



Implementing an Islamic Religious Education Model to Foster Students' Religious Moderation Character: A Case Study at SDN 01 Lebakharjo

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Abstract

Religious moderation has become an essential objective of character education in multicultural societies, requiring educational approaches that integrate religious understanding with inclusive values and everyday practice. This study explores how an Islamic Religious Education (IRE) model is implemented to foster students' religious moderation character at SDN 01 Lebakharjo, Indonesia. A qualitative descriptive case study was employed, involving school principals, Islamic Religious Education teachers, classroom teachers, and students selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis, and were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. The findings reveal that religious moderation is cultivated through an interconnected educational process combining classroom instruction, religious habituation, teacher role modelling, extracurricular activities, and a supportive school culture. These practices encourage students to develop tolerance, mutual respect, responsibility, cooperation, and social awareness as integral aspects of their daily behaviour. The implementation is strengthened by collaborative leadership, teacher commitment, and parental involvement, although challenges remain due to digital media influence, family background differences, and diverse student characteristics. This study contributes to the literature by presenting religious moderation as the outcome of a holistic educational ecosystem rather than isolated instructional activities. The findings also provide practical insights for educators and policymakers seeking to strengthen character education through contextually grounded Islamic Religious Education practices.

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INTRODUCTION

Education plays a fundamental role in shaping not only students' cognitive competence but also their moral awareness, social responsibility, and capacity to live harmoniously within increasingly diverse societies. In many multicultural countries, schools are expected to cultivate values that enable learners to appreciate differences while maintaining their own religious and cultural identities (Takunas et al., 2024). This expectation has become more significant as globalization, technological advancement, and rapid social transformation have intensified interactions among individuals from different religious, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds (Akova & Kantar, 2021; Alsaleh, 2024). Although diversity enriches social life, it also presents educational challenges when differences are misunderstood or interpreted through exclusive perspectives that may foster prejudice and social polarization. Reports from various educational contexts indicate that intolerance, discriminatory attitudes, and religious misunderstanding continue to emerge among school-age children despite the integration of character education into national curricula (DeCuir, 2025; Nurasiah et al., 2022; Vincent, 2022). Such conditions suggest that schools must move beyond the traditional transmission of academic knowledge and actively cultivate students' social and moral competencies through meaningful educational experiences (Jia et al., 2026; Okada et al., 2025). Consequently, educational institutions are increasingly recognized as strategic environments for nurturing inclusive values that encourage mutual respect, peaceful coexistence, and responsible

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citizenship. Within this broader educational mission, strengthening religious moderation has become an essential component of character education aimed at preparing younger generations to navigate diversity constructively.

Religious moderation has gained considerable attention in recent years because it offers a balanced approach to understanding and practicing religious beliefs without encouraging extremism, exclusivism, or intolerance. Rather than reducing religious commitment, the concept emphasizes fairness, respect for diversity, dialogue, and peaceful interaction among individuals with different beliefs (Aderibigbe et al., 2023a; Gule & Keliat, 2025). In Indonesia, where cultural and religious diversity constitutes one of the nation's defining characteristics, promoting religious moderation has become a national educational priority to reinforce social cohesion and democratic values (Huda, 2023; Mukhibat et al., 2024). The Ministry of Religious Affairs has consistently encouraged educational institutions to integrate moderation values into learning processes as part of strengthening national character education. Nevertheless, translating these policy initiatives into everyday educational practice remains challenging because the implementation of religious moderation depends largely on teachers' pedagogical approaches, school culture, and institutional commitment rather than curriculum documents alone (Huda, 2024). Furthermore, elementary schools represent a particularly important educational setting because children at this developmental stage begin forming lasting attitudes, behavioral patterns, and social identities that influence their future interactions with others (Eccles & Wigfield, 2023; El Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022). Educational experiences during these formative years therefore have substantial implications for the development of tolerant and inclusive citizens. These circumstances highlight the importance of examining how religious moderation is translated into concrete educational practices rather than remaining merely a normative educational ideal.

The urgency of strengthening religious moderation at the elementary school level is reinforced by various empirical issues reported in both educational research and school practice. Several studies have documented that students continue to experience difficulties in respecting different opinions, collaborating across diverse social groups, and responding constructively to cultural or religious differences encountered within school environments (Azmira, 2026; Noe et al., 2026). The growing influence of digital media further complicates this situation because children are increasingly exposed to diverse information, including content that may promote stereotypes, misinformation, or polarized perspectives before they possess sufficient critical literacy to evaluate such information responsibly. At the same time, schools frequently encounter disparities in students' family backgrounds, religious understanding, and social experiences, creating additional challenges for educators attempting to establish a consistent culture of moderation and mutual respect. These realities indicate that character education cannot rely solely on classroom instruction or theoretical explanations concerning moral values. Instead, religious moderation requires continuous reinforcement through daily habituation, teacher role modelling, collaborative learning experiences, extracurricular activities, and supportive school policies that collectively shape students' attitudes and behaviors (Azizah et al., 2025). Without a comprehensive educational approach that integrates these interconnected dimensions, efforts to cultivate moderation risk becoming fragmented and producing only superficial behavioral changes (Ahmad, 2023; Tran, 2026). Therefore, investigating how Islamic Religious Education is systematically implemented to foster students' religious moderation character represents an important academic and practical endeavor capable of informing more effective character education practices in elementary schools.

