

Religious Moderation in the School Curriculum: Its Influence on Students' Tolerance and Character Strengthening

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Abstract

Keywords:

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Tolerance; Character
Strengthening.

This study investigates the influence of religious moderation integrated into the school curriculum on students' tolerance and character strengthening in Indonesian senior high schools. A mixed-methods approach employing a sequential explanatory design was adopted to obtain comprehensive quantitative and qualitative evidence. The research was conducted at SMAN 3 Jombang and SMA PGRI 1 Jombang, East Java, Indonesia. Quantitative data were collected through questionnaires administered to students and analyzed using descriptive statistics and simple linear regression. Qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured interviews, classroom and school observations, and document analysis, and were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. The findings reveal that students' understanding of religious moderation positively and significantly influences both tolerance and character strengthening. Religious moderation contributes 53.0% and 40.1% to students' tolerance at SMAN 3 Jombang and SMA PGRI 1 Jombang, respectively, while its contribution to character strengthening reaches 35.9% and 39.3%. Qualitative findings indicate that these influences are strengthened through curriculum integration, classroom learning, teacher role modelling, religious habituation, and an inclusive school culture. This study proposes the Curriculum-Based Religious Moderation Internalization (CRMI) Model, explaining that curriculum integration, pedagogical implementation, value internalization, and school culture interact to foster tolerance and positive character. The study contributes theoretically by extending religious moderation from a normative concept into a comprehensive curriculum-based educational framework and provides practical implications for strengthening inclusive and character-oriented education in multicultural schools.

Abstrak

Kata kunci:

Moderasi Beragama;
Kurikulum Sekolah;
Toleransi; Penguatan
Karakter

Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis pengaruh moderasi beragama yang diintegrasikan ke dalam kurikulum sekolah terhadap toleransi dan penguatan karakter siswa pada sekolah menengah atas di Indonesia. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan mixed methods dengan desain sequential explanatory untuk memperoleh pemahaman yang komprehensif melalui data kuantitatif dan kualitatif. Penelitian dilaksanakan di SMAN 3 Jombang dan SMA PGRI 1 Jombang, Jawa Timur. Data kuantitatif diperoleh melalui penyebaran angket kepada siswa dan dianalisis menggunakan statistik deskriptif serta regresi linier sederhana. Data kualitatif dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur, observasi pembelajaran dan budaya sekolah, serta analisis dokumentasi, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan model interaktif Miles, Huberman, dan Saldaña. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pemahaman moderasi beragama berpengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap toleransi serta penguatan karakter siswa. Moderasi beragama memberikan kontribusi sebesar 53,0% dan 40,1% terhadap toleransi siswa di SMAN 3 Jombang dan SMA PGRI 1 Jombang, sedangkan kontribusinya terhadap penguatan karakter mencapai 35,9% dan 39,3%. Temuan kualitatif menunjukkan bahwa pengaruh tersebut diperkuat melalui integrasi kurikulum, pembelajaran di kelas, keteladanan guru, pembiasaan

keagamaan, dan budaya sekolah yang inklusif. Penelitian ini menghasilkan Curriculum-Based Religious Moderation Internalization (CRMI) Model yang menjelaskan bahwa integrasi kurikulum, implementasi pedagogis, internalisasi nilai, dan budaya sekolah membentuk toleransi serta karakter positif siswa. Model ini memperkaya kajian moderasi beragama sebagai kerangka pendidikan berbasis kurikulum sekaligus memberikan implikasi praktis bagi penguatan pendidikan karakter di sekolah multikultural.

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Introduction

Religious diversity has become one of the defining characteristics of contemporary societies, bringing both opportunities for intercultural dialogue and challenges related to intolerance, religious polarization, and radicalism (Ainiyah et al., 2025; Tobroni et al., 2025). In many multicultural countries, educational institutions are increasingly expected to cultivate democratic citizenship, mutual respect, and peaceful coexistence among students from different religious and cultural backgrounds (Azizah et al., 2025; M. S. Hasan et al., 2021). Schools are therefore no longer viewed solely as institutions for academic instruction but also as strategic spaces for nurturing inclusive values, preventing social conflict, and strengthening students' moral character through systematic educational processes. Within this context, the integration of religious moderation into school education has attracted growing scholarly and policy attention as an educational strategy for fostering tolerance while preventing exclusivist and extremist religious attitudes (K. Hasan & Juhannis, 2023; Rohman et al., 2024). Indonesia represents a unique context for examining religious moderation because it is one of the world's largest multicultural democracies, characterized by extensive ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity. While this diversity constitutes an important national asset, it simultaneously presents persistent challenges associated with intolerance, hate speech, identity politics, and religious radicalization, particularly among adolescents. National surveys have consistently reported that a proportion of Indonesian secondary school students continue to demonstrate exclusive religious attitudes, discriminatory perceptions toward people of different faiths, and varying degrees of acceptance toward radical narratives. These findings indicate that schools remain vulnerable to ideological influences and emphasize the urgent need for educational interventions capable of

strengthening students' tolerance and civic responsibility through formal education. Consequently, religious moderation has emerged as one of Indonesia's principal educational priorities for maintaining social harmony within an increasingly pluralistic society.

