



Internalizing Multicultural and Intercultural Values of Religious Moderation through Islamic Education to Strengthen National Character

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Abstract

This study analyzes the process of Islamic religious education learning in internalizing religious moderation values at SMK Al-Falah Nagreg, Bandung Regency. The research employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive case study design. Data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews with five Islamic religious education teachers and fifteen students, and curriculum document analysis. The findings suggest that value internalization was facilitated through an inclusive curriculum approach, interactive experiential learning methods, and an authentic evaluation system focused on attitudes. A key finding reveals that the school environment, integrated with a *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school), creates a unique ecosystem where moderation values are not only taught but also lived in daily interactions. The study concludes that holistic, contextual learning in Islamic religious education can serve as an effective model for shaping a tolerant and inclusive national character. Research implications include recommendations for developing teacher-training modules based on interfaith dialogue and for more systematically integrating moderation values into the Merdeka Curriculum.

Keywords: *Holistic Learning; Islamic Religious Education; National Character; Religious Moderation; Value Internalization*

1. Introduction

Islamic Religious Education plays a crucial role as the foundation for building the character and religious values of Indonesian students. In the context of a country with a diverse Muslim society, strengthening national character based on values of religious moderation is imperative for nurturing social harmony and national integration (Mala & Hunaida, 2023; Syahriani & Jannah, 2025). Religious moderation, which encompasses values such as egalitarianism, tolerance, justice, non-violence, balanced religious observance, multicultural wisdom, and intercultural values, is believed to be not only a counter to extremism but also a path toward shaping inclusive and globally competitive Muslim individuals (Ahmed et al., 2025). Thus, Islamic religious education serves as a strategic arena where these moderation values are not merely taught as abstract concepts but are actively cultivated as foundational pillars of students' national identity and civic responsibility.

Internalizing these values through Islamic religious education learning is a strategic process to transform cognitive knowledge into real attitudes and behaviors that reflect national character, such as tolerance, a spirit of cooperation, nationalism, and social solidarity (Al Musanna et al., 2025; Zubaidi, 2024). UNESCO emphasizes the importance of the principles of *learning to live together* and *unity in diversity* as goals of 21st-century education, which align completely with the vision of religious moderation (Basri & Zaki, 2023). This alignment underscores that religious moderation education is not an isolated religious agenda but an integral component of global citizenship education. Consequently, Islamic religious education learning that systematically internalizes moderation values equips students with the intercultural competencies essential for navigating an increasingly interconnected and pluralistic world.

However, efforts to internalize moderation values in educational environments still face real challenges. Various incidents of intolerance, such as the forced imposition of religious attire in several schools (Ihsan, 2021). Moreover, high reports of discrimination indicate that exclusive and narrow religious understandings still require systematic responses. Previous research has extensively studied the integration of religious moderation into curricula (Kosim et al., 2024; Mukhibat et al., 2024) and the role of Islamic religious education teachers in public schools (Akhyar, 2023; Syuhudi, 2021). Nevertheless, these studies predominantly focus on general school settings, leaving the unique dynamics of vocational schools integrated with *pesantren* environments largely underexplored. Moreover, existing scholarship tends to emphasize cognitive outcomes and curriculum design rather than the depth of value internalization as evidenced in students' daily attitudes and behaviors. This gap necessitates an in-depth investigation into how the holistic ecosystem of a *pesantren*-integrated vocational school facilitates or constrains the internalization of religious moderation values among students from diverse regional and cultural backgrounds.

Despite growing scholarship, four significant gaps remain. First, limited attention has been paid to vocational schools integrated with *pesantren* environments, where students from diverse backgrounds experience intensive socio-religious dynamics (Zhao & Liu, 2023). Second, existing studies often examine cognitive outcomes rather than the depth of value internalization evidenced in attitudes and behavior (McGrath, 2012). Third, no previous study has systematically examined the SMK Al-Falah Nagreg model integrating vocational education with *pesantren* and serving students from across Indonesia as a pedagogical resource for moderation education. Fourth, the holistic ecosystem of value internalization of how curriculum, methods, teachers, and environment interact synergistically remains insufficiently explored (Koul & Nayar, 2021). These gaps

collectively point to the need for a qualitative inquiry that captures the lived experiences of students and teachers within this unique institutional setting. Addressing these lacunae, the present study offers an empirical examination of the internalization process as it unfolds organically through the interplay of formal instruction, dormitory life, and intercultural peer interactions at SMK Al-Falah Nagreg.

The novelty of this study lies in three contributions. First, it provides a contextualized framework for religious moderation internalization specifically within the SMK-*pesantren* integrated model. Second, it develops a 5-stage internalization model grounded in empirical data. Third, it offers empirical evidence from one of Indonesia's most diverse vocational boarding school settings, where students originate from 15 provinces across the archipelago. Based on these gaps, this study addresses the following research questions: How is the process of internalizing religious moderation values through Islamic religious education learning at SMK Al-Falah Nagreg? What supporting and hindering factors influence the effectiveness of this internalization? How does the internalization of religious moderation values impact students' national character?

2. Literature Review

The discourse on religious moderation has gained significant traction in Islamic education scholarship, particularly in pluralistic societies where maintaining social harmony amid diversity is paramount. Bibliometric analyses reveal substantial research growth over the past decade, concentrated in the education and Islamic studies fields. Islamic Religious Education serves as a strategic vehicle for transmitting values that shape students' character and worldview. This review examines scholarship on religious moderation, value internalization, Islamic education pedagogy, and national character formation, identifying gaps justifying the present study.