Recognizing these educational challenges, researchers have increasingly examined strategies for integrating religious moderation into school education from various theoretical and practical perspectives. Recent studies consistently emphasize that Islamic Religious Education (IRE) provides an appropriate foundation for nurturing students' moral development because it combines religious understanding with ethical behavior and social responsibility (Soleh, 2026). Other scholars have argued that religious moderation should not be treated as a separate instructional topic but rather as a cross-cutting educational value embedded throughout teaching, school culture, and student interactions (Muis, 2026a; Setiadi et al., 2025). Empirical evidence further demonstrates that teacher role modelling significantly influences students' attitudes toward tolerance, fairness, and mutual respect because children tend to internalize values through observation and repeated social experiences rather than through theoretical instruction alone. Likewise, studies on character

education suggest that sustainable moral development requires consistent reinforcement through classroom activities, extracurricular programs, and habitual practices supported by the entire school community (Sufiani & Sumardona, 2026). Within multicultural educational settings, school leadership has also been identified as an essential factor because principals establish institutional policies that encourage inclusive learning environments and collaborative educational practices (Gómez-Hurtado et al., 2021; Leithwood, 2021; Szeto, 2021). Collectively, these studies indicate that religious moderation develops most effectively when educational values are implemented systematically across multiple dimensions of school life rather than through isolated instructional interventions. Nevertheless, the extent to which these educational components operate as an integrated implementation model remains insufficiently understood.

Previous empirical studies have generated valuable insights into religious moderation education; however, their primary emphasis has generally been directed toward conceptual discussions, curriculum development, or the effectiveness of individual instructional strategies. Several investigations have explored the integration of moderation values within Islamic Religious Education curricula (Hanif et al., 2025), while others have examined teacher strategies for promoting tolerance and peaceful coexistence in Islamic educational institutions (Nurbayani & Amiruddin, 2024). Systematic reviews have further documented the growing international interest in religious moderation and character education, highlighting their importance for strengthening democratic citizenship and intercultural understanding (Hasan & Juhannis, 2024; Wardi et al., 2024). Research has also confirmed the positive contribution of school culture, local wisdom, and community participation to students' character formation (Sadri & Temaja, 2025; Yasmianti et al., 2026). Despite these important contributions, much of the existing literature evaluates religious moderation through broad educational policies, perception-based assessments, or generalized descriptions of character education without closely examining how moderation values are operationalized through everyday educational practices. Consequently, there remains limited empirical evidence explaining how instructional activities, teacher exemplarity, religious habituation, extracurricular programs, and institutional culture interact to shape students' religious moderation character within a single educational system (Harahap et al., 2026). This limitation reduces our understanding of the practical mechanisms through which religious moderation is translated from educational ideals into observable student behaviors.

The limitations of previous research reveal an important scholarly opportunity that this study seeks to address (Bolaños et al., 2024). Existing studies have predominantly investigated isolated aspects of religious moderation, including curriculum content, pedagogical strategies, teacher competence, or students' perceptions, while paying comparatively little attention to the comprehensive implementation process occurring within elementary schools. Furthermore, because educational contexts differ considerably across schools in terms of organizational culture, leadership, community characteristics, and religious diversity, findings from one educational setting cannot automatically explain implementation processes in another context (Hilal et al., 2025; Mincu, 2022). There is therefore a need for research that captures the complexity of implementing religious moderation as a holistic educational model involving multiple stakeholders and interconnected educational practices (Muis, 2026). Addressing this gap, the present study investigates how Islamic Religious Education is implemented to cultivate students' religious moderation character at SDN 01 Lebakharjo by examining the integration of classroom learning, religious habituation, teacher role modelling, extracurricular activities, and school culture within a unified educational framework. Rather than focusing exclusively on conceptual understandings of moderation, this research emphasizes the practical dynamics through which moderation values are embedded in students' everyday learning experiences. By adopting this perspective, the study extends current scholarship from describing what religious moderation is toward explaining how it is systematically implemented within elementary education (Chotimah et al., 2024; Musyahid & Kolis, 2023). Such an approach is expected to enrich the theoretical discourse on character education while providing an evidence-based implementation model that may inform similar educational institutions seeking to strengthen religious moderation through comprehensive school practices.

Against this background, the present study aims to examine the implementation of the Islamic Religious Education model in fostering students' religious moderation character at SDN 01 Lebakharjo (Hidayati et al., 2025). Specifically, the study investigates how religious moderation

