating the values of moderation in madrasah environments. The training is conducted by the Ministry of Religious Affairs' Research, Development, and Training Agency, and is implemented by the Ministry's Education and Training Centers and Workshops. In addition, religious moderation orientations are also conducted by the Regional Offices and Regency/City Offices of the Ministry of Religious Affairs throughout Indonesia.

b. The Strategic Role of Educational Institutions

Education plays an irreplaceable strategic role in nurturing and strengthening religious moderation, serving as both a cultural bulwark and an active social laboratory. At the most fundamental level, education provides a structured and systematic space for developing a substantive, contextual, and inclusive understanding of religion. Through a critical learning process, students are encouraged to move beyond literal-textual understanding to an appreciation of universal religious values, such as justice, compassion, and wisdom. They learn to distinguish between historically particular dogma and universal ethical principles. Thus, education reduces vulnerability to narrow and absolutist interpretations, which often foster intolerance. (Hanan and Rahmat 2023)

Furthermore, education creates a safe space for experiencing diversity. Within the school or campus ecosystem, students from various faiths, ethnicities, and social backgrounds meet on equal footing as learners. Intense and purposeful social interactions in this academic setting enable direct dialogue, foster empathy, and deconstruct prejudice. This concrete experience of coexistence is far more powerful than mere theoretical knowledge of tolerance. Education transforms diversity from an abstract concept into a daily lived experience, where differences are embraced not as a threat but as an inevitability that enriches insight. (Hanan and Rahmat 2023; Kohar et al. 2024; Pratama and Harahap 2024)

At a higher level, education empowers individuals with the capacity for critical thinking and ethical reasoning. Religious moderation cannot be sustained solely by a passive "live and let live" attitude. It requires the active ability to filter information, trace sources, analyze narratives, and reject violent propaganda often couched in religious language. A curriculum that emphasizes logic, philosophy, and research methodology equips young people with the intellectual tools to test truth claims, including religious ones. With this knowledge, they become more resistant to indoctrination and better able to navigate the complexities of the modern world without losing their spiritual roots. (Hilda 2023; Salwa and Aldri 2023)

Furthermore, education plays a role in the reproduction and transmission of civic values compatible with moderate religion. Constitutional values such as Pancasila, Bhinneka Tunggal Ika (Unity in Diversity), human rights, and equality before the law are internalized not as a substitute for religious identity, but as a shared framework that allows that identity to develop harmoniously within a diverse nation. Education teaches that loyalty to the state and commitment to democratic values are not a denial of faith, but rather a manifestation of the social responsibility that accompanies that faith. This synergy between civic education and religious education is what produces individuals who are both religious and patriotic.

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Education also facilitates reconciliation between tradition and modernity, which are often sources of tension. Through a reflective approach, education can demonstrate how the noble values of religion remain relevant to address contemporary challenges such as social justice, environmental sustainability, and global peace. Thus, religion is no longer seen as a nostalgic force resisting change, but rather as a source of progressive inspiration for building the future. (Azis 2024; Warnisyah et al. 2024) In this context, education serves as a bridge connecting the authority of tradition with the demands of the times, so that the younger generation does not feel forced to choose between being "modern" or being "faithful," but can synthesize the two creatively and moderately. With all these multidimensional functions, education is essentially not merely a means of imparting knowledge, but a process of humanization and collective character formation that ensures the survival of a pluralistic society in peace and dignity.

Method

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design, which aims to comprehensively and objectively describe the phenomenon of the implementation of religious moderation in educational environments. The research locus was determined at the State Islamic Senior High School (MAN) Insan Cendekia Gowa, located on Jl. Pendidikan, Belapunranga Village, Parangloe District, Gowa Regency. Data collection was conducted during January-August 2025. Data sources consist of two types. Primary data were obtained from the main sources, namely the Madrasah Principal, teachers, and students of MAN IC Gowa. Secondary data came from academic literature, curriculum documents, madrasah archives, and other reference materials that is relevant to the study. Data collection techniques were carried out through in-depth interviews, observation, focus group discussion, and documentation studies of related written materials. Data analysis was carried out interactively and continuously following the Miles and Huberman model, which includes three main stages. First, data reduction which is the process of selecting, focusing, and simplifying raw data. Second, data presentation which involves arranging the organized information into matrices, narratives, or diagrams to facilitate pattern identification. Finally, data verification and conclusion drawing, which involves checking the consistency of findings, conducting in-depth interpretations, and formulating final conclusions that address the research problem.

