



Mainstreaming Religious Moderation Learning in Early Childhood Education Institutions in Pekalongan City

A. Tabi'in¹, Zulkipli Lessy², Suhadi³

Universitas Islam Negeri K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan, Indonesia¹

Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, Indonesia^{2,3}

ahmadtabiin@uingusdur.ac.id¹, zulkifli.lessy@uin-suka.ac.id², suhadi@uinsuka.ac.id³

*Correspondence: e-mail : ahmadtabiin@uingusdur.ac.id

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Abstrak

Lembaga pendidikan anak usia dini memegang peran penting dalam membentuk karakter anak sejak dini, termasuk menanamkan sikap inklusif dan toleran terhadap keberagaman. Seiring menguatnya moderasi beragama sebagai agenda kebijakan nasional, penting untuk memahami bagaimana nilai-nilai ini diinternalisasi dan dipraktikkan dalam lingkungan pembelajaran anak usia dini. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji bagaimana pemahaman dan penerapan moderasi beragama dilakukan oleh pendidik, serta bagaimana strategi pembelajaran dan keterlibatan orang tua turut berkontribusi dalam menanamkan nilai-nilai tersebut pada anak. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain fenomenologis. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi kelas, analisis dokumen, dan wawancara mendalam dengan guru, kepala sekolah, orang tua, dan tenaga kependidikan dari empat lembaga PAUD di Kota Pekalongan. Analisis tematik dilakukan secara induktif dengan pendekatan open coding, serta menginterpretasikan pengalaman sosial dan pedagogis para partisipan. Teori Pembelajaran Sosial dari Albert Bandura digunakan untuk memahami proses observasi dan imitasi dalam pembentukan sikap keagamaan anak. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa pendidikan moderasi beragama mendorong sikap inklusif, empatik, dan toleran sejak usia dini. Nilai-nilai tersebut ditanamkan melalui bermain peran, mendengarkan cerita, kegiatan kolaboratif, diskusi terbimbing, dan interaksi sosial yang dicontohkan guru. Guru mencatat bahwa anak mulai membangun relasi terbuka dengan teman dari latar belakang berbeda. Peran orang tua penting dalam memperkuat nilai-nilai moderat di rumah melalui komunikasi hangat dan diskusi tentang keberagaman. Sinergi antara praktik sekolah dan dukungan keluarga membentuk fondasi kokoh bagi perkembangan sikap keagamaan yang moderat dan penghargaan terhadap perbedaan.

Kata kunci: Moderasi Beragama, Pembelajaran, Inklusifitas, Lembaga Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini

Abstract

Early childhood education (*Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini*, hereafter PAUD) institutions play a vital role in shaping children's character, including fostering inclusive and tolerant attitudes toward diversity. As religious moderation gains prominence as a national policy agenda, it

becomes essential to understand how such values are internalized and practiced within early learning environments. This study investigates how religious moderation is understood and implemented by educators, and how teaching strategies and parental involvement contribute to its cultivation in children's lives. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, data were gathered through observations, document analysis, and in-depth interviews with teachers, principals, parents, and educational staff from four early childhood education institutions in Pekalongan City. Thematic analysis, guided by Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory, was conducted using an inductive approach to interpret participants' social and pedagogical experiences. The findings reveal that religious moderation education promotes inclusive, empathetic, and tolerant behaviors among young children. These values are fostered through role-play, storytelling, collaborative activities, and teacher-modeled interactions. Instructional methods are contextualized using national narratives, local Islamic traditions, and daily character-building practices. Teachers observed that children became more open in interacting with peers from diverse backgrounds. Parental involvement reinforces these values at home through open dialogue and responsiveness to children's curiosity about differences. The synergy between school-based learning and family support forms a solid foundation for the development of moderate religious attitudes and respect for diversity from an early age.