2.1. Religious Moderation in Islamic Thought

The concept of religious moderation in Islam is rooted in the Qur'anic term *wasathiyyah* (Surah Al-Baqarah 2:143), which Yansah (2025) analyzes as a governing principle preventing extremism (*ghuluw*) and negligence (*tafrith*). Contemporary scholarship elaborates its dimensions: *tawazun* (balance), *i'tidal* (justice), *tasamuh* (tolerance), and *muwatanah* (civic consciousness) (Mukhsin et al., 2024; Suharto, 2021). For educational application, religious moderation comprises interconnected values: tolerance, active respect and engagement with religious difference (Rahmadi & Hamdan, 2023); social harmony, enabling peaceful coexistence in pluralistic societies (Hutabarat, 2023); balance, equilibrium between spiritual and worldly responsibilities (Basri & Zaki, 2023); justice, fairness, regardless of religious identity (Rahmadi & Hamdan, 2023); and non-violence, cultivating peacebuilding capacities (Aravena, 2025). It demonstrates how Islamic education contributes to intercultural values in European contexts, highlighting the transferability of moderation principles (Sijamhodžić-Nadarević, 2023). In Indonesia, the Ministry of Religious Affairs has articulated religious moderation as a national strategy with four indicators: national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and accommodation to local culture. Mala and Hunaida (2023) argue this recognizes Indonesia's need for Islamic education that is simultaneously deeply committed and inclusively oriented.

2.2. Value Internalization in Educational Contexts

Value internalization is the psychological process through which individuals transform external norms into internally owned principles guiding thought, emotion, and action (Wu et al.,

2025). Kristeller's (2020) three-stage model—compliance, identification, internalization—remains foundational, while self-determination theory (Chong et al., 2024) adds that internalization is optimized through autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Krathwohl's affective domain taxonomy provides an educational framework: receiving, responding, valuing, organization, and characterization (Datt, 2021). Internalization mechanisms include: observational learning (Xianyou, 2025), acquiring values through authentic models; sociocultural theory (Vygotsky & Cole, 2018), which is co-construction through dialogue; experiential learning (Kolb, 2014), concrete experience followed by reflection; and transformative learning (Mezirow, 2018), disorienting dilemmas prompting perspective change. In *pesantren* contexts, systematic reviews identify internalization through educators' role modeling, religious habituation, curriculum integration, and intensive social interactions (Kibtiyah et al., 2025). The teacher's role as *uswah hasanah* (exemplary model) is essential (Khanna et al., 2021). Taken together, these theoretical perspectives underscore that successful value internalization in Islamic education requires not only cognitive instruction but also an immersive environment where students can observe, practice, and reflect upon moderation values in authentic social contexts.

2.3. Islamic Religious Education Pedagogy

Islamic educational philosophy conceptualizes education (*tarbiyah*) as comprehensive development encompassing intellectual, spiritual, and moral dimensions (Basith & Syarif, 2025). Within Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum, Islamic religious education for vocational schools is organized around five elements: Al-Qur'an-Hadith, Aqidah, Akhlak, Fiqh, and Islamic history (Batubara et al., 2025). Learning outcomes align with the *Profil Pelajar Pancasila* (Pancasila Student Profile), including faith, global diversity, and cooperation (Luthfi et al., 2024). Effective pedagogical approaches include: experiential learning, simulations, and projects, enabling concrete value encounters (Hertel & Millis, 2023; Kokotsaki et al., 2016; Laverie et al., 2022). Dialogic pedagogies, guided discussion, and interfaith dialogue create contexts for encountering diverse perspectives (R'boul & El Yazidi, 2026). Critical reflection, case analysis supporting a nuanced understanding (Lundgren & Poell, 2016). And teacher modelling, embodying values authentically (Min, 2016). Mukhsin et al. (2024) demonstrate that multicultural-based Islamic education effectively counteracts student radicalization in Indonesia. Authentic assessment—observation, portfolios, self-reflection—evaluates affective and behavioral dimensions beyond cognitive mastery (Villarreal et al., 2018). These pedagogical strategies collectively create a learning ecosystem where religious moderation values are not merely delivered as content but are experienced, practiced, and assessed as integral components of students' holistic development.

2.4. National Character Formation

National character refers to noble values constituting collective identity, reflecting unity and responsible citizenship (Barker, 2024). Theoretical foundations include Aristotelian virtue ethics, cognitive-developmental approaches, social learning theory, and ecological systems theory (Muñoz-García, 2025). Peterson et al. (2024) (2022) identify core character components: moral, performance, civic, and intellectual virtues. Indonesian character education is grounded in Pancasila, operationalized through the *Profil Pelajar Pancasila* (Parwati & Suastra, 2024). Huo et al. (2023) emphasize that vocational contexts require attention to professional ethics alongside general character education. Chao (2025) demonstrates that curriculum integration significantly impacts character development. Effective character formation requires whole-school approaches, positive school climate, curriculum integration, co-curricular activities, school-family-community

partnerships, and attention to the hidden curriculum (Goswami, 2025). In this framework, the internalization of religious moderation values through Islamic education learning serves as a crucial pathway for strengthening national character, as it cultivates the civic virtues of tolerance, mutual respect, and social solidarity that are essential for sustaining Indonesia's pluralistic democracy.