Results

1. Insight of Religious Moderation

Essentially, educators have long applied the values of religious moderation in their learning activities. They have also generally participated in training and outreach on religious moderation, so that for them knowledge of religious moderation is no longer foreign to them, so the main problem is how to integrate the values of religious moderation into the educational and learning processes they carry out. The answers of informants from both students and teachers indicate that the majority of educators and students have a good understanding of the meaning of religious moderation, and a small number of others do not fully understand. This is evident from the results of interviews delivered by Muh. Alauddin Nur (English Teacher);

Religious moderation is familiar to me. Religious moderation is important because it concerns the well-being of the nation and state. As citizens, we must practice religious tolerance and refrain from committing violence in the name of religion. We must respect culture and remain steadfast in our commitment to nationalism.(Alauddin 2025)

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Dahnial (Mathematics Teacher) stated:

I believe that religious moderation is the core of religious teachings. This means that rejecting religious moderation is rejecting the very essence of religious values. Therefore, I agree with the government's decision to make religious moderation education a shared and national agenda. To strengthen the content of moderation, I also participated in training to deepen religious moderation. (Dahnial 2025)

This statement affirms that religious moderation is a fundamental pillar of national unity, as it guarantees collective well-being. The call to practice tolerance, reject all forms of violence in the name of religion, respect cultural diversity, and maintain a commitment to nationalism are key principles that must be firmly upheld by all citizens. These practices not only prevent conflict but also strengthen the foundation of a diverse nation like Indonesia. However, improvements are still needed, particularly regarding the implementation of religious moderation in carrying out their primary duties and functions as educators.

The majority of educators at MAN IC Gowa have implemented religious moderation in their educational activities, with a rating of "Good" or even "Very Good." However, a small number of educators still need to improve their implementation of religious moderation in their educational activities at MAN IC Gowa. They have also generally participated in training and outreach on religious moderation, so they are already familiar with the concept. The key issue is how to integrate the values of religious moderation into their educational and learning processes.

Most teachers at MAN IC Gowa have understood and applied the values of religious moderation in their duties, both directly and through learning interactions in general subjects. Islamic Religious Education teachers at MAN IC Gowa are expected to be pioneers in instilling values of tolerance and openness to differences. Meanwhile, teachers of general subjects such as Mathematics and Guidance and Counseling play a role in building an inclusive and equitable atmosphere. However, some teachers, such as Arabic teachers, feel they have not optimally implemented the values of moderation, either due to limited training or a conventional approach. One of them said;

"Since the launch of the religious moderation education program by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, I, as an Arabic teacher, have never been included in any religious moderation training. Nevertheless, I have independently studied the core values taught in religious moderation education, which consist of four main points: tolerance, anti-violence, commitment to nationalism, and respect for local culture." (Ahmad 2025)

Meanwhile, students demonstrated a fairly good understanding. This is supported by the high level of intensity of educators and institutions in promoting the concept of religious moderation. Furthermore, the contextualization of religious moderation values in all learning activities, including intracurricular, extracurricular, and co-curricular activities, is realized through students' actions and attitudes, carried out extensively and simultaneously.

Fauzan, a class XI student at MAN IC Gowa, stated:

My understanding of religious moderation stems not only from intracurricular classroom learning activities, but also from extracurricular and co-curricular activities, as well as from outreach, technical guidance, and training conducted by MAN IC Gowa, which brings in religious moderation facilitators. The topic of religious moderation is not unfamiliar or new to me, as it has been taught

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extensively at this madrasah. However, when the material is related to my position as a student, it naturally compels me to analyze it. (Fauzan 2025)

Ahmad Zaki added:

I have the insight of religious moderation. This is because my friends and I've frequently received material on religious moderation in the class. We generally understood the basic concepts.(Zaki 2025)

Meanwhile Fina Khalisah stated:

I realize that religious moderation is not just a insight. Religious moderation is a movement of awareness that allows me to apply the values of religious moderation, which include tolerance, commitment to nationalism, anti-violence, and accommodating local culture, in my daily life as a student (Khalisah 2025).

This statement demonstrates good internalization, where participants not only cognitively understand the concept of religious moderation but also have achieved an awareness of the importance of applying these values in real life. Students clearly distinguish between theoretical understanding (basic concepts already understood) and practical action (religious moderation is a movement of awareness). This response reflects the ideal educational outcome, where learning successfully fosters reflective awareness and applicable commitment, rather than simply memorizing material. Students have moved from the "knowing" phase to the "realizing responsibility to act" phase.