Keywords: Religious moderation, Learning, Inclusiveness, Early childhood education institutions

INTRODUCTION

Various social and religious events in Indonesia in the last decade indicate that the challenges of diversity are increasingly complex, and have even touched the lives of the lower classes (Abror, 2020). The growth of narratives of intolerance, exclusivism, and the tendency of religious-based radicalism is no longer a sectoral discourse. However, it has entered people's daily lives, including educational and family environments (Diaz-Diaz, 2023). In this context, early childhood education is an aspect that cannot be ignored (Fatimah, 2023). Children at an early age do not live separately from their environment. They grow and develop in an increasingly diverse society, both in terms of religion, culture, and socio-economic status (Affairs, 2021). Unfortunately, most educational policies and learning practices at the PAUD level are still procedural and emphasize cognitive aspects and academic readiness, without giving commensurate attention to the formation of inclusive social and religious values.

This phenomenon raises fundamental questions about the readiness of PAUD institutions in building a moderate religious foundation for children. Religious moderation, as a perspective that places religious teachings in a fair, balanced position and prioritizes respect for diversity, has not been an integral part of the curriculum and learning in many PAUD institutions (Faniati & Padli, 2024). Early childhood is a crucial period (*golden age*) for forming future thinking structures,

attitudes, and social habits. Children learn from verbal instructions, observing, and imitating the figures around them (Gibbons, 2011). In this context, teachers and the PAUD environment play a key role in instilling religious values that are not rigid and exclusive, but adaptive to pluralistic social realities. Bandura (1977) states that the formation of values and attitudes in children is strongly influenced by social models displayed by the surrounding environment, especially in daily interactions that are emotional and repetitive. Thus, learning practices carried out by teachers and the school environment will form the basis of children's religious identity (Sari & Nugroho, 2021).

Amid demands for the importance of learning that fosters moderate, tolerant, and inclusive characters, there is a gap between the discourse of religious moderation echoed by the state, primarily through the Ministry of Religious Affairs program, and the implementation of religious learning at the PAUD level (Rofik & Misbah, 2021). Many PAUD institutions still understand religious education as limited to memorizing prayers, practicing ritual worship, or strengthening the identity of certain groups. Learning practices have not explicitly included values such as justice, balance, non-violence, and acceptance of diversity (Chan, 2020). In fact, in some cases, approaches have emerged that limit children's interaction with differences and instill a monolithic view of religious truth (Batool & Akram, 2020). This phenomenon shows the gap between the normative ideal of mainstreaming religious moderation and the implemented reality in PAUD institutions.

Empirically, religious moderation, education, and tolerant attitudes from an early age are increasingly visible from various findings in the field. The National Counterterrorism Agency (*Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Terorisme*, BNPT) noted that radical groups began targeting early childhood through formal channels such as educational institutions and indirectly through the family environment and digital media (BNPT, 2022). Children are sometimes involved in symbolic activities or become part of visual propaganda materials containing violence. The UNICEF report (2021) also shows that children who are accustomed to seeing hateful content from an early age are at risk of growing up with intolerant attitudes and aggressive behavior. These facts reinforce the importance of education, which instills the values of peace, openness, and respect for differences from an early age.

The limited number of studies that specifically examine the teaching of religious moderation values in early childhood education highlights a significant gap in both educational literature and practice. Existing research tends to focus predominantly on primary and secondary education, while PAUD institutions have not been the object of many research studies. This condition raises critical questions about the extent of the readiness of PAUD institutions in developing learning based on religious moderation values. The absence of curriculum guidelines that explicitly make religious moderation the main learning framework also widens the gap between policy and implementation. As a result, educators in PAUD often have to formulate their approaches based on personal experience or limited references, without adequate systematic support.

The complexity of this issue deepens when considered in light of the diverse nature of PAUD institutions in Indonesia, particularly in regions with strong religious traditions. Pekalongan City presents a compelling case, characterized by a predominantly Muslim population and a well-established foundation in Islamic education. While there is a strong commitment to religious values, the city's dynamic social environment also necessitates a more inclusive and open approach to religious expression. In this context, mainstreaming religious moderation in early childhood education institutions is not merely a matter of curriculum design, but also involves value formation, institutional culture, and the capacity of teachers as agents of social learning. In early childhood education, the influence of teachers, peers, and parental figures is a significant source of social learning that shapes attitude preferences, including attitudes towards differences (Bandura, 1986).