values are integrated into classroom instruction, religious habituation programs, teacher role modelling, extracurricular activities, and the broader school culture, while also identifying the supporting and inhibiting factors influencing the implementation process and its implications for students' character development. Unlike previous studies that have primarily emphasized conceptual discussions or isolated educational practices, this research adopts a holistic perspective by examining religious moderation as a comprehensive educational model embedded within the entire school ecosystem. Theoretically, the findings are expected to enrich the literature on Islamic Religious Education, character education, and religious moderation by providing empirical evidence regarding the interconnected mechanisms through which moderation values are internalized during elementary education. The study also contributes to extending current discussions on value-based education by demonstrating how multiple educational components function collectively rather than independently in shaping students' social and religious character. From a practical perspective, the findings are expected to provide evidence-based recommendations for school leaders, teachers, curriculum developers, and educational policymakers seeking to strengthen religious moderation through sustainable educational practices. Furthermore, the implementation model identified in this study may serve as a contextual reference for other elementary schools operating in culturally and religiously diverse environments that seek to cultivate inclusive, tolerant, and socially responsible future citizens. Ultimately, this research is expected to bridge the gap between the normative ideals of religious moderation and their practical realization within everyday educational experiences, thereby contributing to the development of more comprehensive and effective character education in contemporary elementary schools.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research approach using a descriptive case study design to explore the implementation of the Islamic Religious Education (IRE) model in fostering students' religious moderation character at SDN 01 Lebakharjo. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study sought to understand educational practices, participants' experiences, and the social processes underlying the implementation of religious moderation within a natural school setting rather than measuring predetermined variables quantitatively. The descriptive case study design enabled an in-depth investigation of a contemporary educational phenomenon in its real-life context, allowing the researcher to examine interactions among teachers, students, school leaders, and institutional culture holistically. This design also provided opportunities to investigate how religious moderation values were translated into classroom instruction, religious habituation, teacher role modelling, extracurricular activities, and school culture, thereby generating a comprehensive understanding of the educational process.

Research Setting

The study was conducted at SDN 01 Lebakharjo, an elementary school located in Malang Regency, East Java, Indonesia. The school was selected purposively because it has consistently implemented character education integrated with Islamic Religious Education and promotes various school programs related to religious moderation. Data collection was carried out over a four-month period, from February to May 2025, enabling the researcher to observe routine instructional activities, religious programs, extracurricular activities, and daily interactions among members of the school community. Conducting the study within the participants' natural educational environment allowed the researcher to obtain authentic and contextually rich information regarding the implementation of religious moderation in everyday school practices.

Research Participants

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, which is appropriate for qualitative research because it enables the selection of individuals who possess direct experience and relevant knowledge concerning the research phenomenon. The participants consisted of one school principal, one Islamic Religious Education teacher, two classroom teachers, and twelve upper-grade students who had actively participated in the school's religious moderation programs. These participants were selected because they were directly involved in planning, implementing, or experiencing

educational activities related to religious moderation. Data collection continued until sufficient information had been obtained and no substantially new insights emerged, indicating that the collected data adequately addressed the objectives of the study.

Research Instruments

In qualitative research, the researcher functioned as the primary research instrument responsible for planning the study, collecting data, interpreting findings, and drawing conclusions. To facilitate systematic data collection, three complementary instruments were prepared: observation guidelines, semi-structured interview protocols, and documentation checklists. The observation guidelines focused on classroom learning activities, teacher–student interactions, religious habituation programs, extracurricular activities, and school cultural practices associated with religious moderation. Semi-structured interviews explored participants’ perceptions, implementation strategies, educational experiences, supporting factors, and challenges encountered during the implementation process while allowing flexibility for probing deeper responses. Documentation, including lesson plans, school regulations, activity reports, photographs, and other institutional records, was collected to enrich and corroborate evidence obtained through observations and interviews.

Trustworthiness of the Data

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, several complementary validation strategies were employed throughout the research process. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from different participant groups, including the school principal, teachers, and students. Technique triangulation involved comparing evidence collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentary analysis to verify the consistency of emerging findings. In addition, member checking was undertaken by confirming interview summaries and preliminary interpretations with selected participants to ensure that the researcher’s interpretations accurately reflected their experiences. Reflective field notes and systematic documentation were maintained throughout the study to strengthen the dependability and confirmability of the findings. These procedures enhanced the overall rigor of the qualitative inquiry by ensuring that interpretations remained grounded in the empirical evidence collected from the research setting.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was conducted sequentially following the completion of administrative approval and participant recruitment. Classroom observations were first carried out to obtain a comprehensive understanding of instructional practices, religious habituation activities, teacher–student interactions, and school culture related to religious moderation. Subsequently, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the school principal, Islamic Religious Education teacher, classroom teachers, and selected students to obtain detailed information regarding implementation strategies, educational experiences, supporting factors, and challenges encountered during the implementation process. All interviews were conducted with participants’ informed consent and audio-recorded before being transcribed verbatim for analysis. Documentation was collected throughout the research period to provide contextual evidence and support information obtained from observations and interviews. The integration of these three complementary data sources enabled the researcher to construct a comprehensive understanding of the implementation of the Islamic Religious Education model from multiple perspectives.

Research Procedure

The study followed a systematic sequence of interconnected stages to ensure methodological rigor, transparency, and consistency throughout the research process. The procedure began with identifying the research problem and reviewing relevant literature to establish the conceptual foundation and refine the research focus. After determining the qualitative descriptive case study design, administrative permission was obtained from the selected research site before participants were recruited using purposive sampling. Observation guidelines, interview protocols, and documentation checklists were subsequently prepared to facilitate systematic data collection. Following the completion of fieldwork, all qualitative data were organized, transcribed, and verified

through triangulation before being analyzed using the interactive qualitative analysis model proposed. The complete sequence of the research procedure is illustrated in Figure 1.