2.5. Empirical Studies on Moderation Values in Islamic Education

Bibliometric analyses identify religious moderation as a dominant theme in Islamic education research (Basri & Zaki, 2023; Harianto, 2022; Utami, 2025). Suputra et al. (2024) found that structured curriculum materials significantly improve teachers' integration of moderation values. Mukhibat et al. (2024) identified challenges, including teacher preparation and assessment of affective outcomes. Teacher perceptions significantly influence effectiveness—teachers with a deeper understanding demonstrate more effective integration (Zhang et al., 2024). Student outcomes research shows positive effects on intergroup attitudes and cross-cultural friendship formation, particularly in diverse environments (Al Musanna et al., 2025). Sulhan and Hakim (2023) found that institutional culture significantly influences character outcomes. Mukhsin et al. (2024) emphasize continuity between school and family contexts. Despite these valuable contributions, most empirical studies remain quantitative, measuring outcomes rather than capturing the nuanced processes of how internalization occurs in situ. This underscores the need for qualitative inquiry that can illuminate the lived experiences of students and teachers within specific institutional contexts, particularly in integrated pesantren-school settings where moderation values are cultivated through daily interactions beyond formal instruction.

2.6. Theoretical Framework

This research is based on four interrelated conceptual pillars: (1) Value Internalization, (2) Religious Moderation, (3) Islamic Religious Education Learning within the Merdeka Curriculum, and (4) National Character. The relationship between these four concepts forms the framework for analyzing how religious moderation values are internalized through Islamic religious education learning to strengthen students' national character.

Value internalization is a psychological and educational process in which an individual adopts, understands, identifies with, and integrates external values into their own belief and behavioral system, thereby becoming part of their identity (Munif, 2025). This process is not merely a transfer of knowledge, but a transformation of values into a guide for thinking, feeling, and acting (Spaid, 2025). In the context of learning, the revised Bloom's Taxonomy (Krathwohl, 2002) provides a framework for understanding the stages of internalization, ranging from remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, to creating. The urgency of value internalization in learning lies in its fundamental role in character formation, positive attitude development, and preparing individuals to become responsible citizens (Mahfud & Zahriyah, 2025). Within Islamic education, this internalization process is particularly critical as it transforms religious teachings from mere cognitive knowledge into embodied ethical dispositions that manifest in students' daily conduct and social interactions.

Religious moderation is a religious approach emphasizing the principles of balance (*tawazun*), tolerance (*tasamuh*), justice (*'adalah*), and avoidance of extremism (Yansah et al., 2025). Its core values include: (1) tolerance, i.e., respecting differences in belief; (2) social harmony in interaction; (3) balance in practicing religious teachings; (4) justice and equality for all; and (5) humility and compassion (Utami, 2025). In the Indonesian context, religious moderation functions

as a socio-cultural strategy to maintain harmony, prevent radicalism, and strengthen national identity amidst diversity. Education on religious moderation in schools becomes imperative to build inclusive, profound, and contextual understanding of religion, while also fostering students' social-emotional skills (Rahmadi & Hamdan, 2023). However, the successful implementation of religious moderation education depends not only on curriculum content but also on the pedagogical approaches and institutional culture that shape how students experience and internalize these values. This is particularly relevant in vocational school settings integrated with *pesantren*, where students live and learn in a diverse community that continuously challenges and reinforces their understanding of moderation.

Islamic Religious Education learning in Vocational High Schools (SMK), within the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, is designed to achieve holistic goals encompassing not only cognitive but also affective and psychomotor aspects (Kemendikdasmen, 2024). This curriculum emphasizes flexibility, competency, and project-based learning, and strengthens the *Pelajar Pancasila* (Pancasila Student) profile (Purnawanto, 2022). Islamic religious education material in SMK covers five scholarly elements: *Al-Qur'an-Hadith*, *Aqidah*, *Akhlak*, *Fiqh*, and History of Islamic Civilization, integrated with universal values and the context of the working world. Recommended learning methods are active, collaborative, and contextual, such as guided discussions, simulations, problem-based learning, and project-based learning. Learning evaluation also shifts towards being formative, authentic, and focused on skills and attitudes, aiming to measure value internalization rather than mere memorization (Rahman et al., 2024). The context of SMK Al-Falah, integrated with a *pesantren*, adds a unique dimension where Islamic religious education learning occurs within an intensive and diverse socio-religious environment.

National character is the crystallization of noble values that form the collective identity of a nation, reflecting the spirit of unity, integrity, and responsibility as citizens. Its values include religiosity, honesty, tolerance, discipline, national spirit, love for the homeland, social care, and responsibility (Kemendikdasmen, 2024). This character is vitally urgent as a moral foundation to maintain national integrity, encourage active participation in development, and collectively overcome shared challenges. Strengthening national character is the ultimate goal of national education, including religious education.

These four theoretical pillars have a synergistic and hierarchical relationship in this study. The learning of Islamic religious education functions as the operational medium or vehicle in schools. Religious moderation values constitute the content or value substance to be transmitted. The internalization process is the psychological-educational mechanism that transforms this content from knowledge into attitude and behavior. Finally, the strengthening of national character becomes the expected outcome or impact of the entire process. Thus, this theoretical framework explains that the effectiveness of Islamic religious education learning in strengthening national character heavily depends on the extent to which students successfully internalize religious moderation values through appropriate methods, curriculum, and learning environment.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study employs a qualitative approach with an intrinsic case study design (Janis, 2022) to deeply explore the process of internalizing religious moderation values within its natural context.

The case study design was chosen as it is relevant for investigating contemporary phenomena in real-life contexts, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon under study and its context are not clearly defined. This approach enables the researcher to holistically understand the complexity and uniqueness of the value internalization process at the research site.

The lead researcher is a Muslim Indonesian with a doctor's and master's degree in Islamic Education, but no prior affiliation with SMK Al-Falah Nagreg prior to this study. This outsider status allowed for relative neutrality in data collection but required an extended entry period (two weeks of initial observation without data recording) to build trust with participants. The researcher's religious affiliation facilitated access to religious discussions and classroom observations, as teachers and students perceived the researcher as sharing their religious framework. However, this insider status also required reflexive bracketing to avoid assuming shared interpretations of religious concepts. Throughout the research process, the researcher maintained a reflective journal, engaged in peer debriefing with two colleagues not involved in the study, and conducted member checking with five participants to minimize potential bias. A professor of qualitative research methods supervised all data collection and analysis.