This research is based on the framework of social learning theory developed by Albert Bandura. This theory explains that individuals, especially children, learn through observation, imitation, and behavioral models from the surrounding environment. In early childhood, children internalize values not only through explicit instruction but also by observing the behaviors of teachers, peers, and parents (Ladlia, 2010). Social models consistent with moderation values, such as tolerance, openness, and respect for differences, are key in shaping children's understanding and religious attitudes from an early age (Nurfaizah & Romlah, 2020). This theory also emphasizes

the importance of *reinforcement* and identification of role models, making teachers and the PAUD environment a medium for forming moderate religious character.

Previous studies can be mapped into several themes. *First*, the theme of habituation of moderate values in children's daily lives, as shown by Faniati & Padli (2024). *Second*, the theme of using story methods and social activities as a medium of tolerance, as studied by Agustiani (2019). *Third*, the theme of the effectiveness of interactive media in shaping peaceful and inclusive attitudes (Fahrudin Nisak et al., 2022). *Fourth*, the theme of curriculum exclusivity and the lack of representation of religious diversity (Anwar et al., 2020). *Fifth*, the theme of family involvement in strengthening multicultural values (Amalia et al. 2023). However, not many studies have explained in detail how the practice of learning religious moderation by child development, curriculum design, the role of teachers, interaction with the role of parents contribute to the success or failure of instilling religious moderation. This is where the contribution of this research lies.

The urgency of this research lies in the need to formulate a systematic and contextual approach to building religious moderation-based learning in PAUD institutions. The cultivation of religious values that are friendly, peaceful, and respectful of differences is becoming increasingly urgent amid the swift flow of digital information that is easily accessible to children (Chan, 2020). Meanwhile, through the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the government has established religious moderation as one of the national strategic policies. However, the policy still requires in-depth studies and implementation models based on the characteristics and needs of early childhood development (Asrori, 2016). In this context, this research not only offers theoretical contributions in enriching the discourse of early childhood education but also provides practical contributions for educators, policymakers, and parents in building a peaceful, open, and inclusive learning ecosystem from an early age.

As a researcher directly involved with the social context of education in Pekalongan, the researcher views that learning religious moderation in PAUD institutions needs to be placed as part of a long-term effort to form citizens with good religious awareness. Early childhood education is not just a stage of academic preparation, but the foundation for forming identity and perspective on the

surrounding environment. In this context, researchers position religious moderation not as additional material, but as the main framework in the learning process in early childhood. Researchers believe that values such as tolerance, justice, balance, and empathy will only be embedded if the learning process can present good models that children can imitate. Therefore, this study directs its focus on real practices in PAUD institutions by exploring how teachers, curriculum, social interactions, and parental support form a learning ecosystem that fosters moderate values.

This study aims to describe and analyze the practice of learning religious moderation in PAUD institutions in Pekalongan City. Specifically, this study aims to reveal how the concept of religious moderation is understood and practiced by teachers, learning approaches and strategies to support these values, and how the role of parents and the school's social environment strengthens or challenges the process. This research is expected to produce contextualized, operational, and replicable examples of religious moderation learning in other areas with similar characteristics.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach (Chubb et al., 2022). This approach was chosen to explore in depth how religious teachers live moderation learning, practiced in learning activities in PAUD, and interpreted by parents in the context of early childhood education in Pekalongan City. The phenomenological approach enables a comprehensive analysis of the subjective experiences that emerge in daily social-pedagogical processes in classrooms and school environments, and describes in detail the meanings formed through social interactions that influence children's religious views and attitudes. This research focuses on learning practices that contain moderation values, such as tolerance, empathy, cooperation, and acceptance of diversity. These are developed through learning strategies in four PAUD institutions with different characteristics (Alam et al., 2023). Through a phenomenological approach, researchers sought to deeply understand the subjective experiences experienced by teachers, children, and parents, considering the socio-cultural context in each PAUD institution. The meaning of the value of moderation that emerges in learning practices is observed

not as a separate phenomenon, but as part of the construction of social experiences that are alive and dynamic in the daily life of early childhood education.