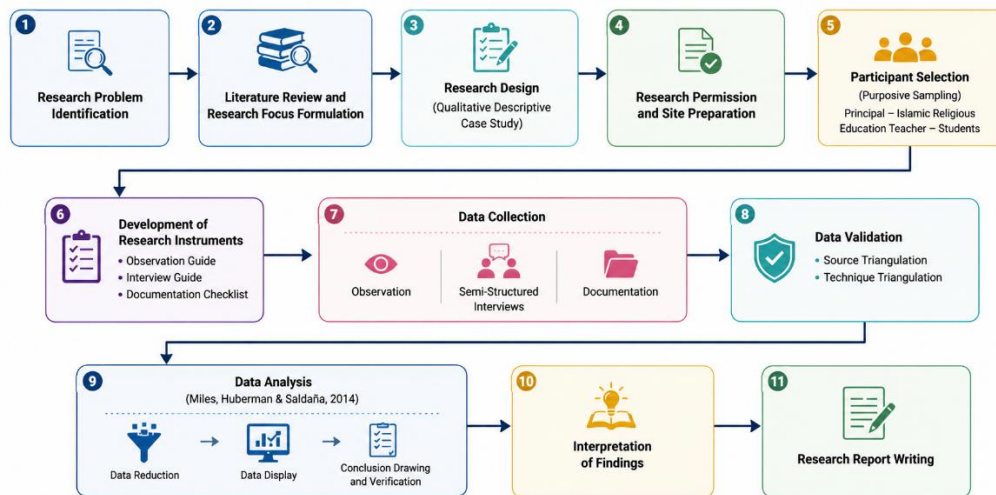


Figure 1. Research Procedure

As presented in Figure 1, the research procedure was implemented through an iterative rather than a strictly linear process. Although the stages are illustrated sequentially to facilitate understanding, data collection, verification, and analysis were conducted continuously throughout the study. Information obtained during classroom observations informed subsequent interviews, while documentary evidence was used to clarify and confirm emerging findings. The application of source triangulation, technique triangulation, and member checking strengthened the credibility of the study by enabling cross-verification across multiple participants and data sources. Furthermore, the systematic organization and transcription of qualitative data prior to analysis ensured that the subsequent coding, categorization, theme development, and interpretation remained firmly grounded in empirical evidence. This methodological procedure enhanced the transparency and trustworthiness of the research while providing a comprehensive understanding of how the Islamic Religious Education model was implemented to foster students' religious moderation character at SDN 01 Lebakharjo.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the interactive qualitative analysis model developed. The analytical process began with data reduction, during which interview transcripts, observation records, and documentary evidence were reviewed, organized, and condensed according to the objectives of the study. The researcher subsequently conducted open coding to identify meaningful units of information across the collected data. Similar codes were grouped into broader conceptual categories through a process of categorization, allowing patterns and relationships to emerge systematically. These categories were then synthesized into overarching themes representing the implementation of the Islamic Religious Education model in fostering students' religious moderation character. Throughout the analytical process, qualitative data displays in the form of descriptive matrices and thematic summaries facilitated systematic comparison across participants and data sources. The final stage involved drawing conclusions and continuously verifying emerging interpretations through repeated examination of the data, triangulation, and reflective analysis. This iterative analytical process enabled the researcher to construct trustworthy interpretations that accurately represented participants' experiences and explained the educational practices observed within the research setting.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Implementation of an Educational Model for Fostering a Character of Religious Moderation at SDN 01 Lebakharjo

Research findings regarding the implementation of the Islamic Religious Education model for fostering a character of religious moderation at SDN 01 Lebakharjo indicate that character education has been carried out through an integrated approach combining instruction, habituation, educators setting an example, and students' social activities. Observations and interviews with the principal, teachers, and students reveal that the school focuses not only on academic achievement but also places great emphasis on shaping attitudes and behaviors that reflect the values of religious moderation. These values are instilled through the habit of respecting differences, maintaining positive communication, fostering cooperation, and resolving issues through deliberation. The implementation of Islamic religious education at the school demonstrates a paradigm shift in religious instruction. Religious education is viewed not merely as a process of conveying material on acts of worship and religious knowledge, but also as a means of fostering students' social character (Komariah & Nihayah, 2023). Through this approach, students are guided to understand that religious observance must go hand in hand with respect for others (Aderibigbe et al., 2023). These findings indicate that education on religious moderation can be instilled as early as the primary school level through simple yet consistently implemented activities. One manifestation of this implementation is evident in the Sekolah Plus Ngaji (SPN) program. This program is a regular activity conducted prior to the start of lessons. Its implementation not only strengthens scripture-reading skills but also fosters positive habits such as punctuality, responsibility, a calm learning demeanor, and an appreciation for spiritual values. The program has become an integral part of the school culture, linking religious aspects with the character development of the students.

The implementation of the SPN program at the school is notable for its inclusive approach; it is not limited to Muslim students but also provides guidance for non-Muslim students in accordance with their respective faiths. Each religious group receives support from qualified teachers, ensuring a fair educational process that does not impose specific beliefs. This practice demonstrates the school's commitment to fostering an inclusive educational environment, aligning with the concept of religious moderation, which emphasizes a balance between reinforcing religious values and respecting social diversity. In addition to religious habituation, the values of religious moderation are also implemented within the learning process. Islamic Religious Education teachers play a crucial role in connecting lesson content to the students' social lives. During instruction, teachers do not merely explain the concept of tolerance theoretically; they also provide practical examples through activities such as discussions, group work, and experiential learning. Students are given the opportunity to express their opinions, listen to their peers' perspectives, and learn to accept differing viewpoints.