2. Implementation Strategy for Religious Moderation Education

As a leading Islamic school, MAN IC Gowa has flagship programs, which are prioritized activities to help improve the academic and non-academic quality of students. The strategy for implementing religious moderation education is carried out through various activities, both intra- and extracurricular. Intra-curricular activities are carried out through the education and teaching process, where the values of religious moderation are integrated into the learning curriculum. This was emphasized by Muhaimin (Biology Teacher) as follows:

When teaching biology, I convey to students that this diversity is a divine law. When studying biodiversity, for example, we are amazed by the complexity of God's creation. This diversity of species teaches us to appreciate differences as divine law. As Muslim scientists, we are obligated to maintain the balance of ecosystems as our caliphs on earth, reject excessive exploitation, and prioritize ethical research for the benefit of all creatures, not just humans. (Muhaimin 2025)

Muh. Nasir (mathematics teacher) made a different statement:

When I teach, I tell students that in mathematics, we learn that there are many valid ways to prove the same theorem. Just as in religion, divine truth is one, but it can be reached through various valid paths. The concepts of equality and justice in algebra teach us to treat everyone fairly while adhering to certain principles(Nasir 2025).

Both narratives cleverly demonstrate the integration of religious moderation into the exact sciences. The biology teacher links it to biodiversity and environmental ethics as a manifestation

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of religious responsibility. Meanwhile, the mathematics teacher connects it to logic, plurality of methods, and the principle of equality. This approach successfully avoids the impression of doctrinaire behavior, as the value of moderation emerges organically from the internal logic of the sciences themselves. Both narratives go beyond simply attaching religious messages to the text, but demonstrate how science and the value of religious moderation can interact dialectically and enrich each other within a rational framework.

In addition to curriculum integration, extracurricular activities also greatly determine the dissemination of the values of religious moderation education. At MAN IC Gowa there are various activities such as Scouts, Paskibra, Archery, PMR (Young Red Cross), KOSMIC (Insan Cita Arts Community), KIR (Young Scientific Work), and Martial arts. In addition, there are also mentoring activities at MAN IC Gowa. The guidance referred to here is guidance carried out by teachers who have been intensively appointed. The forms of guidance are Clinic and Learning Response, Olympiad Guidance, Scientific Writing, Foster Teachers, Tahfidzul Qur'an, Qira'atul Kutub, Night Study Guidance, Language Guidance, Religious Guidance/Boarding, and UTBK Guidance (Computer-Based Written Exam).

Observations of extracurricular activities at MAN IC Gowa show that interactions between students from diverse regional and cultural backgrounds are harmonious. Activities such as Scouting, KIR, and KOSMIC provide ample space for students to collaborate and engage in dialogue to complete group assignments. Through discussions and field practice, students learn to accept differences in thinking and respect each other's choices in expressing ideas. This demonstrates the development of tolerance and openness, core elements of religious moderation. Observations of Scouting activities, for example, revealed that students were able to integrate diverse ideas without conflict, instead embracing differences as a team strength. Mutual assistance also emerged naturally, especially when facing challenges in the field.

3. The Impact of Religious Moderation in Religiousness

Based on observations in the dormitory environment, religious moderation has positive implications for creating a religious atmosphere. The habit of congregational prayer, morning Quran recitation, and after-Maghrib study, for example, reflect the implications of this religious moderation education. Observations over several days showed that students not only carried out their worship routines but also demonstrated mutual guidance and respect for others in practicing their religion. For example, when one student had difficulty reading the Quran, his friends patiently helped without cornering him. Such habits foster social sensitivity based on religious values that are *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (blessing for the universe). In the post-Maghrib discussion forum led by the dormitory supervisor, students were given space to openly express their views on current religious issues, which were then guided by the principles of etiquette, compassion, and balanced argumentation. This reflects the students' practice of moderation in the real context of everyday life.

Similarly, during observations conducted by researchers at the Learning Clinic and Teacher Development Center, it was apparent that students were accustomed to asking critical questions about religion, culture, and social phenomena. Teachers responded with a dialogical approach, encouraging students to seek answers while considering context and human values. The UTBK guidance combined with religious guidance also demonstrated that students were encouraged to think rationally, yet still within Islamic ethics. Discussions frequently covered topics such as Islam

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and pluralism, religious hoaxes, or contextual interpretations of verses. Teachers provided guidance so that students became not only intellectually intelligent but also spiritually and socially mature. This process fostered an inclusive and flexible religious character.