This research involved various parties from four PAUD institutions in Pekalongan City: KB Labschool UIN KH Abdurrahman Wahid, TK Aisyiyah Qurrota A'yun, RA Masyitoh 06 Buaran, and TK Pembina West Pekalongan, which are known to actively implement religious moderation values in their learning activities. Eight teachers became prominent resource persons to reveal their learning practices and strategies. In addition, four school principals were also interviewed to understand the direction of the institution's policies and the institutional support provided for efforts to instill moderate values. To explore family perspectives, this research also involved four heads of parents' associations and four representatives of student guardians from each institution. Meanwhile, thirty children aged between 4 and 6 years were actively involved through classroom activities and simple discussions. The behavior of these children was carefully observed, especially in their interactions with peers and teachers, with special attention to the emergence of tolerant, empathic attitudes and openness to differences.

Various data collection methods were used to understand the practice and impact of learning religious moderation: a) Classroom Observation: The researcher conducted non-participant observation for four weeks. This observation focused on classroom learning: the activities undertaken, the teaching methods, and the interactions among the children; b) Interviews with Educators: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight early childhood educators; c) Parent interviews: structured interviews were conducted with parents of the children. The interviews aimed to look at the parents' perceptions of the importance of learning religious moderation in their children, as well as their observations of changes in their children's attitudes towards religious tolerance at home; d) Children's documentation/Journals: As part of the classroom activities, children were asked to participate in drawing, role-playing and journaling activities that reflected their understanding of religious diversity and moderation. These activities provided visual and textual data to analyze the children's understanding of the concepts taught.

Qualitative inquiry is inevitably shaped by the assumptions, identities, and social locations of those collecting and interpreting the data. Data analysis in this

study used the Miles and Huberman (1992) model, which includes three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification. These three stages occurred simultaneously and iteratively throughout the collection process until the final writing. Validation was done through negative case discussions, *member checking*, and cross-checking with learning documents.

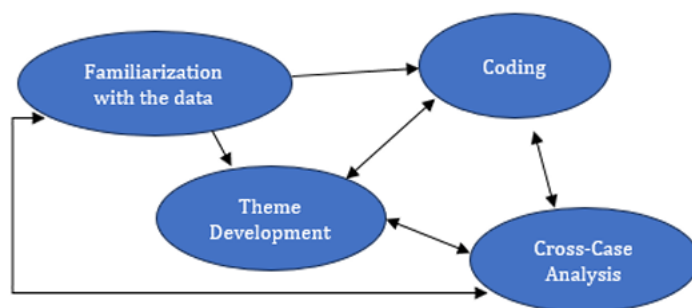


Figure 1. Data Analysis Process (Huberman, 1992)

The researcher repeatedly reviewed the interview transcripts, observation notes, and children's work to gain a complete understanding of the data. This process identified and tagged several key themes relating to learning religious moderation. These themes include respect for diversity, empathy development, national identity formation, and interfaith tolerance. Furthermore, the coded data were grouped into broader categories to illustrate how the national insight approach fosters religious moderation. The themes concerning the research questions were analyzed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Religious Moderation Learning Practices in PAUD Institutions in Pekalongan City

This study reveals various learning practices of religious moderation applied in four PAUD institutions in Pekalongan City, namely TK Pembina West Pekalongan, RA Masyitoh 06 Buaran, KB Labschool UIN KH Abdurrahman Wahid, and TK Aisyiyah Qurrota A'yun. Each institution shows diverse approaches and strategies, influenced by institutional character, ideological background, and teachers' capacity to interpret moderation values. This finding shows that religious moderation is not practiced as a single concept, but as a contextual response to local socio-religious dynamics.