Responding to these challenges, the Indonesian government has mainstreamed religious moderation as a national educational agenda through the Ministry of Religious Affairs, while the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education has simultaneously integrated related values into the national curriculum, particularly within Islamic Religious Education and character education (Hidayah et al., 2024). Religious moderation is understood not as the modification of religious doctrines but as the promotion of balanced religious understanding characterized by *tawassuṭ* (moderation), *tawāzun* (balance), *i'tidāl* (justice), and *tasāmuḥ* (tolerance) (Fuadi et al., 2024). Through curricular integration, classroom instruction, school culture, and extracurricular activities, schools are expected to transform these principles into students' daily behaviour and social interaction. Consequently, the school curriculum functions not merely as an academic framework but also as an instrument for developing democratic attitudes, strengthening national identity, and preventing intolerance among young people.

Although studies concerning religious moderation have increased substantially during the past decade, existing literature demonstrates several important limitations (Ridwanulloh et al., 2025). Previous studies have predominantly examined the implementation of religious moderation programs, students' perceptions of moderation, or the relationship between religious moderation and tolerance within particular educational settings (Afwadzi & Miski, 2021; Somer, 2014). Other studies have focused separately on character education or multicultural education without examining how religious moderation embedded within the school curriculum simultaneously contributes to both students' tolerance and character development (Mappanyompa et al., 2026; Ridwan et al., 2026). Furthermore, most previous research employed either quantitative or qualitative approaches independently, limiting the ability to explain not only whether religious moderation influences student outcomes but also how curricular implementation, school culture, and educational practices interact in shaping those outcomes (Alabdulhadi & Alkandari, 2024; Fathurrochman et al., 2026). These limitations indicate the need for a more comprehensive investigation capable of integrating statistical evidence with contextual educational experiences. Another limitation concerns the research setting itself. Previous investigations have largely concentrated on Islamic schools, madrasahs, pesantren, or higher education institutions under the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Comparatively little attention has been devoted to public and private senior high schools administered by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, despite the fact that these schools educate the majority of Indonesian adolescents and represent highly diverse

educational environments. Understanding how religious moderation is implemented within general secondary schools is particularly important because students encounter greater religious, cultural, and social diversity in these institutions, making them appropriate contexts for examining the relationship between curriculum, tolerance, and character formation.

Addressing these gaps, the present study employs a multisite mixed-methods design to investigate the integration of religious moderation within the school curriculum at SMAN 3 Jombang and SMA PGRI 1 Jombang, two senior high schools representing different institutional characteristics within the same multicultural district. Unlike previous studies, this research simultaneously examines the influence of students' understanding of religious moderation on two educational outcomes – tolerance and character strengthening – while qualitatively exploring how curricular implementation, classroom learning, school culture, and educational leadership facilitate the internalization of moderation values. The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings enables a more comprehensive explanation of both the magnitude and the educational processes through which religious moderation contributes to student development.

The principal contribution of this study lies in proposing an Integrated Religious Moderation Curriculum Model, which explains that the influence of religious moderation on students' tolerance and character strengthening is not generated solely through classroom instruction but through the interaction of four interconnected educational dimensions: curriculum integration, learning implementation, school culture, and value internalization. This model extends existing scholarship by positioning religious moderation as a comprehensive educational ecosystem rather than merely a curricular concept or learning material. Accordingly, this study contributes theoretically to Islamic education, curriculum studies, and character education while providing practical recommendations for strengthening religious moderation in Indonesian senior high schools. Based on this background, the study aims to analyze the implementation of religious moderation within the school curriculum and examine its influence on students' tolerance and character strengthening in two Indonesian senior high schools.