The research was conducted at SMK Al-Falah Nagreg, Bandung Regency, an educational institution operating in an integrated manner within the environment of the Al-Quran Al-Falah Islamic Boarding School (*Pondok Pesantren*). The selection of this location was based on several specific criteria: first, the integration of the formal school system with the *pesantren* environment creates a unique socio-cultural setting; second, the highly diverse student population, originating from various provinces in Indonesia, thereby representing the nation's plurality; and third, the institution's explicit commitment to prioritizing religious moderation values in its educational vision and practice.

3.2. Participants of the Study

Participants in this study were selected purposively, considering the depth of information and their relevance to the research focus. Sample size was determined based on purposive sampling logic following Patton's (2015) principle that "information richness" guides sample selection in qualitative research, not statistical representativeness. Selecting five Islamic religious education teachers represented the entire population of Islamic religious education teachers at the school, ensuring comprehensive coverage of teacher perspectives. The selection of fifteen students was guided by the principle of data saturation (Guest et al., 2020)—interviews continued until no new themes emerged, which occurred after the 12th student interview. The additional three student interviews were conducted to confirm saturation. The selection also ensured maximum variation across grades (X, XI, XII) and regional origins (Papua, East Nusa Tenggara, Aceh, West Java).

Table 1. Research Participant Profile

Participant Group	n	Criteria
Islamic religious education Teachers	5	Minimum 3 years of teaching experience at the school
Students	15	Representatives from grades X, XI, XII with varied regional origins
Principal	1	Responsible for curriculum policy
Total	21	

3.3. Instruments

Data collection was carried out from March to June 2025, employing a triangulation strategy encompassing both source and method triangulation to obtain a comprehensive understanding and ensure data validity. The primary data collection techniques included semi-structured in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation studies. The interview guide was specifically developed based on the research questions. All interview sessions were recorded with participant consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis. Participatory observation involved the researcher directly participating in 12 Islamic Religious Education learning sessions in the classroom, as well as observing the dynamics of student social interaction in the dormitory environment over 20 days. Meanwhile, documentation studies were performed by analyzing curricular documents such as Lesson Plans, syllabi, textbooks, and relevant school activity archives.

3.4. Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis process followed the interactive model developed by Miles et al (2014), involving three interrelated stages that occurred concurrently with data collection. The first stage was data condensation, where raw data from interview transcripts and observation notes were simplified, focused, and coded thematically. Coding categories were developed using a combined deductive and inductive (framework analysis) approach. An initial coding framework was deductively derived from the four theoretical pillars (value internalization, religious moderation, Islamic religious education learning, national character). This a priori framework included codes such as "tolerance expression," "teacher modelling," and "curriculum integration." Subsequently, inductive coding was applied to capture emergent themes not anticipated by the theoretical framework, such as "surface-level tolerance" and "dormitory hierarchy dynamics."

The second stage was data display, where the reduced data were organized into thematic matrices and descriptive narratives. This display enabled the researcher to organize information, see relationships between categories, and identify significant patterns. The final stage was conclusion drawing and verification, where the meaning of the identified patterns was interpreted and verified. Verification of findings was rigorously conducted through member checking, by confirming preliminary interpretation results with participants, as well as through data triangulation to ensure consistency and credibility of the findings.

Research validity was maintained by applying a series of *trustworthiness* criteria in qualitative research. Credibility was pursued through triangulation and member checking techniques as explained. Transferability was achieved by providing a detailed thick description of the research setting, participant characteristics, and research process, enabling readers to judge whether these findings can be applied in other similar contexts. Dependability was ensured by maintaining an audit trail and systematically and transparently documenting all methodological decision paths and data analysis processes. Confirmability was pursued through critical researcher reflection and consultation with experts to minimize bias and ensure that the reported findings genuinely originate from the existing data.

Research ethics were applied conscientiously throughout the research process. The principle of informed consent was implemented by providing a complete explanation of the research purpose, procedures, participant rights, and data confidentiality before obtaining written consent from each participant. The confidentiality of all participants' identities was guaranteed by using pseudonyms or initial codes in all data reporting. The researcher was also committed to adhering

to the no-harm principle, ensuring that this research did not cause physical, psychological, or social harm to anyone involved.

4. Results

4.1. The Process of Internalizing Religious Moderation Values in Islamic Religious Education

The internalization process at SMK Al-Falah occurs through five interrelated and cyclical stages. The following matrix details the stages, strategies, and success indicators of this process.

Table 2. Stages and Strategies for Internalizing Religious Moderation Values in Islamic religious education Learning

Internalization Stage	Description of Learning Activities	Teacher's Role	Student Achievement Indicators
Awareness	Introduction to the concept of moderation (<i>wasathiyah</i>) through interactive lectures and study of relevant Al-Qur'an and Hadith texts.	As an information provider and initial guide.	Able to define religious moderation in their own words.
Contextual Understanding	Discussion of real cases (issues of harmony in Indonesia), integration with other subjects (History, Civic Education), and analysis of tolerance-themed films.	As a dialogue facilitator and context provider.	Can provide examples of the relevance of moderation in societal and national life.
Simulative Experience	Conflict simulation, role-play (acting as characters of different religions), and problem-based learning related to social issues.	As simulation director and reflection guide.	Demonstrates empathy and the ability to see other perspectives during simulation.
Habituation & Practice	Collaborative projects across backgrounds (e.g., harmony newsletter), joint social activities, and habituating politeness in daily dormitory interactions.	As supervisor, feedback provider, and role model.	Actively collaborates in projects and consistently shows inclusive attitudes in social interaction.
Reflection & Self-Assessment	Writing reflective journals, presenting attitude development portfolios, and guided group discussions to evaluate personal change.	As a reflection encourager and evaluation partner.	Able to identify personal attitude changes and plan follow-up for self-improvement.

