

The Implementation of Religious Moderation Values in Shaping Harmonious Student Character in Secondary Schools

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Article History:

Received:
June 2, 2025
Revised:
June 15, 2025
Accepted:
July 6, 2025
Published:
July 7, 2025

Keywords:

Religious
Moderation,
Student Character,
Inclusive Education,
Interfaith Dialogue,
Tolerance

Abstract: This study examines how the implementation of religious moderation values shapes harmonious student character in secondary schools. In a diverse educational setting, promoting tolerance and mutual respect is essential. Using a qualitative descriptive method, data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation involving school principals, teachers, and students. The findings show that religious moderation is practiced through inclusive programs such as joint religious events, interfaith dialogue, and character-building activities. Teachers play a key role in modeling tolerance and resolving inter-religious tensions constructively. The consistent integration of moderation values fosters student character marked by openness, empathy, and peaceful coexistence. This research contributes to inclusive education practices and offers insights for schools in managing religious diversity effectively.

Abstrak: Penelitian ini mengkaji implementasi nilai-nilai moderasi beragama dalam membentuk karakter siswa yang harmonis di sekolah menengah. Dalam lingkungan pendidikan yang beragam, penting untuk menumbuhkan sikap toleran dan saling menghargai. Metode yang digunakan adalah kualitatif deskriptif, dengan teknik wawancara, observasi, dan dokumentasi yang melibatkan kepala sekolah, guru, dan siswa. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa moderasi beragama diterapkan melalui kegiatan inklusif seperti acara keagamaan bersama, dialog lintas iman, dan pembinaan karakter. Guru berperan penting sebagai teladan dalam menyelesaikan ketegangan antaragama secara konstruktif. Integrasi nilai-nilai moderasi secara konsisten mampu membentuk karakter siswa yang terbuka, empatik, dan mampu hidup berdampingan secara damai. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada praktik pendidikan inklusif dan memberikan wawasan bagi sekolah dalam mengelola keberagaman secara efektif.

Please cite this article in APA style as:

Waslah; Huda, Saihul Atho' A'laul; Nashihin, Ahmad Ali. (2025). The Implementation of Religious Moderation Values in Shaping Harmonious Student Character in Secondary Schools. *Journal of Islamic Education Research*, 6 (3), 291-301; doi: <https://doi.org/10.35719/jier.v6i3.501>



INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a nation rich in religious and cultural diversity, symbolized by *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* ("Unity in Diversity"). Yet, this pluralism faces challenges amid rising exclusivism and social fragmentation that threaten national cohesion (Abdin & Tuharea, 2023). Schools (microcosms of society) often lack frameworks that foster genuine interfaith harmony. While religious tolerance is frequently promoted, systematic implementation of religious moderation at the school level remains underexplored.

Prior studies have investigated religious moderation largely from theoretical or curricular perspectives, especially in Islamic education. For instance, Iqbal (2023) emphasizes the importance of character education strategies rooted in religious moderation as a means of maintaining national unity and social harmony in a pluralistic society. Similarly, Islamy (2024) discusses inclusive Islamic education in promoting tolerance, focusing on institutional frameworks and teacher pedagogy.

Another relevant work by Al Faruq et al. (2023) highlights how Living Values Education supports the development of moderation and empathy among students in multicultural settings. However, these studies tend to rely on curriculum-level analysis or top-down program implementation without examining how moderation values are internalized in daily social interactions among students and teachers.

Mufi et al. (2023) explored the internalization of religious moderation through active tolerance and shared experiences, yet the study still centered on theoretical frameworks and broad educational principles. Tasikmalaya et al. (2024), in their study of the Merdeka Curriculum, underscore the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers in fostering inclusive school environments, but the context is typically limited to senior high schools and formal classroom activities.

The study by Yudin et al. (2025) investigates how high school teachers in Banten promote religious moderation through dialogic teaching. Although this research enriches our understanding of pedagogy, it stops short of analyzing how informal school life and daily interfaith interactions can shape character development through social experience.

Thus, a clear research gap exists regarding how religious moderation values are manifested and internalized through daily practices and spontaneous interactions, particularly in public secondary schools where a religious majority coexists with minorities.

This current study seeks to fill that gap by examining how students and educators at SMP Negeri 3 Jombang embody religious moderation in their everyday school life, through shared religious ceremonies, mutual respect in prayer routines, participation in interfaith celebrations, and inclusive teaching practices. Unlike prior studies that focus on top-down curriculum or university contexts, this research investigates lived moderation, how values like respect, empathy, and cooperation are cultivated socially, informally, and consistently within the school's ecosystem.

This grassroots approach aligns with the growing consensus that effective character education is not solely the result of instructional content but of consistent modeling, relational interaction, and institutional culture (Wibowo et al., 2024). By documenting these lived experiences, the study contributes a practical, replicable model for fostering religious harmony in schools, one that complements national education policy while responding directly to social realities on the ground.