Methods

This study employed a mixed-methods approach using a sequential explanatory design, in which quantitative data collection and analysis were conducted in the first phase, followed by qualitative investigation to explain and strengthen the statistical findings. This design was selected to examine the influence of religious moderation integrated into the school curriculum on students' tolerance and character strengthening while also exploring the educational processes underlying these relationships (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018). The research was conducted at SMAN 3 Jombang and SMA PGRI 1 Jombang, East Java, Indonesia, which were

purposively selected to represent different institutional contexts. SMAN 3 Jombang represents a public senior high school with structured religious habituation programs, whereas SMA PGRI 1 Jombang represents a private senior high school characterized by greater religious diversity among students. This multisite setting enabled cross-site comparison of curriculum implementation and educational outcomes

The quantitative phase involved students from both schools selected through proportional sampling (Yin, 2018). Data were collected using structured questionnaires measuring three principal constructs: students' understanding of religious moderation, tolerance, and character strengthening. The questionnaire was developed based on religious moderation indicators formulated by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia and theoretical constructs of tolerance and character education presented in the conceptual framework. Prior to data collection, the instrument underwent validity and reliability testing to ensure measurement accuracy and consistency. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and simple linear regression to examine the influence of students' understanding of religious moderation on tolerance and character strengthening at each research site. Following the quantitative analysis, qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participant observations, and document analysis. Participants included school principals, vice principals, Islamic Religious Education teachers, guidance and counselling teachers, homeroom teachers, and selected students representing different levels of understanding of religious moderation. Observations focused on classroom learning, religious activities, and daily student interactions, while curriculum documents, lesson plans, school regulations, extracurricular programs, and institutional reports were examined as documentary evidence.

Qualitative data were analyzed using the interactive model of (Miles et al., 2019), involving data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing with continuous verification. The quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated at the interpretation stage, with qualitative evidence used to explain the statistical patterns concerning the relationships among religious moderation, tolerance, and character strengthening. The credibility of the qualitative findings was ensured through method triangulation across interviews, observations, and documentation; source triangulation involving different participant groups; and member checking with selected participants. Through this sequential integration, the study generated statistical evidence regarding the influence of religious moderation alongside contextual explanations of how curriculum implementation and school culture contribute to the development of tolerant attitudes and positive student character.

Results And Discussion

Results

Students' Understanding of Religious Moderation

The quantitative findings indicate that students' understanding of religious moderation at both research sites falls within the moderate category. At SMAN 3 Jombang, the majority of respondents demonstrated a moderate level of understanding regarding the principles of religious moderation, including tolerance, justice, balance, anti-violence, and respect for diversity. A similar pattern was observed at SMA PGRI 1 Jombang, where most students also exhibited a moderate level of understanding, although slight differences were found in the educational contexts supporting the internalization of moderation values.

The interview findings reveal that religious moderation has been systematically integrated into the educational process in both schools. School principals explained that moderation values are incorporated into curriculum implementation, religious activities, and school policies promoting mutual respect among students. Islamic Religious Education teachers further emphasized that moderation is introduced not only through classroom instruction but also through daily educational practices, collaborative learning, and religious habituation programs designed to cultivate inclusive attitudes. Students consistently reported that they had been encouraged to appreciate religious diversity, avoid discriminatory behaviour, and maintain harmonious relationships with peers from different backgrounds.

Classroom observations confirmed that moderation values were reflected in students' interactions during learning activities. Students participated actively in group discussions, respected differing opinions, and demonstrated cooperative behaviour regardless of religious or social background. Teachers consistently facilitated classroom interaction by encouraging dialogue, fairness, and equal participation among learners. In addition, observations of school activities indicated that religious and social programs were conducted inclusively, allowing students to participate without experiencing religious discrimination.

Document analysis also supports these findings. Curriculum documents, lesson plans, school regulations, and annual educational programs demonstrate that religious moderation has been incorporated into formal and informal educational activities. Both schools organize religious habituation programs, collective worship activities, character education initiatives, and student development programs designed to strengthen moderation values. These documents indicate that moderation is implemented through structured institutional programs rather than isolated classroom activities.

To ensure the credibility of the findings, source triangulation and method triangulation were conducted by comparing questionnaire results with interview, observation, and documentary evidence. The triangulation demonstrates strong

consistency among the different sources of data. While questionnaire results indicate that students' understanding of religious moderation is generally at the moderate level, qualitative findings explain that this understanding develops through curriculum implementation, classroom learning, religious habituation, and school culture. The convergence of quantitative and qualitative evidence therefore confirms that both schools have successfully integrated religious moderation into their educational practices, although the approaches differ according to each school's institutional context. At SMAN 3 Jombang, moderation values are primarily strengthened through structured religious programs and school habituation, whereas at SMA PGRI 1 Jombang, students' understanding develops more strongly through everyday interaction within a naturally diverse school community.