This learning approach influences the development of students' character. Observations indicate that students are beginning to show behavioral changes in their interactions with peers; they are better able to collaborate across different groups, engage less in teasing, and are starting to understand the importance of respecting differences. These findings demonstrate that fostering a character of religious moderation is more effective when achieved through real-world social experiences rather than merely through the delivery of theory. The role of the teacher is a crucial factor in the successful implementation of education on religious moderation. Teachers act not only as instructors but also as role models for their students. A teacher's conduct such as treating all students equally, using polite language, and resolving conflicts through communication serves as an indirect form of character education. Students learn by observing and emulating the positive behaviors demonstrated by educators.

This aligns with the perspective on character education, which posits that character formation requires three key elements: an understanding of values, an emotional connection to those values, and tangible actions in daily life. Character cannot be shaped through theory alone; it requires consistent practice and habituation. In the context of school, teachers setting a good example serves as a primary strategy for fostering a harmonious school culture. Beyond academic pursuits, extracurricular activities play a vital role in shaping character grounded in religious moderation.

Scouting activities, for instance, provide students with opportunities to learn cooperation, responsibility, and decision-making through consensus-building. In group activities, students become accustomed to completing tasks together, regardless of differences in ability or background. This process indirectly instills values of equality and mutual respect. Dance activities also contribute to shaping a moderate character through cultural exposure. Students not only acquire artistic skills but also come to understand that Indonesia possesses a wealth of cultures deserving of respect. Through these activities, students learn that cultural differences represent a richness that must be preserved. Culture-based education serves as an effective means of fostering an open mindset and an appreciation for diversity.

In Information and Communication Technology (ICT) activities, the school focuses on shaping students' digital character. The use of technology is guided to ensure that students are not only capable of using digital devices but also understand the ethics of online interaction. Teachers emphasize the importance of expressing opinions respectfully, refraining from spreading unverified information, and using technology for positive purposes. This approach plays a crucial role in addressing the challenges of character education in the digital age. Meanwhile, athletic activities particularly running foster character development through the values of discipline and sportsmanship. Students learn that success is determined not only by individual ability but also by training, hard work, and respect for others. The ability to accept race results with grace demonstrates that sports education is also linked to cultivating a character of moderation.

Table 1. Components of the Islamic Religious Education Model and Their Contributions to Students' Religious Moderation Character Development

Implementation Components	Activity Format	Impact on character
Islamic Religious Education instruction	Discussion, Group work, Contextual Learning	Fostering tolerance and an open attitude
SPN program	Religious refraction	Strengthening religiosity and responsibility
Teacher's exemplary conduct	Fair attitude and positive communication	Fostering behavior moderat
School culture	Collaboration and social activities	Raise awareness
Extracurricular	Scouts, arts, ICT, sports	Developing sosial character

Research findings also indicate that there are several factors supporting the implementation of religious moderation education. Support from the school principal is a crucial element, as school policies largely determine the program's sustainability. Furthermore, collaboration among teachers fosters an environment conducive to character building. The established school culture also helps students understand that the values of tolerance and respect for differences are integral to living together.

However, this implementation still faces several obstacles. One major challenge is the impact of the rise of digital media on students behavior. Primary school-aged children still require guidance in discerning the information they receive. Inappropriate digital content can influence students' thinking patterns and modes of interaction. Therefore, schools need to strengthen digital literacy education to ensure students can use technology responsibly.

Beyond technological factors, family circumstances also influence the success of character education. Values instilled by the school are reinforced when supported by the family environment. Conversely, if there is a discrepancy between the educational approaches at school and at home, the process of character formation may be less than optimal. Therefore, the relationship between schools and parents plays a crucial role in fostering a moderate character in students.

Overall, this study demonstrates that the implementation of Islamic Religious Education based on religious moderation at the school has a positive impact on students character development. An approach combining instruction, habituation, role modeling, and social activities fosters students who are tolerant, responsible, and capable of living in a diverse environment. This model offers an alternative character education strategy for primary schools serving communities with diverse backgrounds.

This study has limitations as it was conducted at a single research site; consequently, the findings do not fully reflect the general conditions of elementary schools. Future research could involve a larger number of schools and employ more diverse research methods to gain a broader perspective on the effectiveness of religious moderation education.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in the Implementation of Religious Moderation Education

Based on research conducted at the school, the implementation of religious moderation education in shaping students character is influenced by various factors stemming from both the school's internal and external environments. The program's success is not determined solely by classroom instruction but is also shaped by school culture, the exemplary conduct of educators, family support, and the students social environments. Research findings indicate that the implementation of religious moderation is most effective when all members of the school community share a common understanding of the importance of fostering a character in students that is religious, tolerant, and respectful of diversity.

One of the key factors supporting the implementation of religious moderation education is the support provided by the school principal. The principal plays a strategic role in establishing policies that foster student character development through various school programs. This support is evident in efforts to create an educational environment that is both religious and comfortable, while also providing space for all students to practice religious values in accordance with their beliefs. The principal's leadership serves as a driving force, guiding teachers to look beyond mere academic achievement and also attend to the development of students' attitudes and behaviors.