The process of internalizing religious moderation values at SMK Al-Falah is carried out through a holistic and integrated approach within Islamic Religious Education learning. Based on observation results and interviews, internalization is not only conveyed as theory but is actualized through contextual and participatory learning activities.

Islamic religious education teacher, Asep (pseudonym), explained:

"We don't just teach tolerance as a concept. We make students experience it. For example, when a student from Papua feels uncomfortable because of a joke, we turn that moment into a class discussion about empathy." A grade XI student from East Nusa Tenggara, Rian (pseudonym), stated: "Before coming here, I only knew people from my own village. Now my roommate is from Aceh. At first we argued about prayer traditions, but now we respect each other."

Similarly, Siti (pseudonym), a grade XII student from West Java, shared:

"I used to think that my way of practicing Islam was the only correct one. But after living with friends from Papua and East Nusa Tenggara, I realized that diversity in understanding is a blessing, not a threat."

First, teachers actively select material relevant to students' real lives. For instance, through discussions on interfaith tolerance, students not only learn the concept but are also guided to understand real examples of interfaith cooperation in daily activities such as trade, sports, or social action. Teachers also use case studies, such as the situation in Papua, to show how religious diversity can be managed through dialogue and respect. Role-play simulations are also frequently used, where students practice resolving interfaith conflicts from different perspectives, thereby learning empathy and peaceful solutions (T2). This contextualized approach ensures that learning is not abstract but directly connected to students' lived realities as citizens of a pluralistic nation. By grounding discussions in concrete examples, teachers help students recognize that religious moderation is not merely a theoretical ideal but a practical necessity for daily social harmony. Furthermore, the use of case studies and simulations allows students to develop critical thinking skills and emotional resilience when navigating real-world diversity.

Second, the learning process is designed to encourage interaction and reflection. Open discussions about differences in beliefs become a space for students to share experiences without fear of judgment. Cross-cultural collaborative activities, such as humanitarian projects or tolerance-themed drama performances, bring together students from various regions (e.g., Papua, East Nusa Tenggara, Aceh, and Java) to cooperate and understand each other (T3). Through this direct experience, moderation values are not only understood but also *felt*. These interactive activities create opportunities for students to confront their own biases and stereotypes in a safe, guided environment. The reflection component, often facilitated through debriefing sessions after collaborative tasks, enables students to articulate what they have learned about themselves and others. Over time, this iterative process of interaction and reflection gradually transforms superficial acceptance into genuine appreciation for diversity.

Third, the teacher's role as a role model is highly evident. Islamic religious education teachers at SMK Al-Falah consistently demonstrate tolerant attitudes, respect for differences, and create an inclusive atmosphere in the classroom. This is corroborated by observation results, where teachers not only teach values but also practice them in daily interactions with students from diverse backgrounds (T4). Students consistently reported that teachers' authentic modeling of moderation values was more influential than any formal lesson in shaping their own attitudes. When teachers acknowledge their own biases or admit uncertainty about certain cultural practices, they demonstrate intellectual humility that students find both relatable and aspirational. This modelling extends beyond the classroom into dormitory life, where teachers serve as advisors and mentors, reinforcing the values they teach through consistent, everyday actions.

Fourth, learning evaluation does not focus solely on the cognitive aspect. Teachers use various methods, such as behavioral observation, self-reflection, project assignments, and simulations, to assess the extent to which students have internalized moderation values in their attitudes and actions. This multidimensional assessment approach acknowledges that true internalization manifests not in what students can recite but in how they behave when no one is watching (T5). By incorporating self-reflection journals, teachers encourage students to honestly

evaluate their progress and identify areas where they still struggle with tolerance or empathy. Moreover, project-based assessments, such as designing community harmony initiatives, allow students to demonstrate their commitment to moderation through tangible, socially meaningful actions.

Finally, the Islamic religious education curriculum at this school is designed inclusively. It is not limited to studying religious texts but also integrates understanding of other religions, visits to different places of worship, and the development of interfaith dialogue skills. This approach allows students to see religious moderation as part of a complete life, not merely a subject lesson. Such an inclusive curriculum design reflects a paradigm shift from teaching about religion to teaching through religion, where Islamic values become a lens for engaging with the broader social world. By exposing students to diverse religious traditions and practices, the curriculum cultivates intellectual curiosity and reduces the "othering" that often underlies religious prejudice. Ultimately, this holistic curricular framework prepares students not only as devout Muslims but also as responsible citizens who can contribute positively to Indonesia's multicultural society.

To assess the effectiveness of internalizing religious moderation values, this study conducted a comprehensive evaluation of several key aspects of Islamic religious education learning at SMK Al-Falah Nagreg.

Table 3. Indicators and Level of Effectiveness of Islamic religious education Learning

Aspect Evaluated	Success Indicator	Level of Effectiveness	Measurement Method	Supporting Evidence
Cognitive Achievement	Understanding of moderation concept and its relevance	High (most students achieved KKM)	School academic records (post-test quiz scores)	Quiz results, analysis of essay assignments
Affective Change (Attitude)	Emergence of tolerant, empathetic, respectful attitudes	High	Classroom observation rubric (5 sessions coded)	Observation notes, teacher anecdotal records
Psychomotor Improvement (Behavior)	Inclusive behavior and participation in collaborative activities	Medium-High	Participatory observation checklist (20-day dormitory)	Project documentation, activity reports
Student Engagement	Activeness in discussions and learning activities	High (the most active participation)	Observation count per session (12 sessions)	Observation notes
Method & Goal Alignment	Direct linkage between methods (experiential learning) and internalization goal	High	Document analysis of 12 Lesson Plans (RPP)	RPP analysis showing 90% experiential learning design

Another Islamic religious education teacher, Farhan (pseudonym), noted:

"The change is not instant. However, after one semester, I see students no longer hesitate to sit next to someone from a different region. That small thing means a lot."