The Influence of Religious Moderation on Students' Tolerance

The quantitative analysis demonstrates that religious moderation has a positive and statistically significant influence on students' tolerance in both research sites. The regression analysis shows that students' understanding of religious moderation contributes 53.0% to tolerance at SMAN 3 Jombang, whereas at SMA PGRI 1 Jombang the contribution reaches 40.1%. These findings indicate that religious moderation constitutes an important factor influencing students' tolerant attitudes, although the magnitude of its contribution differs according to the educational context of each school.

The interview findings explain these differences. At SMAN 3 Jombang, school leaders and Islamic Religious Education teachers consistently reported that moderation values were strengthened through structured religious programs integrated into the school curriculum. Daily congregational prayers, Friday prayers, regular istighasah, Qur'anic recitation, and continuous character-building activities provided students with repeated opportunities to practice respect, cooperation, and mutual appreciation. Informants explained that these programs had become part of students' daily educational experiences rather than occasional religious activities.

Meanwhile, at SMA PGRI 1 Jombang, interviews revealed a different pattern. Teachers and school administrators explained that students developed tolerant attitudes primarily through continuous interaction within a naturally multireligious school environment. Students from different religious backgrounds participated together in classroom learning, student organizations, social service activities, and extracurricular programs. According to the participants, these daily interactions enabled students to appreciate differences, communicate respectfully, and cooperate without considering religious identity as a social barrier. Although moderation values were also integrated into classroom instruction, informants emphasized that students' direct social experiences played an equally important role in strengthening tolerance.

Classroom and school observations support these interview findings. At SMAN 3 Jombang, observations indicated that religious moderation was reflected through

structured religious habituation and orderly participation in collective worship and school activities. Students demonstrated respectful behaviour during classroom discussions, listened attentively to differing opinions, and interacted harmoniously during collaborative learning activities. At SMA PGRI 1 Jombang, observations showed intensive interaction among students from different religious backgrounds during classroom instruction, extracurricular activities, and informal communication outside classrooms. The school climate encouraged openness, cooperation, and mutual respect without visible discrimination based on religion.

Documentary evidence further confirms the implementation of religious moderation in both schools. School curriculum documents, annual educational programs, lesson plans, and student development activities indicate that moderation values have been incorporated into institutional policies and learning implementation. At SMAN 3 Jombang, documentation highlights religious habituation programs, congregational worship, tahfidz, and istighasah as integral components of school activities. At SMA PGRI 1 Jombang, institutional documents demonstrate continuous efforts to maintain an inclusive educational environment through collaborative student activities, school regulations promoting equality, and programs encouraging interaction among students from diverse religious backgrounds.

Triangulation of quantitative and qualitative findings demonstrates a high degree of consistency across different sources of evidence. The statistical analysis confirms that religious moderation significantly influences students' tolerance, while interviews, observations, and documentation explain the educational processes through which this influence occurs. Although both schools achieved similar outcomes in developing tolerant students, the mechanisms differed. SMAN 3 Jombang primarily strengthened tolerance through structured religious habituation integrated into school programs, whereas SMA PGRI 1 Jombang relied more heavily on continuous interaction within a multicultural educational environment. Despite these contextual differences, the convergence of evidence indicates that religious moderation has become an integral component of educational practice in both schools and contributes substantially to the development of students' tolerant attitudes.

The Influence of Religious Moderation on Students' Character Strengthening

The quantitative findings indicate that students' character strengthening in both research sites falls within the moderate category. The regression analysis further demonstrates that students' understanding of religious moderation has a positive and statistically significant influence on character strengthening. At SMAN 3 Jombang, religious moderation contributes 35.9% to students' character strengthening, while at SMA PGRI 1 Jombang, the contribution reaches 39.3%. These findings confirm that religious moderation constitutes an important factor in students' character development, although other educational and environmental factors also contribute to the formation of students' character.

The interview findings consistently indicate that character strengthening is implemented through the integration of religious moderation values into curriculum implementation, classroom learning, religious activities, and school culture. At SMAN 3 Jombang, the principal explained that character education is developed through religious programs integrated into the school curriculum, including congregational prayers, Friday prayers, istighasah, and tahfidz activities. The vice principal for curriculum further reported that these programs contribute to improving students' discipline, politeness, punctuality, and responsibility in carrying out daily school activities. Islamic Religious Education teachers also emphasized that moderation values are continuously reinforced through learning activities promoting ukhuwah, empathy, justice, responsibility, and respect for diversity.