In addition to school leadership, collaboration among teachers plays a crucial role in the successful implementation of education on religious moderation. Teachers serve not only as conveyors of instructional material but also as mentors who model behavior in daily life. Through consistent interaction, they instill values such as tolerance, mutual respect, social concern, and peaceful conflict resolution. A teacher's exemplary conduct represents a form of character education that is most readily embraced by students, as they learn through the tangible actions they observe within the school environment.

A school culture rooted in religious and humanistic values also serves as a supporting factor that reinforces the process of fostering character traits associated with religious moderation. Various routine activities such as communal prayers before lessons, religious observances, the cultivation of polite behavior, and social engagement act as vehicles for instilling religious values in students lives. Through these practices, religious values are not merely understood theoretically but become an integral part of daily conduct. This demonstrates the significant influence the school environment has on shaping students positive habits.

The successful implementation of religious moderation at the school is also influenced by the positive relationship between the school and parents. Family involvement is a crucial factor, as the school cannot fully undertake the task of shaping students character on its own. Values such as tolerance, responsibility, and respect for diversity are reinforced when supported by the family environment. Collaboration between the school and parents ensures continuity in character education, allowing students to receive consistent guidance across both the school and home environments.

Nevertheless, research has also identified several obstacles to implementing education on religious moderation. A significant challenge stems from technological advancements and the use of social media among students. Easy access to information allows students to encounter various forms of content that may not necessarily align with religious values or a moderate character. Certain digital information can influence students mindsets and behaviors if they lack the ability to filter information effectively. Therefore, schools need to strengthen digital literacy grounded in religious values so that students can use technology wisely.

In addition to the influence of digital media, family environment and social circles also present challenges in fostering a character of religious moderation. Variations in parenting styles, parental levels of understanding, and living environments can influence how students interact with others. Not all students acquire the same understanding regarding the importance of tolerance and respect for diversity. Such circumstances require schools to adopt a more flexible approach so that character development can proceed in alignment with the specific needs of each student.

Differences in individual student characteristics are also a factor that must be considered when implementing education on religious moderation. Each student possesses a unique background, adaptability, and way of thinking. While some students readily embrace the value of tolerance, others require additional guidance to understand the importance of coexisting with others. Therefore, teachers need to employ instructional strategies tailored to the students' specific circumstances to ensure that the values of moderation are comprehensively understood and accepted.

Based on the research findings, the supporting and inhibiting factors for the implementation of religious moderation education can be outlined as follows:

Table 2. Supporting Factors Contributing to the Implementation of Religious Moderation Education

Supporting Factors	Contribution to Moderation Education
School leadership	Generates school policies that support religious and tolerant character
Teacher role-modeling	Provides examples of moderate behavior in daily life
School culture	Shapes positive habits and a harmonious environment
Religious and social activities	Strengthens the values of responsibility and empathy/caring
Parental cooperation	Reinforces character education outside of school

Table 3. Inhibiting Factors Affecting the Implementation of Religious Moderation Education

Inhibiting Factors	Impact on Implementation
Social media influence	The influx of information that aligns less with moderation values
Lack of family guidance	Character values are not yet fully implemented at home
Differences in student character	Requires different mentoring/coaching approaches
Limited supporting facilities	Hinders the optimization of several school programs

Overall, the research findings indicate that the implementation of religious moderation education at the school involves a process engaging various stakeholders. The program's success does not rely solely on Islamic Religious Education teachers but requires the support of the entire school community, families, and the surrounding society. Religious moderation can flourish optimally when values such as religiosity, tolerance, and social concern are instilled through both instruction and consistent, habitual practice (Ali & Touseef, n.d.). These findings reinforce the view that character education based on religious moderation requires a sustainable strategy involving the integration of the curriculum, school culture, and the exemplary conduct of educators. Elementary schools serve as a crucial setting for instilling these values early on, enabling students to grow into

individuals who possess a sound understanding of religion while also respecting diversity within society.

The Impact of Implementing Religious Moderation Education on Students' Character Formation

Research findings regarding the implementation of an Islamic Religious Education model based on religious moderation at the school indicate that the application of moderation values positively influences students character development. This transformation is evident in increased tolerance, the ability to respect differences, social awareness, cooperation, and the capacity to resolve conflicts peacefully. The implementation of religious moderation education goes beyond the delivery of instructional material; it is also fostered through daily habits, teachers setting a good example, social activities, and a school culture that supports the creation of a harmonious educational environment. At the school, Islamic religious education is not treated merely as a process of transferring religious knowledge but also as a means of shaping students character. Teachers design lessons that connect religious values with the students social lives. Values such as *tasamuh* (respect for differences), *tawazun* (balance), and *i'tidal* (fairness) are put into practice through both instructional activities and social interactions within the school. This approach ensures that students not only grasp the concept of moderation theoretically but are also capable of applying it in their shared lives.

They are able to interact with peers regardless of background and demonstrate appreciation for the diversity present in the school environment. These changes indicate that the process of instilling values of religious moderation influences how students perceive social relationships. The resulting attitude of tolerance is evident not only in learning activities but also in daily interactions such as playing together, working in groups, and resolving differences of opinion. This increase in tolerance stems from the school providing students with opportunities to experience diversity firsthand within the educational environment. Islamic Religious Education teachers play a role in guiding students to understand that differences are an inherent part of social life and must be respected. Through a pedagogical approach that emphasizes dialogue, cooperation, and respect for the views of others, students begin to realize that interpersonal relationships should not be constrained by differences in ethnicity, culture, or religious understanding.