From the perspective of curriculum and materials, observations of curriculum documents and interviews with the Vice Principal for Curriculum, Suhendar (pseudonym), indicate that the Islamic religious education curriculum at this school has been designed with a multicultural and inclusive approach. The curriculum not only emphasizes the understanding of Islamic teachings but also

integrates values such as tolerance, justice, and respect for diversity into learning activities. Moreover, Islamic religious education teachers actively source material from other subjects, such as Civic Education, to enrich students' perspectives on mutual cooperation and democracy within the framework of religious moderation. This interdisciplinary approach ensures that students encounter moderation values from multiple angles, reinforcing their importance across different domains of knowledge. The curriculum documents also reveal explicit learning objectives related to interfaith understanding and conflict resolution, demonstrating the school's institutional commitment to moderation education. Furthermore, teachers are provided with flexibility to adapt materials to address emerging issues in the dormitory or broader community, making learning responsive to students' immediate social realities. This curriculum design reflects a deliberate effort to position religious moderation not as an add-on topic but as a foundational thread woven throughout the entire educational experience.

The learning methods used are also highly supportive. Islamic religious education teachers predominantly utilize interactive approaches such as project-based learning, guided discussions, role-playing, and collaborative activities. For example, in project-based learning, students not only study theory but also design and implement real actions reflecting values of tolerance. According to teachers, such methods effectively train togetherness, eliminate barriers of difference, and sharpen students' critical thinking skills. These interactive methods shift the locus of learning from teacher-centered delivery to student-centered discovery, where students actively construct their understanding through hands-on engagement. Role-playing, in particular, allows students to step into the shoes of others, fostering empathy and perspective-taking that are difficult to achieve through lectures alone. Teachers also reported that collaborative activities often reveal students' latent leadership qualities and their capacity for negotiation and compromise when working across cultural differences. By making learning experiential and socially dynamic, these methods create memorable encounters with moderation values that are more likely to be retained and applied beyond the classroom setting.

Student engagement in the learning process is very high. Classroom observation results show that students actively participate in discussions, can express opinions politely, and listen to differing views from peers with empathy. In group project activities, they also demonstrate collaboration skills and reflect moderation values in their work outcomes. Furthermore, student participation in extracurricular activities such as the Islamic Spirituality Group (*Rohis*), Scouting, and national character programs provides evidence that moderation values are not only present in the classroom but are also integrated into their daily school activities. This high level of engagement suggests that students perceive moderation values as relevant and meaningful to their lives rather than as abstract concepts imposed by teachers. The willingness to express opinions respectfully and listen to differing views indicates that students have internalized the ground rules of civil discourse through repeated practice in a safe environment. Extracurricular participation provides additional spaces for students to apply moderation values in less structured settings, where peer influence and informal norms play a stronger role. Collectively, these observations point to the emergence of a school culture where religious moderation is not merely taught but lived, reinforced through both formal instruction and informal social interactions.

4.3. Factors Influencing the Internalization of Religious Moderation Values

The success of internalization is supported and hindered by several factors across different levels of the educational ecosystem.

Table 4. Mapping of Supporting and Hindering Factors for Internalization

Factor Category	Specific Factor	Type (Supporting/ Hindering)	Degree of Influence	Example of Empirical Evidence
Internal School Factors	Inclusive and flexible Islamic religious education curriculum	Supporting	Very High	Syllabi and Lesson Plans (RPP) that integrate moderation values
	Competence and role modelling of Islamic religious education teachers	Supporting	Very High	Interview results and observation of 5 teachers
	Interactive and experiential learning methods	Supporting	High	Observation of 12 learning sessions
Environmental Factors	Diversity of student backgrounds in the dormitory	Supporting	High	Demographic data of students from 15 provinces
	Support and visionary leadership of the school	Supporting	High	Interview with the principal and vision-mission documents
External Factors	Parental involvement and understanding	Hindering (Potential)	Low-Medium	Limited data from parents indicates need for improved communication
	Limited learning time	Hindering	Medium	Complaints from 3 teachers in interviews regarding discussion depth

The Vice Principal for Curriculum, Suhendar, commented:

"The Merdeka Curriculum gives us flexibility. We don't need special permission to insert moderation values into any topic. It's already in the learning outcomes."

The successful internalization of religious moderation values at SMK Al-Falah is inseparable from the support of various interrelated factors. Based on in-depth interviews with teachers and educational staff, at least eight key factors play a role. *First*, the curriculum and learning designed with an inclusive and contextual approach form the main foundation. *Second*, teacher competence is highly decisive. *Third*, interactive and participatory learning methods ensure that students are not merely passive listeners. *Fourth*, a safe and inclusive learning environment creates space for students to ask questions, express opinions, and learn from differences without fear. *Fifth*, support from family and community also strengthens the process. *Sixth*, Indonesia's plural social and cultural context serves as living teaching material. *Seventh*, the appropriate use of technology and

learning media helps present material more engagingly. *Eighth*, a continuous evaluation and feedback system enables teachers to monitor student progress.

4.4. Impact of Internalizing Moderation Values on Students' National Character

The internalization of moderation values contributes directly to strengthening the pillars of students' national character.