A similar pattern was identified at SMA PGRI 1 Jombang. School leaders explained that character strengthening is not limited to classroom instruction but is reinforced through religious habituation, social service programs, Friday charity (Infak Jumat), student organizations, and various collaborative school activities. Teachers reported that these programs encourage students to develop social concern, empathy, responsibility, mutual assistance, and respect for diversity. Students also explained that participation in religious and social activities helped them become more disciplined, cooperative, and respectful toward classmates from different religious backgrounds.

The observational findings support the interview data. At SMAN 3 Jombang, students consistently demonstrated disciplined behaviour during religious activities, showed respect toward teachers and classmates, and actively participated in school programs emphasizing responsibility and cooperation. Likewise, observations at SMA PGRI 1 Jombang revealed that students interacted politely, collaborated effectively in academic and extracurricular activities, and demonstrated social concern during community service and charity programs. These observations indicate that the values introduced through religious moderation were reflected in students' daily behaviour within the school environment.

Documentary evidence also confirms the implementation of character-strengthening programs in both schools. At SMAN 3 Jombang, school documents indicate the routine implementation of congregational prayers, Friday prayers, istighasah, tahfidz, and structured character habituation programs integrated into the annual school agenda. At SMA PGRI 1 Jombang, documentation demonstrates the existence of Friday charity activities, religious programs, student character development activities, and inclusive school policies encouraging equal participation for all students regardless of religious background. These institutional programs consistently reinforce values of discipline, responsibility, honesty, social concern, cooperation, and respect for diversity.

To ensure the credibility of the findings, source triangulation and method triangulation were conducted by comparing quantitative results with interviews, observations, and documentary evidence. The triangulation demonstrates a high level of consistency across all data sources. Statistical analysis confirms the significant influence of religious moderation on students' character strengthening, while qualitative findings explain that this influence is developed through curriculum implementation, religious habituation, school culture, and continuous social interaction. At SMAN 3 Jombang, character strengthening is predominantly reinforced through structured religious programs embedded within the school curriculum. In contrast, SMA PGRI 1 Jombang combines religious activities with inclusive social programs that encourage interaction among students from diverse religious backgrounds. Despite these contextual differences, both schools demonstrate that the integration of religious moderation contributes positively to strengthening students' character, particularly in developing responsibility, discipline, empathy, social concern, cooperation, integrity, and respect for diversity.

Discussion

Religious Moderation as the Foundation for Strengthening Students' Tolerance

The findings demonstrate that religious moderation significantly contributes to strengthening students' tolerance in both research sites. However, the statistical relationship identified in this study should not be interpreted merely as evidence that higher levels of religious moderation automatically produce greater tolerance. Rather, the qualitative findings indicate that the relationship is mediated through educational processes in which moderation values are continuously internalized via curriculum implementation, classroom instruction, teacher exemplification, school culture, and students' daily social interaction. Consequently, tolerance emerges not simply as an individual attitude but as the educational outcome of systematic value formation within the school environment.

This finding supports the concept of religious moderation developed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, which defines moderation (*wasatiyyah*) as a balanced religious orientation characterized by *tawassuṭ* (moderation), *tawāzun* (balance), *i'tidāl* (justice), and *tasāmuḥ* (tolerance) (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia (Syamsuni, 2026; W et al., 2025). Within this framework, moderation is not intended to weaken religious commitment but to encourage believers to practice their religion while respecting diversity, justice, and peaceful coexistence (M. S. Hasan et al., 2025; M. S. Hasan & Aziz, 2023). The present findings indicate that these principles become educational values when systematically integrated into curriculum implementation and school culture. Students therefore experience moderation not only through classroom instruction but also through repeated educational interaction that reinforces respect, dialogue, cooperation, and equality.

The findings are likewise consistent with Milton Rokeach's Value Theory, which argues that values gradually become internalized through continuous educational experiences until they influence individual attitudes and behaviour (Rokeach, 1968). According to Rokeach, (1971), values are relatively enduring beliefs that guide individuals in determining desirable modes of conduct and life goals. Within the present study, moderation values such as tolerance, justice, respect, and responsibility were repeatedly introduced through classroom learning, collaborative activities, religious programs, and school regulations. These repeated experiences gradually transformed abstract values into behavioural dispositions manifested through students' daily interaction with peers from diverse religious backgrounds.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that curriculum implementation constitutes the primary mechanism through which moderation values are translated into students' social behaviour. Curriculum documents introduce moderation formally, teachers contextualize these principles through instructional practices, school leaders reinforce them through institutional policies, while school culture provides authentic opportunities for students to experience diversity directly. This educational process confirms that tolerance is constructed through continuous value internalization rather than through isolated classroom instruction.