This research aims to investigate how religious moderation values are implemented to shape students' harmonious character in public secondary schools. It explores practices such as interfaith ceremonies, conflict resolution, and inclusive participation, involving both majority and minority religious groups.

The central premise is that, through sustained social interaction, supportive school leadership, and culture of inclusion, students naturally develop tolerant, respectful, and cohesive character. This aligns with frameworks from both moderate Islamic education (Kharisma, 2023; Wibowo et al., 2024) and inclusive education (Islamy, 2024; Iqbal, 2023).

Given the increasing complexity of religious identity in Indonesian schools, this study offers practical insights for inclusive education. By documenting how moderation values operate at SMP Negeri 3 Jombang, it provides guidance for schools nationwide aiming to strengthen social cohesion through character-based education.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach, which is appropriate for exploring in-depth social phenomena related to the implementation of religious moderation values in a school setting. Qualitative research focuses on understanding meaning, social interactions, and participants' perspectives within their natural context (Moleong, 2017; Safrudin et al., 2023).

The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 3 Jombang, selected purposively due to its religiously diverse school environment. Participants in this study included the school principal, teachers, and students, both from majority and minority religious backgrounds, selected using purposive sampling based on their involvement in interfaith-related school activities.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were used to allow flexible exploration of participants' experiences and viewpoints. Observations were conducted to capture real-life interfaith interactions and school activities that reflect religious moderation values. Documentation included school policies, event records, and photographs of relevant activities.

The data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), which involves data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data validity was ensured through triangulation of sources and methods to enhance the credibility of findings. The analytical process was iterative and continuous throughout data collection and interpretation to develop a holistic understanding of how religious moderation is implemented in the school.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

Daily Implementation of Religious Moderation in Interfaith Social Interactions

The implementation of religious moderation at SMP Negeri 3 Jombang is integrated into daily routines, interactions, and institutional programs. Rather than being treated as a formal or isolated topic, moderation values—such as tolerance, mutual respect, inclusion, and fairness—are embodied in the school's relational culture. According to one teacher:

“Religious moderation here means instilling tolerance, mutual respect, nonviolence, and appreciation for local traditions. Our aim is to nurture moderate attitudes in students so they carry these values into broader society.”
(Informant 1)

This value system is embedded in both formal and informal school activities. The Student Character Strengthening Project (P5), for instance, provides space to integrate religious dimensions into character development.

“In P5, we regularly use dimensions like faith in God Almighty. Although we include religious values, they’re framed in ways that involve all students and never cause problems.” (Informant 2)

Importantly, these initiatives are inclusive. During Friday Legi and istighosah events, non-Muslim students are not excluded. Instead, they participate by preparing the venue or later attending religious coaching sessions tailored to their beliefs.

“On Friday Legi, everyone wears the same uniform. During istighosah, non-Muslim students help with setup, then go to their own religious guidance classes.” (Informant 3)

These moments of interaction nurture empathy and cooperation. As an example of interfaith solidarity, a non-Muslim student once assisted a Muslim peer to avoid ritual impurity before prayer by carrying them across a muddy path—a simple yet powerful act of religious sensitivity.

Inclusive Programs That Reinforce Tolerance and Social Equity

Another institutional practice that cultivates tolerance is the charity savings initiative. Teachers and students voluntarily contribute funds that are distributed equally to students in need—without discrimination based on religion.

“We save collectively, and funds are given to orphans and underprivileged students, regardless of their religion. Even though zakat is meant for Muslims, we ensure that non-Muslim students are not excluded.” (Informant 4).

This approach reflects an ethic of compassion that goes beyond formal religious norms. The school also promotes interfaith representation in student organizations. Leadership roles, such as OSIS membership, are accessible to students of all faiths.

"Non-Muslim students can serve in OSIS and join religious celebrations. Even if an event is Islamic-themed, we still involve them so they don't feel excluded." (Informant 5)

Through this everyday inclusion, religious moderation becomes part of students' social development. Over time, they learn to reject prejudice and appreciate diversity.

Barriers to Implementation and Institutional Responses

Although implementation has been largely successful, the school has encountered behavioral challenges such as bullying based on religious differences. Some students initially showed intolerance due to a lack of understanding.

"There were cases where students bullied their peers or teachers for religious reasons. But we addressed it through coaching and guidance. It took time, but they eventually changed." (Informant 6)

The school responded with a restorative approach, emphasizing character building and moral reasoning rather than punishment. Cases are handled through repeated personal mentoring and structured counseling.