This aligns with the concept of religious moderation developed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, which holds that a moderate attitude in religious life is demonstrated through fairness, balance, respect for differences, and the ability to foster peaceful coexistence. In the context of primary education, instilling these values is crucial, as the primary education stage marks the initial phase of shaping students social character (Gomez, 2024). In addition to fostering tolerance, the implementation of education on religious moderation also impacts the development of students empathy and social concern. Through shared religious activities, the cultivation of a habit of mutual assistance, and school-based social initiatives, students begin to understand that religious values pertain not only to the relationship between humans and God but also to the relationships between people. Caring for peers, offering help during times of difficulty, and being considerate of others feelings serve as tangible expressions of putting religious values into practice in daily life.

The role of the teacher is a key factor in this process of character. Teachers do not merely convey material on tolerance and religious moderation; they also serve as behavioral role models for their students. A teacher's open attitude, impartial treatment of students, and ability to resolve issues through effective communication provide students with firsthand experience regarding the importance of living harmoniously amidst diversity. It is this exemplary conduct that makes character education more readily accepted, as students learn through tangible actions. According to Mulyasa, character education develops optimally when the values being taught are reinforced through habituation and role modeling within the educational environment. Therefore, the successful implementation of religious moderation at SDN 01 Lebakharjo is influenced not only by the instructional content but also by a school culture that consistently fosters positive habits

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that the implementation of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) fostered students' religious moderation not through isolated instructional practices but through an

integrated educational ecosystem comprising classroom instruction, religious habituation, teacher role modelling, extracurricular engagement, and a supportive school culture. This finding suggests that religious moderation should be understood as a developmental process emerging from repeated social interactions rather than from cognitive acquisition alone. Such an interpretation is consistent with Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1986), which argues that values are internalized through observation, imitation, and reinforcement within authentic social environments. The present findings also reinforce Bronfenbrenner's ecological perspective, where children's character development is shaped by interconnected microsystems involving classrooms, teachers, peers, and families (El Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022). Recent studies similarly report that moderation education becomes more effective when embedded within everyday educational practices instead of being delivered as a separate curricular topic (Muis, 2026; Sufiani & Sumardona, 2026; Chotimah et al., 2024). Unlike earlier studies that primarily focused on curriculum integration or pedagogical strategies, this study demonstrates how multiple educational components operate synergistically as a coherent implementation model, thereby extending the conceptual understanding of religious moderation from an instructional objective to a school-wide educational ecosystem.

Another important finding concerns the significant contribution of religious habituation, particularly through the Sekolah Plus Ngaji (SPN) program, in strengthening students' religious moderation character. Rather than functioning solely as a religious ritual, the program cultivated punctuality, responsibility, self-discipline, and spiritual awareness while simultaneously creating opportunities for students from different religious backgrounds to practice mutual respect within an inclusive educational environment. From the perspective of character education, repeated moral actions gradually become stable dispositions through consistent habituation and reflective practice. This interpretation aligns with contemporary discussions emphasizing that sustainable character formation depends on continuous behavioural reinforcement rather than occasional moral instruction (Azizah et al., 2025; Gomez, 2024). The inclusive implementation of SPN, where non-Muslim students also receive appropriate religious guidance according to their own beliefs, further illustrates that strengthening religious identity does not necessarily contradict openness toward diversity. This finding supports previous evidence reported by Aderibigbe et al. (2023) and Takunas et al. (2024), while extending their conclusions by demonstrating that inclusive religious habituation can simultaneously reinforce personal religiosity and interreligious respect within elementary education. Consequently, religious moderation emerges not as a compromise of religious commitment but as its constructive social expression.

The study further highlights teacher role modelling as one of the most influential mechanisms through which moderation values are translated into students' daily behaviour. Teachers' fairness, respectful communication, inclusive treatment of students, and peaceful conflict resolution were consistently observed and interpreted by students as normative patterns of social interaction. This finding strongly supports Social Cognitive Theory, which emphasizes observational learning as a primary mechanism through which individuals acquire attitudes and behavioural norms. Rather than learning tolerance merely through verbal explanation, students experienced moderation through teachers' everyday actions, making value internalization substantially more authentic. Similar conclusions have been reported by Nurbayani and Amiruddin (2024), Harahap et al. (2026), and Soleh (2026), who found that teacher agency significantly influences students' attitudes toward inclusivity and peaceful coexistence. Nevertheless, this study advances previous scholarship by showing that teacher exemplarity functions most effectively when supported by complementary institutional practices, including school leadership, habituation programs, and collaborative learning experiences. This broader interpretation suggests that teacher effectiveness in moderation education depends not only on individual competence but also on organizational coherence that consistently reinforces the same educational values.