The present findings are also in line with previous studies reporting that religious moderation positively contributes to students' tolerant attitudes in multicultural educational settings (Budiyo et al., 2025; Mala & Hunaida, 2023; Shofiyuddin et al., 2023). However, unlike previous studies that predominantly focused on measuring statistical relationships, the present research demonstrates that the influence of religious moderation is mediated through curriculum implementation, teacher role modelling, institutional commitment, and school culture. Consequently, tolerance should be understood not merely as an educational outcome but as the result of an integrated educational ecosystem that continuously reinforces moderation values through formal, informal, and hidden curriculum.

Therefore, the findings suggest that schools should not position religious moderation solely as learning material within Islamic Religious Education classes. Instead, moderation should become an institutional culture integrated into curriculum implementation, pedagogical practice, extracurricular activities, school leadership, and students' everyday interaction. Such an educational approach enables moderation values to move beyond normative discourse and become practical educational experiences capable of strengthening tolerance and social cohesion within multicultural school communities.

Religious Moderation and Students' Character Strengthening

The findings indicate that religious moderation has a positive and statistically significant influence on students' character strengthening in both research sites. However, the influence identified in this study should not be interpreted merely as a

statistical relationship between two variables. Rather, the findings demonstrate that character strengthening develops through a continuous educational process in which moderation values are systematically internalized across curricular, co-curricular, and extracurricular activities. Students who consistently experience educational practices emphasizing justice, tolerance, mutual respect, responsibility, and peaceful coexistence gradually translate these values into observable behavioural characteristics. This finding suggests that religious moderation functions as an educational foundation for character formation rather than merely as a cognitive understanding of religious diversity.

The findings strongly support Thomas Lickona's theory of character education, which argues that effective character development requires the integration of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action (Lickona, 2012). According to Lickona, (1999), character education becomes meaningful only when students not only understand moral values but also develop emotional commitment toward those values and ultimately express them through consistent behaviour. The present study demonstrates this process empirically. Religious moderation was initially introduced through classroom learning, enabling students to understand the importance of tolerance, justice, and respect for diversity (moral knowing). These values were subsequently reinforced through school culture, religious activities, teacher exemplification, and collaborative learning experiences, fostering positive emotional attachment toward moderation (moral feeling). Finally, students manifested these values through disciplined behaviour, empathy, cooperation, responsibility, honesty, and respect for others in their daily school interactions (moral action).

These findings are also consistent with Milton Rokeach's Value Theory, which emphasizes that values become stable behavioural orientations through continuous internalization and repeated social experiences (Rokeach, 1971). Rokeach, (1968) explains that educational institutions play an important role in shaping individuals' value systems because schools provide repeated opportunities for students to experience, evaluate, and practice desirable values. The present findings confirm this theoretical perspective. Religious moderation values were not transmitted solely through formal classroom instruction but were continuously reinforced through religious habituation programs, student organizations, social service activities, school regulations, and teacher role modelling. Consequently, moderation values gradually evolved into personal values that guided students' attitudes and everyday behaviour.

The empirical evidence further indicates that the effectiveness of character strengthening depends on the consistency between curriculum implementation and school culture. Although both schools implemented religious moderation successfully, each institution developed distinctive educational strategies reflecting its institutional context. At SMAN 3 Jombang, character strengthening was predominantly reinforced through structured religious habituation integrated into the school's educational

programs. In contrast, SMA PGRI 1 Jombang emphasized inclusive interaction among students from diverse religious backgrounds while simultaneously reinforcing moderation values through collaborative learning and social activities. Despite these contextual differences, both schools demonstrated that character education becomes more effective when moderation values are experienced consistently across the entire educational environment rather than confined to classroom instruction alone.

The findings of this study are in agreement with previous research reporting that religious moderation contributes positively to students' character development (Masturin, 2022; Munawir et al., 2023; Setiawan et al., 2025). Likewise, studies on character education have consistently emphasized that schools should cultivate values through comprehensive educational experiences instead of relying exclusively on cognitive learning (Lickona, 1991). Nevertheless, the present study extends earlier research by demonstrating that the relationship between religious moderation and character strengthening is mediated through an integrated educational process involving curriculum implementation, instructional practice, school leadership, institutional culture, and continuous value habituation. This integrated explanation provides a more comprehensive understanding of how moderation values are transformed into students' character within multicultural educational settings.