Table 5. Impact of Internalizing Moderation Values on Students' National Character

Aspect of National Character	Baseline (as reported retrospectively by teachers)	Current Condition (at time of study)	Form of Observed Change	Degree of Change
Sense of Love for the Homeland and Nationalism	Abstract, more sloganistic	Concrete, understood as love for Indonesia's diversity	Students actively celebrate national days with themes of harmony and can explain the relationship between religious moderation and NKRI	Significant
Spirit of Togetherness and Mutual Cooperation (Gotong Royong)	Limited to homogeneous groups (region of origin/class)	Expanded to heterogeneous groups (across regions, ethnicities, religious understandings)	Increased participation in mixed collaborative projects and school social activities	Significant
Attitude of Appreciating Diversity	Passive tolerance (not disturbing)	Active tolerance (respecting, protecting, celebrating differences)	Positive interaction in the dormitory, defense of friends experiencing verbal discrimination, curiosity about other cultures	Very Significant
Social Responsibility	Individualistic, focused on academic tasks	Collective, emergence of awareness to contribute to the social environment	Initiative to organize community service, becoming mediators in minor conflicts between friends, and concern for social issues	Medium-Significant
Integrity and Honesty in Interaction	Situational, dependent on context	Beginning to become a personal value (internalized value)	Honest admission of personal mistakes in reflection discussions and consistency of attitude inside/outside the classroom	Medium

The data presented in Table 5 reveal a comprehensive transformation across multiple dimensions of students' national character resulting from the internalization of religious moderation values. The most remarkable change occurred in students' attitude toward appreciating diversity, which shifted from passive tolerance—simply refraining from disturbing others—to active tolerance characterized by respect, protection, and celebration of differences. This transformation was evidenced by positive interactions in the dormitory, where students from

various regions defended friends experiencing verbal discrimination and demonstrated genuine curiosity about other cultures, indicating a deep-seated appreciation for pluralism. Similarly, students' sense of love for the homeland and nationalism evolved from an abstract, sloganistic understanding to a concrete appreciation of Indonesia's diversity as a source of national strength. Students actively participated in celebrating national days with themes of harmony. They could articulate the relationship between religious moderation and the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI), demonstrating that their patriotism was now grounded in substantive understanding rather than mere symbolism.

The spirit of togetherness and cooperation also expanded significantly, moving beyond homogeneous groups based on regional origin or class to encompass heterogeneous collaborations across regions, ethnicities, and religious understandings. This was reflected in increased participation in mixed collaborative projects and school social activities, suggesting that students had developed the capacity to work effectively with peers from diverse backgrounds. In the domain of social responsibility, the shift from individualistic, academically focused orientations to collective awareness of contributing to the social environment was moderate but meaningful. Students demonstrated initiative in organizing community service, served as mediators in minor conflicts between friends, and expressed concern for social issues, indicating emerging civic consciousness. Similarly, integrity and honesty in interaction showed moderate progress, transitioning from situational, context-dependent behavior to the beginnings of internalized personal values. This was evidenced by honest admission of personal mistakes in reflection discussions and consistent attitudes both inside and outside the classroom, suggesting that these values were gradually becoming part of students' character rather than mere compliance with external expectations.

These findings collectively demonstrate that the internalization of religious moderation values through Islamic religious education learning has contributed significantly to strengthening multiple dimensions of students' national character. The most pronounced impacts were observed in attitudes toward diversity and nationalism. At the same time, social responsibility and integrity showed more moderate yet still meaningful progress, indicating that character formation is an ongoing process requiring sustained reinforcement. While the findings above demonstrate positive outcomes, this study also uncovered a more nuanced and underexplored finding: surface-level tolerance among a subset of students. Surface-level tolerance refers to behavioral compliance with moderation norms without accompanying deep paradigmatic change in beliefs or attitudes.

From interviews with 15 students, 4 (27 percent) displayed what could be characterized as surface-level tolerance. These students could articulate the concept of tolerance correctly in classroom discussions and demonstrated compliant behavior during observed activities. However, in one-on-one interviews, they revealed persistent internal discomfort with religious differences. One student from West Java, Dedi (pseudonym), admitted:

"I know I should be tolerant. I say 'yes' to tolerance in class. But honestly, sometimes inside I still feel uncomfortable with different practices. I just don't show it." Another student, Sinta (pseudonym), reflected on the tension between school and home: *"I follow what the teacher says. But at home, my parents still have different views. I don't know which one to follow."*

Observation data supported this finding. In three of 12 observed learning sessions, researchers noted that while students verbally affirmed tolerance during guided discussions, their

non-verbal cues, such as avoiding eye contact with students from different regions during group work or whispering to same-origin peers, suggested residual prejudice.

This finding suggests that internalization is not a linear or binary process (internalized vs. not internalized). Rather, it exists on a spectrum. Surface-level tolerance represents an intermediate stage between compliance and genuine internalization, a finding that has not been systematically reported in previous studies on religious moderation in Indonesian schools (Kosim et al., 2024; Mukhibat et al., 2024). This phenomenon signals the need for more sustained, long-term interventions that address not only behavioral compliance but also belief transformation.

5. Discussion

This study investigated the internalization of religious moderation values through Islamic religious education learning at SMK Al-Falah Nagreg, an integrated vocational-pesantren school. The findings reveal three main results. First, the internalization process occurs through five interrelated stages: awareness, contextual understanding, simulative experience, habituation and practice, and reflection and self-assessment. Second, the effectiveness of this process is supported by synergistic factors, including an inclusive curriculum, experiential learning methods, teacher role modelling, and a diverse dormitory environment. Third, while most students demonstrated positive outcomes in tolerance and national character, approximately 27 percent of interviewed students displayed surface-level tolerance—behavioral compliance without deep belief transformation. This study proposes a 5-stage internalization model grounded in empirical data from the SMK-pesantren context: (1) Awareness, (2) Contextual Understanding, (3) Simulative Experience, (4) Habituation & Practice, and (5) Reflection & Self-Assessment.