In TK Pembina West Pekalongan, religious moderation is instilled through an approach based on national insight. Teachers actively integrate symbols of unity, such as national anthems, state symbols, and folktales that contain inclusive moral messages. One teacher stated, *"We often sing the song 'Satu Nusa, Satu Bangsa (One Homeland, One Nation)' every morning, so that children feel that even though we are different, we are all part of one big Indonesian family."* This encourages a sense of togetherness and tolerance between ethnicities and religions in the classroom. The teacher facilitates national values that do not conflict with religious diversity.

Meanwhile, RA Masyitoh 06 Buaran displays a traditional style of Islam based on the local culture of *Nahdliyyin*. Learning is done through exemplary stories of the Prophet and ritual practices juxtaposed with social values such as cooperation, respect for parents, and acceptance of differences. A teacher said, *"We do not only teach prayers, but also stories of the Prophet that teach compassion and respect for others."* Teachers play a central role as spiritual and cultural caregivers, with a compassionate approach and soothing religious narratives.

KB Labschool UIN KH Abdurrahman Wahid implements reflective learning strategies based on the principle of academic inclusiveness. Teachers encourage children to engage in simple discussions about differences, make symbolic observations of other religious practices, and foster empathy through collaborative activities. One teacher said, *"We once invited the children to watch a video of children from other religions praying, and then discussed it with light and empathetic language."* The teacher acts as an innovator who opens the space for dialogue from an early age, strengthening children's identification with peaceful and tolerant values.

TK Aisyiyah Qurrota A'yun emphasizes the formation of moderate morals through emotional touch and example. Learning is carried out using the method of moral stories, habituation of manners, and open dialogue that builds empathy. A teacher stated, *"We teach children to greet kindly, help friends, and apologize when they make mistakes. It is all part of the formation of moderate morals."* Teachers serve as behavioral models and emotional mentors for children. This approach shows that the value of moderation can grow naturally through consistent affective interactions.

The description of the learning practices of religious moderation in the four PAUD institutions shows that the approach is not uniform but adapted to the

institutional vision, the values embraced by educators, and the social context of the surrounding community. Each institution develops a different form of learning but has the same orientation, namely, shaping children’s religious attitudes that are inclusive, balanced, and tolerant. To clarify the comparison of the characteristics of each institution, a summary of religious moderation learning practices can be seen in the following table 1:

Table 1: Summary of Religious Moderation Learning Practices in Four PAUD Institutions

Early Childhood Institution	Religious Moderation Learning Practices	The teacher’s role	Moderation Value Emphasized
TK Pembina West Pekalongan	Singing the national anthem every morning, introducing the country’s symbol, and sharing inclusive folklore.	Encouraging the internalization of national values through learning activities and becoming a model of learning	Togetherness, tolerance
RA Masyitoh 06 Buaran	Reciting prophet stories, strengthening the value of cooperation and compassion in religious learning.	Guiding children in understanding balanced and friendly Islamic values.	Compassion, mutual respect
KB Labschool UIN KH Abdurrahman Wahid	Children are invited to observe the practice of other religions (through videos) and have simple discussions about differences.	Modeling behavior and developing children’s creativity while building social awareness through reflective learning experiences.	Empathy, openness
TK Aisyiyah Qurrota A’yun	Getting used to greeting, apologizing, and helping friends as part of moderate morals.	Modeling polite behavior and fostering children’s empathy through daily interactions.	Noble morals, balanced attitude

Table 1 shows the diversity of religious moderation learning practices implemented in each PAUD institution in Pekalongan City. Each institution. TK Pembina West Pekalongan, RA Masyitoh 06 Buaran, KB Labschool UIN KH Abdurrahman Wahid, and TK Aisyiyah Qurrota A’yun display distinctive and contextual approaches. All four move on different paths but are still oriented towards

a similar goal: shaping children's characters who are open, balanced, and respectful of differences.

The practice of moderation in TK Pembina is centered on strengthening national identity as the basis for a tolerant attitude; RA Masyitoh fosters moderation values through culturally friendly and familiar religious narratives; Labschool UIN instills moderate attitudes by building social reflection spaces from an early age, while TK Aisyiyah Qurrota A'yun emphasizes moral habituation and empathy in everyday life. Although different in form and method, all these practices show the same direction in instilling respect for diversity as part of the reality of children's lives from an early age.