The positive influence of extracurricular activities further demonstrates that religious moderation develops beyond formal religious instruction through experiential and collaborative learning. Activities such as scouting, arts, sports, and ICT education created authentic situations in which students negotiated differences, developed empathy, practiced cooperation, and learned democratic decision-making. Experiential learning theory explains that meaningful values are constructed through direct participation, reflection, and social interaction rather than passive knowledge transmission. Recent international studies similarly argue that co-curricular experiences

strengthen empathy, intercultural competence, and civic responsibility by exposing learners to authentic collaborative situations (Jia et al., 2026; Okada et al., 2025; Yasmiati et al., 2026). However, the present findings indicate that these extracurricular activities contributed to religious moderation precisely because they were intentionally aligned with the school's broader character education framework instead of functioning as independent programs. This integrated approach represents an important conceptual contribution because it illustrates how non-religious educational activities may substantially reinforce religious moderation through the development of universal social virtues, including fairness, responsibility, and mutual respect.

An equally important finding concerns the contextual conditions influencing implementation effectiveness. Collaborative school leadership, teacher commitment, and parental involvement emerged as major enabling factors, whereas digital media exposure, differences in family environments, and diverse student characteristics constituted significant challenges. These findings support ecological theories of child development, which emphasize that educational outcomes are produced through interactions among multiple environmental systems rather than school factors alone. Previous studies have likewise highlighted the strategic role of inclusive school leadership (Leithwood, 2021; Gómez-Hurtado et al., 2021; Hilal et al., 2025) and family engagement in sustaining character education. Nevertheless, the present study adds a more nuanced perspective by identifying digital media as an increasingly influential contextual variable shaping students' interpretation of religious diversity. The rapid expansion of digital information creates opportunities for learning but simultaneously exposes children to misinformation, polarization, and exclusive narratives before adequate critical literacy has developed (Hanif et al., 2025; Huda, 2024). Therefore, strengthening religious moderation should not only involve conventional religious instruction but also incorporate digital citizenship and critical media literacy as complementary components of contemporary character education.

The behavioural changes observed among students—including greater tolerance, improved cooperation, stronger social responsibility, and more peaceful conflict resolution—indicate that moderation values had become increasingly internalized rather than merely understood conceptually. Importantly, these outcomes appeared across various daily interactions, suggesting that students transferred moderation principles beyond classroom settings into authentic social relationships. Such evidence supports recent findings that effective religious moderation education should be evaluated through observable behavioural transformation instead of relying exclusively on perception-based assessments (Noe et al., 2026; Muis, 2026; Hasan & Juhannis, 2024). Compared with previous research that frequently measured attitudes or curriculum implementation, this study provides richer empirical evidence regarding the practical mechanisms through which moderation values become embedded within everyday school life. Although conducted within a single elementary school context, the findings suggest that sustainable character development depends on long-term consistency across instructional, cultural, and interpersonal dimensions. Consequently, future comparative studies involving multiple educational contexts are necessary to determine the transferability of this integrated implementation model while examining how contextual variations influence the effectiveness of religious moderation education.

Overall, this study contributes to the international literature by positioning religious moderation as a holistic educational ecosystem rather than an isolated instructional outcome. Conceptually, it extends current discussions in Islamic Religious Education by demonstrating that moderation is produced through the dynamic interaction of pedagogical practices, religious habituation, teacher exemplarity, extracurricular participation, institutional culture, leadership, and family collaboration. This perspective moves beyond earlier approaches that primarily examined individual educational components independently and instead offers a systems-oriented explanation of how moderation values are cultivated throughout everyday schooling. Practically, the findings provide an evidence-informed implementation model that may guide educators, school leaders, and policymakers seeking to strengthen inclusive character education within culturally diverse educational settings. In the broader global discourse on value-based education, this study contributes empirical support for the argument that fostering religious moderation requires sustained institutional coherence rather than isolated curricular interventions, thereby offering a meaningful conceptual advancement for future research and educational practice.

CONCLUSION

The findings indicate that fostering students' religious moderation character requires an educational process that extends beyond the delivery of religious knowledge into the cultivation of values through everyday school experiences. At SDN 01 Lebakharjo, the implementation of the Islamic Religious Education model integrates classroom learning, religious habituation, teacher role modelling, extracurricular activities, and school culture into a coherent educational framework that encourages students to develop tolerance, mutual respect, responsibility, cooperation, and social awareness. This integrated approach enables religious moderation to become part of students' daily practices rather than remaining a theoretical concept presented during classroom instruction. The implementation process is further reinforced by collaborative leadership, teachers' professional commitment, parental engagement, and a supportive school environment that consistently promotes inclusive values. At the same time, the influence of digital media, differences in family support, and the diversity of students' personal characteristics illustrate that character development is a continuous process requiring adaptive educational strategies and sustained collaboration between schools and families. From a theoretical perspective, the findings enrich current discussions on Islamic Religious Education and character education by highlighting the importance of viewing religious moderation as a holistic educational ecosystem in which instructional, social, and cultural dimensions operate synergistically. From a practical perspective, the implementation model identified in this study may serve as a contextual reference for educators, school leaders, and policymakers seeking to strengthen religious moderation through comprehensive character education at the elementary school level. Given that the investigation was conducted within a single school context, broader comparative studies involving different educational settings and methodological approaches are recommended to deepen understanding of how religious moderation can be effectively cultivated across diverse school environments.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

Aisyah Nindi Antika Conceptualization, methodology, investigation, data curation, formal analysis, validation, visualization, writing original draft preparation, and writing—review and editing. Muhammad Husni Conceptualization, supervision, methodology, validation, formal analysis, project administration, writing review and editing, and final approval of the manuscript. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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