Fatmah, one of the teachers of MAN IC said that during the Quranic memorization and Quranic recitation activities, observations revealed a calm and focused learning environment. The instructor not only tested quranic memorization but also encouraged students to understand the meaning of verses and relate them to contemporary social conditions. Observations indicated that students were beginning to understand that Islamic teachings are not singular in their interpretations, and that the diversity of opinions of scholars must be respected (Fatmah 2025). When the instructor explained differences in Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) laws, students responded with open discussion without heated debate. This demonstrates that the values of *wasathiyyah* (balance) have begun to be embedded conceptually and emotionally. Through these activities, it appears that students are not only ritually obedient but also spiritually mature in dealing with differences and diversity.

The religious moderation program implemented at MAN IC Gowa is clearly reflected in the synergy between intracurricular and extracurricular activities, as well as familiarization within the *boarding school*. Interviews with students confirmed that they directly experienced the benefits of these programs. Students revealed that their religious attitudes became more refined, they became more open to differences, and they were able to refrain from reactive behavior.

One of the main challenges in internalizing the values of religious moderation in the digital age is exposure to unfiltered information on social media. Furthermore, the family and community environment also have a significant impact on the success of internalizing the values of religious moderation. Institutional support is both a challenge and a potential factor, crucial in ensuring the sustainability of religious moderation programs. Another challenge relates to the limitations of evaluation instruments in measuring the extent to which the values of moderation have been internalized.

B. Discussion

Philosophically, religious moderation must be embodied in concrete behavioral dimensions in the form of acceptance of differences, commitment to nationalism, nonviolence, and accommodation of local culture. In various educational institutions, moderate teachers and students reject violent content and demonstrate openness to the local context (Salim et al., 2023). The dimensions of *tawassuth* (middle way), *tawazun* (balance), and *i'tidal* (justice) are the pillars of moderate behavior framed within social and spiritual norms (Fitriani, 2021). In various educational institutions, moderate teachers and students reject violent content and demonstrate openness to the local context (Hanan & Rahmat, 2023). This serves as a philosophical foundation that religious behavior becomes an arena where the values of religious moderation are not only known and understood by educators and students in madrasas, but are also practiced in moral habits, social dialogue, and interfaith respect within their environment.

The urgency of behavioral indicators is also driven by modern challenges such as the massive use of social media and the rapid growth of religious radicalism. Moderate religious media literacy is crucial to counter provocation by extremist groups. Understanding religious moderation will help Generation Z, as it does in schools or madrasas, develop a tolerant attitude, while also addressing

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family and media challenges. Therefore, the active involvement of families, schools, and communities in fostering tolerant and wise behavior is essential for holistic moderation efforts.

From the perspective of religious values theory, religious moderation essentially embodies a balance between spirituality, ethics, and culture. Fitriani emphasized the importance of integrating Qur'anic values - *tawaassuth, tawazun, i'tidal, tasamuh* —into media literacy and daily life to counteract extreme bias. (Fitriani, 2021) This serves as a philosophical foundation that religious behavior becomes an arena where the values of religious moderation are not only known and understood by educators and students in madrasas, but are also practiced in moral habits, social dialogue, and respect between religious communities in their environment.

Educators in madrasas hold a strategic position because they are direct role models in the spiritual life and character of students. When educators are able to demonstrate moderate religious behavior, they will instill those values into the madrasah culture through daily activities, not just theory (Sutrisno & Wahyudi, 2022). When educators are able to demonstrate moderate religious behavior, they will instill those values into the madrasah culture through daily activities, not just theory. The implementation of a school curriculum based on religious moderation will help all educators apply the values of religious moderation consistently and not just through formal training sessions that might be conducted by formal institutions such as the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Abdul Azis, 2024). Teachers, not only Islamic Religious Education teachers but also general subject teachers, have a role as role models and facilitators. They have a strategic function in instilling religious values through exemplary behavior and daily interactions.

A study by Munawwir et al. suggested this result of the research that elementary madrasas play a significant role in instilling the values of moderation in students through teacher interactions and learning materials (Munawwir et al., 2024). Therefore, the urgency of implementing religious moderation by educators is to build an inclusive school climate, respect diversity, and prevent radicalism from an early age. Because educators are agents of socialization, their behavior will be internalized by students and influence the overall school culture.