Another challenge involves building consistent understanding and cooperation among all staff:

"Our biggest challenge is unity. We need consistent teamwork to teach mutual respect, both among students and teachers." (Informant 7)

To overcome this, the school implements an inclusive and open policy, encouraging open communication and collective problem-solving. The principal explained:

"We embrace differences—religious, economic, and personal background. If conflicts arise, we discuss them together. Thankfully, we've never had a major religious incident here." (Informant 8)

Proactive Moderation Education at the Beginning of the Academic Year

Moderation education begins at student orientation. Teachers intentionally introduce religious diversity and discuss how to appreciate it in daily interactions.

"We explain these differences from the start of the school year. Every class has students from different religions, so we promote early understanding of tolerance." (Informant 9)

Students are gradually socialized into a culture of inclusivity, making religious tolerance part of their moral identity. Programs like P5 also contribute to this process by mixing students of different faiths into discussion groups, prompting shared experiences and mutual respect.

"Through P5, we assign students to mixed groups. They collaborate, discuss, and naturally learn how to respect one another's background." (Informant 2)

The findings from SMP Negeri 3 Jombang demonstrate that religious moderation is most effectively internalized not through formal curriculum alone, but through repeated exposure to inclusive practices embedded in students' everyday lives. This highlights the critical role of relational learning, where moral values such as tolerance, empathy, and fairness are constructed socially, through peer interaction, teacher modeling, and collaborative experiences. These informal dimensions of education provide a deeper and more lasting impact than isolated religious lessons or top-down moral instruction.

Furthermore, this study reveals that religious moderation can thrive even in schools with a religious majority, provided there is intentional leadership and institutional support. The school's use of inclusive charity programs, shared ceremonies, and interfaith student leadership illustrates a pragmatic model that balances cultural sensitivity with equal opportunity. These mechanisms help avoid tokenism and instead nurture genuine interreligious engagement. Importantly, the proactive orientation at the start of each academic year ensures that moderation is not reactive to conflict, but preventative in nature, framing diversity as strength rather than a challenge.

The novelty of this research lies in its focus on micro-level, everyday interfaith practices in a public junior secondary school, an area largely underexplored in current literature, which tends to center on higher education or curriculum policy. While prior studies often discuss religious moderation in abstract or doctrinal terms, this study documents how moderation is practiced, embodied, and sustained through communal actions, shared values, and interpersonal habits. By capturing these lived experiences through grounded qualitative inquiry, this research provides a contextual model that can inform future school-based character education strategies, particularly in pluralistic societies.

DISCUSSION

Implementation of Religious Moderation Values in Interfaith Student Social Interactions

The implementation of religious moderation at SMP Negeri 3 Jombang emphasizes neutrality—being fair, balanced, and inclusive without favoring any religious group. This approach facilitates tolerance and respect among students of different faiths, serving as the foundation for harmonious social relationships and unity within the school environment (Albana, 2023). Through daily interactions and school programs, students are exposed to values such as mutual respect, empathy, tolerance, collaboration, and nondiscrimination regardless of religious background.

SMP Negeri 3 Jombang, a junior high school comprising 840 Muslim students and 12 non-Muslim students, exemplifies the presence of religious diversity. The school has long implemented religious moderation as a core value. Teachers play a vital role in introducing and reinforcing this from the beginning of the academic year through orientation sessions and classroom learning. Students are taught what religious moderation means, how it promotes equality, and how it shapes social responsibility (Helandri & Supriadi, 2024). Moderation is also embedded through the school's flagship program—Pancasila Student Profile Project (P5)—which

integrates tolerance and cooperation into daily student life (Arina Hidayati et al., 2024).

Moreover, the school's charity savings program, which includes contributions from students and teachers, benefits underprivileged and orphaned students regardless of religion (Arina Hidayati et al., 2024). Religious inclusivity is also reflected in shared classrooms, such as those in Grade VIII, where students of different faiths study together without segregation. Teachers provide inclusive spaces for participation in school activities. For instance, during the Friday Legi event, all students wear black-and-white uniforms, though non-Muslim girls are not required to wear hijabs. During istighosah prayers, non-Muslim students assist in preparations before joining their own religious guidance sessions. The same inclusive approach is applied in OSIS leadership and school competitions, allowing all students to develop creativity, confidence, and cooperative character. During flag ceremonies, non-Muslim students are entrusted with significant roles, such as reading the preamble of the 1945 Constitution (including religious references) with dignity and respect (Dewi et al., 2024).

Challenges and Strategic Responses in Fostering Religious Moderation

Despite the school's strong efforts, challenges still arise in applying moderation values, particularly due to students' limited understanding. Some instances of bullying and disrespect toward peers or even teachers have been observed due to misperceptions of religious differences (Hakim, 2022). Teachers address such conflicts directly by providing clarification, emotional support, and character guidance until students exhibit more inclusive attitudes. Most of these cases are minor and manageable, but if ignored, they risk escalation (Habibah et al., 2022).