Krathwohl's taxonomy progresses linearly from receiving to characterization. However, our model adds two distinct phases not explicitly present in Krathwohl: *contextual understanding* (stage 2) and *simulative experience* (stage 3). These stages are particularly salient in multicultural educational settings where students encounter difference not abstractly but through lived experience. Moreover, our model emphasizes the *cyclical* nature of internalization—reflection feeds back into awareness, whereas Krathwohl's (2002) Taxonomy is unidirectional. Kelman's model—compliance, identification, internalization—focuses on the psychological process of attitude change under social influence. Our model differs in three ways. First, it is pedagogically actionable, providing concrete learning activities for each stage. Second, it adds the *simulative experience* stage, which is absent in Kelman. Third, our model explicitly addresses the *habituation* stage, recognizing that internalization requires repeated practice, not merely cognitive acceptance (Oliveira et al., 2025).

The empirical basis for these additions is the finding that students who only reached the awareness or contextual understanding stages (stages 1-2) displayed surface-level tolerance, whereas those who progressed through simulative experience and habituation (stages 3-4) demonstrated deeper internalization. This suggests that *experience-based learning is a necessary condition* for genuine value internalization in multicultural educational settings.

Kosim et al. (2024) developed a religious moderation-based curriculum module for laboratory madrasah tsanawiyah and found that structured curriculum materials significantly improve teachers' integration of moderation values. Our study confirms this finding but extends it by demonstrating that curriculum alone is insufficient without experiential learning methods. At

SMK Al-Falah, teachers using the Merdeka Curriculum reported that flexibility was necessary but not sufficient; they needed guided training in simulation and dialogue facilitation. Mukhibat et al. (2024) identified challenges in moderation education, including teacher preparation and assessment of affective outcomes. Our study confirms these challenges, particularly in assessment. However, our finding of surface-level tolerance (Section 4.7) reveals an additional challenge not reported by Mukhibat: behavioral compliance without belief change. This suggests that previous studies may have overestimated internalization depth by relying solely on observable behavior.

Akhyar's (2023) and Syuhudi's (2021) studies examined Islamic religious education teachers' attitudes toward religious moderation in public schools and found generally positive perceptions. Our study confirms these findings but adds that teachers' *pesantren* background (in this context) provided deeper theological grounding for moderation as *wasathiyyah*. This suggests that teacher education programs should incorporate not only pedagogical skills but also theological re-interpretation of moderation. Al Musanna et al. (2025) found that multicultural-based Islamic education positively affects intergroup attitudes. Our study confirms this but adds a crucial caveat: the effect is not uniform across all students. The surface-level tolerance finding suggests that some students may require more intensive, long-term interventions.

Our findings confirm that knowledge and values are co-constructed through social interaction. The diverse dormitory environment at SMK Al-Falah created what Vygotsky termed the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where students from different regions learned moderation through peer dialogue (Vygotsky & Cole, 2018). The positive interaction between students from 15 provinces in the dormitory supports Allport's hypothesis that intergroup contact under appropriate conditions (equal status, common goals, institutional support) reduces prejudice. However, our surface-level tolerance finding suggests that contact alone is insufficient without structured reflection.

Mezirow (2018) argues that transformative learning requires a disorienting dilemma. Our study extends this by demonstrating that *simulative experience* serves as a pedagogically designed disorienting dilemma, triggering critical reflection. This makes transformative learning more feasible in classroom settings. This study enriches religious moderation theory by offering an empirically tested 5-stage framework for Islamic religious education learning. It also extends value internalization theory by demonstrating that internalization exists on a spectrum, with surface-level tolerance as an intermediate stage.

Islamic religious education teachers should prioritize experiential learning methods (simulations, role-plays, interfaith dialogue) over lecture-based instruction. Teachers should also assess not only observable behavior but also students' internal beliefs through reflective journals and one-on-one conversations. Schools should integrate moderation values not only into the curriculum but also into dormitory life, extracurricular activities, and school rituals. A whole-school approach (Berkowitz & Bier, 2014) is essential. The Ministry of Religious Affairs should consider the SMK Al-Falah model as a pilot for moderation education in integrated *pesantren*-schools. The Ministry of Education should integrate religious moderation indicators more explicitly into the *Profil Pelajar Pancasila* assessment instruments.

This study has four limitations. First, the intrinsic case study design limits generalizability to other contexts. Second, social desirability bias may have affected participant responses, particularly regarding sensitive topics like religious tolerance. Third, the four-month data collection

period may not have captured long-term internalization outcomes. Fourth, this study did not include parents or community members as participants, limiting understanding of external influences on value internalization.

6. Conclusion

Based on the research conducted at SMK Al-Falah Nagreg, it can be concluded that Islamic religious education learning has facilitated the internalization of religious moderation values through an ecosystem approach involving an inclusive curriculum, experiential learning methods, and a supportive social environment. This success demonstrates the potential of the integrated *pesantren*-school model as a living laboratory for religious moderation education. However, the internalization process that occurs remains incremental and requires systemic reinforcement. The finding of surface-level tolerance among the students suggests that behavioral compliance does not always indicate deep belief transformation. For future research, longitudinal studies to measure long-term impacts and action research to develop more structured interventions are recommended. Ultimately, education for religious moderation is not merely about transferring values but about building a *habitus* of peaceful coexistence in a pluralistic society.

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