Another important implication emerging from this study concerns the role of curriculum as an instrument of character formation. The findings demonstrate that curriculum should not be understood merely as a collection of learning objectives and instructional content but as a comprehensive educational framework shaping students' cognitive, affective, and behavioural development. When religious moderation is systematically embedded within curriculum implementation, supported by teacher exemplification and reinforced through school culture, it contributes significantly to developing responsible, disciplined, tolerant, honest, and socially sensitive students. Therefore, strengthening students' character requires educational institutions to integrate moderation values into every aspect of school life rather than limiting them to Islamic Religious Education classes alone.

In summary, the present findings confirm that religious moderation contributes to character strengthening through a holistic educational process rather than through isolated instructional interventions. Character development occurs when moderation values are consistently introduced, practiced, reinforced, and institutionalized across the school environment. Accordingly, religious moderation should be viewed as a strategic educational approach capable of integrating moral education, character formation, and social responsibility within a comprehensive school curriculum, thereby preparing students to become responsible citizens capable of living harmoniously in Indonesia's multicultural society.

The Integrated Religious Moderation Curriculum Model

The synthesis of quantitative and qualitative findings indicates that the influence of religious moderation on students' tolerance and character strengthening is not generated solely by students' cognitive understanding of moderation concepts. Instead, the findings reveal a multidimensional educational process in which moderation values are systematically integrated into curriculum implementation, reinforced through instructional practices, strengthened by school culture, and gradually internalized into students' personal value systems. This process explains why religious moderation contributes significantly to both tolerance and character strengthening in the two research sites while simultaneously functioning as a preventive strategy against the emergence of intolerance and radicalism within the school environment.

From the perspective of curriculum theory, these findings demonstrate that curriculum functions not merely as a written document specifying learning objectives and instructional content but as a comprehensive educational system integrating formal, informal, and hidden curriculum. Religious moderation values were not limited to Islamic Religious Education classes but were consistently embedded within civic education, religious habituation programs, extracurricular activities, institutional regulations, and daily interactions among students and teachers. Such integration confirms that value-oriented education becomes more effective when curriculum implementation extends beyond classroom instruction into the broader educational culture of the school. This finding strengthens the argument that curriculum serves as a transformative instrument for shaping students' attitudes and behaviour through continuous educational experiences rather than through cognitive learning alone.

The findings also reinforce the framework of religious moderation developed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia (2019), which emphasizes *tawassuṭ*, *tawāzun*, *i'tidāl*, and *tasāmuḥ* as the principal characteristics of moderate religious practice. However, the present study extends this framework by demonstrating that these principles become educationally effective only when translated into concrete pedagogical practices. The integration of moderation values into curriculum implementation, teacher exemplification, institutional culture, and student interaction enables moderation to move beyond normative discourse and become an authentic educational experience. Consequently, moderation is transformed from a conceptual policy into a living educational practice that shapes students' attitudes, social relationships, and behavioural orientations.

The process identified in this study is likewise consistent with Milton Rokeach's Value Theory, which explains that values gradually develop into stable personal belief systems through continuous internalization and repeated social experiences (Rokeach, 1973). Simultaneously, the findings support Thomas Lickona's Character Education Theory, which proposes that character formation progresses through the

interconnected stages of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action (Lickona, 1991). The present study demonstrates that moderation values initially enter students' cognitive understanding through curriculum implementation, subsequently become emotionally accepted through repeated interaction within an inclusive school environment, and finally emerge as observable behaviour reflected in tolerance, discipline, responsibility, cooperation, integrity, and respect for diversity. This sequential process explains why moderation contributes not only to students' knowledge but also to the development of enduring character.

Compared with previous studies, the present research provides a broader explanation of the educational mechanism through which religious moderation influences students' development. Earlier studies predominantly focused on conceptual discussions of religious moderation, policy implementation, or the statistical relationship between moderation and tolerance. Although these studies confirmed the importance of moderation in multicultural education, they provided limited explanation regarding the institutional processes that transform moderation values into students' attitudes and behaviour. The present study demonstrates that curriculum integration, instructional practice, school culture, teacher role modelling, and continuous value habituation operate simultaneously as interconnected educational components. Accordingly, the influence of religious moderation should be understood as the outcome of an integrated educational ecosystem rather than the consequence of isolated instructional activities.