Some students choose to handle small conflicts independently, often without involving teachers or parents, as long as the issue is not serious. Many students have learned to avoid ridicule or mockery and have developed maturity and resilience in classroom interactions. Teachers face the ongoing challenge of maintaining unity, fairness, and neutrality to model behavior for students both inside and outside the classroom (Hannan, 2021). The school principal supports this effort through inclusive policies that promote justice, respect for all backgrounds, and proactive approaches to diversity.

These policies are complemented by school practices such as initiating moderation education at the start of each school year and reinforcing it throughout classroom activities. The P5 program also serves as a platform to develop character and strengthen interfaith social interaction (Rika Widianita, 2023). Nonetheless, several obstacles remain, including a lack of dedicated religious support facilities for non-Muslim students.

To address these challenges, school leaders continue to develop responsive solutions by empowering all stakeholders. The principal acts as a supervisor and facilitator, ensuring fairness and providing necessary facilities for interaction-based character education (Roziqin & Zainal Abidin, 2021). Teachers act as mentors and role models, delivering value-based instruction and modeling respectful behavior. Parents support the school's programs by encouraging their children's participation

and showing inclusive attitudes at home. Meanwhile, the school committee plays a strategic role by endorsing the principal's inclusive, open, and tolerant policies.

Through these efforts, the implementation of religious moderation fosters several character outcomes. First, it increases students' spiritual awareness and interfaith tolerance. Second, it cultivates mutual respect and helps build strong, peaceful peer relationships. Finally, it promotes social empathy, cooperation, and collective responsibility among students.

The findings of this study have significant implications for educational institutions, policymakers, and curriculum developers. For schools in multicultural societies, especially public institutions with religiously diverse student bodies, this research provides a practical framework for embedding religious moderation through daily interactions and nonformal programs. Rather than relying solely on formal religious education, SMP Negeri 3 Jombang demonstrates that moderation values can be effectively internalized through extracurricular activities, inclusive rituals, and character-building experiences. This approach supports the broader national effort to instill the values of Pancasila and foster civic harmony in Indonesia's pluralistic society.

From a policy standpoint, the success of inclusive leadership and stakeholder collaboration at SMP Negeri 3 Jombang underscores the importance of whole-school approaches in promoting tolerance. The school's ability to create equitable participation across religious lines—in ceremonies, leadership, and support programs—illustrates a replicable model for other schools aiming to prevent interfaith tension and build inclusive communities. This supports recent policy directions from the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Education in encouraging character education based on religious moderation.

The contribution of this research lies in its novel emphasis on the micro-dynamics of interfaith engagement within junior secondary school environments, an area often overlooked in prior studies, which tend to focus on higher education or theoretical models. By providing qualitative, field-based evidence of how religious moderation is lived and experienced in real school settings, this study expands the current discourse on religious tolerance education. It adds empirical richness to the literature by documenting practical, student-centered approaches that foster mutual respect and social integration across religious boundaries. In doing so, it responds to calls for context-sensitive, practice-oriented scholarship that reflects the realities of everyday pluralism in Indonesian schools.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and data analysis, this study concludes that the implementation of religious moderation values at SMP Negeri 3 Jombang plays a significant role in shaping harmonious character among students of different faiths. The school promotes understanding and awareness of religious moderation by introducing its principles early in the academic year and reinforcing them through daily practices.

The integration of the Pancasila Student Profile Project (P5) has proven effective in instilling values such as tolerance, empathy, and cooperation. Programs such as joint classroom settings for Muslim and non-Muslim students, shared participation in ceremonial events (e.g., Friday Legi, istighosah, flag ceremonies), student council activities, and charity initiatives demonstrate a practical commitment to inclusive education. These programs foster daily interfaith interactions that contribute to mutual respect and peaceful coexistence.

However, the study also identified several challenges. A number of students still struggle to fully comprehend and internalize the values of religious moderation. Additionally, the school lacks sufficient religious support activities and dedicated spaces for non-Muslim students to explore their faith traditions. Addressing these issues requires ongoing efforts from school leaders, teachers, and stakeholders to ensure that every student feels respected, included, and supported in developing into tolerant and socially responsible individuals.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author expresses sincere gratitude to the academic advisor for the continuous support, guidance, and assistance throughout the completion of this research. Special thanks are also extended to SMP Negeri 3 Jombang for their warm collaboration and strong support during the data collection process. The contributions of the school principal, administrative staff, teachers, and students were invaluable in providing the necessary data and insights for this study. The author would also like to extend heartfelt appreciation to Journal of Islamic Education Research for the opportunity to publish this research and for their commitment to fostering academic excellence. The constructive feedback from the editorial team and peer reviewers has significantly enhanced the quality and clarity of this article.

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