In line with this research, Nurfahmi et al. argue that the success of religious moderation education is determined by the role of teachers as agents of values capable of integrating aspects of religious moderation into the curriculum, methodology, and learning interactions. Values such as tolerance, commitment to nationality, respect for differences, and rejection of violence need to be instilled through active and reflective learning approaches (Nurfahmi et al., 2025).

The religious behavior of students is not only the responsibility of educators, but most importantly, it is the responsibility of parents and families as the first and foremost educational institutions, in addition to of course also the responsibility of the community (Saleh, 2025). The boarding system implemented at MAN IC Gowa, makes students live in a multicultural environment where they must live side by side with their friends who have different backgrounds, ranging from differences in region, ethnicity, language, and traditions as well as religious understandings that are usually caused by differences in religious organizations such as NU and Muhammadiyah. This multicultural life will teach students the problem of differences that must be addressed wisely in achieving their common goal, namely achieving maximum academic achievement. Setiawan emphasized that *boarding schools* and non-formal activities in formal educational institutions are very effective in forming an inclusive religious character of students (Setiawan, 2021). Thus, moderation education does not have to be centered in the classroom, but

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also formulated through meaningful social experiences. The success of this program is reflected in the social behavior of students who are able to interact peacefully across groups and religions. This proves that extracurricular activities are not merely complementary, but are a vital part of character education based on religious moderation.

In the context of MAN IC Gowa, which is part of the Ministry of Religious Affairs' flagship madrasah, this urgency is heightened because its students come from diverse regional and cultural backgrounds. Implementing the values of religious moderation will help create a harmonious environment, prevent radicalism, and strengthen the spirit of national unity. This aligns with the *Grand Design* for Religious Moderation issued by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, which positions education as a strategic sector in internalizing the values of moderation (Wahid et al., 2024). Thus, MAN IC Gowa is an ideal locus for implementing religious moderation in a structured and systematic manner.

The importance of religious moderation is also reinforced through the pedagogical dimension of the learning process. Teachers, as agents of value transformation, have the responsibility not only to transfer knowledge but also to instill inclusive and contextual religious values (Samhudi et al., 2025). In this regard, a reflective and dialogical pedagogical approach is a relevant method for cultivating moderate values in classroom learning. Based on findings from Raikhan and Amin, it is stated that values such as mutual respect for differences, rejection of violence, and upholding national commitment can be integrated into the daily context of students in madrasas, so that they do not stop at merely cognitive aspects, but also shape their affection and social behavior (Raikhan & Amin, 2023). MAN IC Gowa as a boarding-based madrasa has great potential in instilling these values, because student interaction takes place intensively both inside and outside the classroom. This confirms that the implementation of religious moderation is not only the realm of the curriculum, but also the culture and daily life in madrasas.

The urgency of implementing religious moderation at MAN IC Gowa also encompasses the participation of the entire educational ecosystem, from the principal, teachers, educational staff, students, to parents and the surrounding community. Through intracurricular, co-curricular, and extracurricular activities such as cross-religious discussions, anti-radicalism training, and cross-cultural social activities, the madrasah can become a miniature of an ideologically healthy pluralistic society. Therefore, religious moderation is not only a matter of ideology, but also a social practice that encourages cohesion and cooperation across identities (Pratama & Harahap, 2024).

Educational institutions play a strategic role in shaping a young generation of moderate Muslims through balanced education that encompasses religious understanding, tolerance, and social behavior. These findings align with research conducted by Darmawati and Thalib, which showed that most madrasa students in Makassar have a sufficient understanding of the existence of radical groups, yet still demonstrate moderate attitudes and behavior in understanding Islamic teachings, respecting differences, and rejecting violence in the name of religion. This indicates that madrasa education has contributed to strengthening the values of *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (blessing for the universe), respect for Pancasila, and national spirit. However, the study also indicates that a small number of students are potentially influenced by exclusive and textual ideologies, necessitating the strengthening of character education and national insight (Darmawati & Thalib, 2016). Therefore, it is urgent to implement religious moderation education in madrasas through contextual learning, competent teacher development, and synergy between religious education

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and national character education to prevent radicalism among students.