Based on this synthesis, the present study proposes the Integrated Religious Moderation Curriculum Model as its principal theoretical contribution. The model explains that the effectiveness of religious moderation depends upon four interconnected dimensions. The first dimension is curriculum integration, in which moderation values are embedded within learning objectives, instructional materials, and educational programs. The second dimension is pedagogical implementation, involving classroom instruction, teacher exemplification, religious habituation, and school leadership. The third dimension is value internalization, whereby repeated educational experiences transform moderation principles into students' personal value systems. The final dimension is educational outcomes, represented by strengthened tolerance, positive character development, social responsibility, and resilience against intolerance and radicalism. These dimensions interact continuously, forming a comprehensive educational ecosystem capable of sustaining value-based education within multicultural school environments.

Therefore, the principal novelty of this study does not merely lie in confirming that religious moderation positively influences students' tolerance and character strengthening. Rather, its contribution lies in explaining how this influence is educationally constructed through the interaction of curriculum, pedagogy, institutional culture, and value internalization. The proposed Integrated Religious

Moderation Curriculum Model offers a conceptual framework that extends previous scholarship by positioning religious moderation as a comprehensive curriculum-based educational system capable of integrating cognitive understanding, affective commitment, and behavioural transformation. This framework provides both theoretical implications for curriculum and Islamic education studies and practical guidance for educational institutions seeking to strengthen inclusive education, social harmony, and the prevention of intolerance in multicultural societies.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the integration of religious moderation into the school curriculum plays a significant role in strengthening students' tolerance and character in both public and private senior high schools. The quantitative findings demonstrate that students' understanding of religious moderation has a positive and statistically significant influence on both educational outcomes. At SMAN 3 Jombang, religious moderation contributes 53.0% to students' tolerance and 35.9% to character strengthening, whereas at SMA PGRI 1 Jombang the contributions are 40.1% and 39.3%, respectively. The qualitative findings further reveal that these influences are not produced solely through classroom instruction but are reinforced through the integration of moderation values into curriculum implementation, religious habituation, school culture, teacher role modelling, and students' daily social interaction. These findings indicate that religious moderation functions as a comprehensive educational process rather than merely as instructional content within Islamic Religious Education.

The principal theoretical contribution of this study is the formulation of the Integrated Religious Moderation Curriculum Model, which explains that the effectiveness of religious moderation depends on the interaction of four interconnected dimensions: curriculum integration, pedagogical implementation, value internalization, and educational outcomes. Unlike previous studies that primarily examined the direct relationship between religious moderation and students' attitudes, this study demonstrates that curriculum implementation, instructional practice, school culture, and institutional commitment collectively mediate the transformation of moderation values into tolerance, character strengthening, social responsibility, and resilience against intolerance and radicalism. This model therefore extends existing scholarship by positioning religious moderation as a curriculum-based educational ecosystem that integrates cognitive understanding, affective commitment, and behavioural transformation within multicultural school settings.

Practically, the findings suggest that strengthening religious moderation should become a whole-school strategy rather than being limited to Islamic Religious Education classes. Educational policymakers, school leaders, and teachers should integrate moderation values consistently across curriculum planning, learning

activities, character education programs, extracurricular activities, and institutional culture to create sustainable educational environments that promote tolerance and positive character development. Nevertheless, this study is limited to two senior high schools in Jombang and focuses on students' perceptions and educational practices within those settings. Future research may expand the investigation by involving schools from different provinces, educational levels, and sociocultural contexts while examining additional variables, such as digital literacy, parental involvement, school leadership, or multicultural competence, to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the implementation of religious moderation in Indonesian education.

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Ethical Statement

This study was conducted with due consideration of ethical principles in educational research, including respect for participants, confidentiality, privacy, and the responsible use of research data. Data obtained through questionnaires, interviews, observations, and documentation were used solely for academic purposes, and participants' personal identities were not disclosed in the reporting of the findings.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Use Statement

The authors used artificial intelligence (AI) tools only for limited language-editing purposes, including improving grammatical accuracy, clarity, and readability of the manuscript. AI was not used to generate or manipulate research data, perform statistical analysis, conduct qualitative data analysis, interpret the findings, or formulate the research conclusions. All AI-assisted outputs were critically reviewed and verified by the authors, who take full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the manuscript.

Author Contributions

Lailatus Sa'adah contributed to the conceptualization, investigation, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of the findings, and preparation of the original draft. Samsul Ma'arif contributed to the conceptualization, methodology, supervision, validation, interpretation of the findings, and critical review of the manuscript. Muhammad Iqbal Nashrullah contributed to data analysis, validation, literature review, and manuscript revision. Saihul Atho Alaul Huda contributed to data organization, interpretation of the findings, literature review, and manuscript editing. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript and take responsibility for its scholarly content.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there are no financial, professional, institutional, or personal conflicts of interest that could have influenced the conduct, interpretation, or publication of this study.

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