Religious moderation emphasizes not only the cognitive dimension but also the concrete socio-religious dimension in everyday life. Maksudi found that social values such as politeness, togetherness in congregational prayer, and the habit of dhikr are very effective in forming moderate morals (Maksudi, 2023). The character approach based on Bloom's taxonomy - which includes remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating - shows that the combination of cognitive and character aspects produces an open and cooperative attitude in students. Therefore, the practice of moderation combined with Islamic theory and culture at MAN IC Gowa is believed to be able to produce significant changes in students' religious behavior.

The impact of implementing religious moderation-based learning on students can be seen in several aspects: 1) Increased tolerance towards others, 2) The development of an inclusive national spirit, 3) The ability to communicate peacefully between religions; and 4) An increased sense of justice and non-discrimination. Putri stated that religious moderation strengthens national values and anti-violence while still respecting local traditions (Putri, 2023). Sukarno also emphasized the need for a systematic strategy to overcome challenges such as uneven teacher understanding and the influence of the digital environment (Sukana, 2024). Therefore, evaluation of the implementation of *moderate values* needs to be carried out regularly so that its contribution to the formation of student character is truly optimal and sustainable.

Religious activities in madrasas, in the form of extracurricular activities, also apply the principle of moderation by understanding the meaning of verses contextually. Teachers not only emphasize memorization but also invite students to discuss the social meaning of these verses. Such discussions foster awareness that differences of opinion are normal in Islam. This approach aligns with the view of Parhan et al., regarding the importance of contextual Islamic education that links religious texts to social reality (Parhan et al., 2024). Islamic education should not stop at textual understanding, but must be able to connect religious teachings to real life. With a contextual approach, students are invited to understand the meaning of the Qur'an and Hadith in a way that is relevant to the social, cultural, and moral challenges they face. This is important so that Islamic teachings do not become merely dogma, but also become applicable and solution-oriented life guidelines. Education that connects religious texts to social reality also fosters critical and empathetic thinking skills in students. Thus, contextual Islamic education is an effective means of forming a generation that is both religious and responsive to changing times. Students understand religion not only textually, but also functionally and socially.

The active involvement of teachers and supervisors as behavioral models is a key factor in the successful internalization of moderation values. In Bandura's social learning theory, students will imitate the behavior of figures they perceive as having moral authority (Bandura, 1997). The exemplary behavior of teachers who are patient, fair, and respectful of differences serves as a concrete example for students to adopt a moderate attitude in their daily lives. Therefore, training to improve teacher competency in moderate pedagogy must be continuously conducted so that they can become agents of change in the madrasah environment. Overall, the internalization of religious moderation values at MAN IC Gowa faces various challenges but also opens up significant opportunities to strengthen inclusive Islamic education. Support from the madrasah principal, teachers, dormitory supervisors, and students is a crucial foundation for successful implementation. Successful educational transformation requires collaborative leadership and a reflective culture. With a systematic and participatory approach, MAN IC Gowa can become a relevant model of religious moderation education for other madrasahs in Indonesia.

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As a leading madrasah with its human resource capacity and boarding system, MAN IC Gowa has a significant opportunity to become a national model for implementing religious moderation-based education. If implemented comprehensively and consistently, religious moderation will not only be a tool to counter extremism but also a strategy for building a civilized and dignified nation.

Conclusion

The understanding of religious moderation among educators and students at MAN IC Gowa is considered high. Most students are in the Good and Very Good categories in understanding this concept. Meanwhile, the religious behavior of educators and students also reflects a strong implementation of the values of religious moderation. The majority of educators and students demonstrate behavior that aligns with the principles of moderation, such as tolerance, openness, and avoiding violence. *The boarding school environment* provides greater space for cultivating inclusive and peaceful religious practices. Meanwhile, the implementation of religious moderation values in educational activities also shows encouraging results. Educators actively integrate these values into the learning process. Obstacles are still found, especially among non-PAI teachers, in linking the values of moderation to exact subject matter, indicating the need for cross-disciplinary training. The implications of the holistic implementation of religious moderation are seen in the formation of moderate and reflective religious behavior among students. Habituation through religious discussions, boarding programs, and character development makes students more aware of the importance of tolerance and diversity and able to practice them in complex social contexts.

The research findings recommend that madrasah principals design strategic policies that make religious moderation an integral part of the madrasah's vision and mission explicitly, and teachers as the main implementers of learning are expected to continue to improve their competence in integrating the values of religious moderation into teaching materials, both cognitively and affectively.

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