In this whole process, the role of teachers occupies a central position. They are not only present as deliverers of learning materials, but also as figures who directly shape children's emotional and social experiences. Teachers play the role of role models, showing how values such as tolerance, empathy, and respect for differences can be brought to life in the daily life of the classroom. When teachers invite children to sing unity songs, read exemplary stories, initiate light discussions about diversity, or guide children to forgive each other, they build a foundation of moderate character through concrete actions that children easily understand.

This finding is in line with *Social Learning Theory* developed by Albert Bandura (1977), which states that the learning process in children not only takes place through direct instruction or verbal transmission from the teacher, but occurs intensely through observation, imitation, and social interaction. In the context of learning religious moderation in PAUD, children understand tolerant attitudes, empathy, and respect for differences not from lectures or orders alone, but through their involvement in meaningful daily interactions with teachers as model figures, and with peers as social mirrors (Chotimah et al., 2025). A classroom environment that presents a safe, warm, and inclusive emotional atmosphere is important for this social learning process.

When teachers display mutual respect, model moderate behavior in addressing differences, and respond to children's questions with patience and openness, children will capture and absorb these values as behaviors worthy of emulation. This process is reinforced by repetition and habituation in classroom

activities, for example, when children are invited to have light discussions about cultural differences or practice empathy through stories and role plays (Irvin, 2017). In other words, the internalization of religious moderation values in early childhood is more effective when transmitted indirectly through concrete and authentic social experiences.

This confirms that character learning at an early age, including religious moderation, requires the presence of teachers as consistent *role models*, not just material deliverers. As Bandura asserts, children learn through what they see, experience, and repeat; behaviors observed from respected and trusted figures are more likely to be imitated and become part of an individual's character. Therefore, in the context of ECD institutions, the quality of social relations and exemplary behavior demonstrated by teachers are key to the success of transformative moderation learning (Agarwal-Rangnath, 2021). These principles are evident in learning practices in the four ECD institutions that are the subject of this study. Observations and analysis show that religious moderation is not shaped by the formal curriculum alone, but through social dynamics that take place in classrooms where teachers act as direct examples, and children learn through meaningful interactions.

Through this contextualized and strategic learning practice, children show early signs of forming moderate attitudes that grow naturally. They begin to recognize differences without fear, empathize with friends with different backgrounds, and build inclusive social relations. In daily interactions, expressions such as helping each other regardless of religion, greeting warmly, or asking with genuine curiosity about the habits of different friends appear. Teachers noted a change in how children responded to differences from being passive or avoidant to being more open, communicative, and reflective. In some classes, children could even recall and relate moderation messages to concrete situations they experienced, such as sharing toys or resolving minor disputes peacefully. This shows that moderation values are embedded theoretically and begin to shape how children think and act daily. This positive response reinforces the belief that learning religious moderation, if done in a relevant and exemplary manner, can be a strong foundation in shaping children's character that is inclusive and oriented towards peaceful co-existence.

The practice of learning religious moderation in the four PAUD institutions cannot be understood only from the form of activities displayed, but also from how the activities open space for children to build social understanding in an affective and reflective manner (Adib, 2024). This reinforces the central premise that moderate education cannot be singular or uniform, but must be grounded in the cultural, social, and pedagogical contexts that are real for children (Albin-Clark, 2024). This result supports the direction and purpose of the research, which is to understand the practice of religious moderation in early childhood education in an applicable and contextual manner. The diversity of approaches found shows the flexibility of learning models that are responsive to the character of each institution. This finding also opens space for further discussion of learning strategies used by educators in strengthening the value of moderation in more depth.

Approaches and Learning Strategies for Promoting Religious Moderation in PAUD Institutions in Pekalongan City

Learning Approaches to Religious Moderation

Most PAUD institutions in Pekalongan City adopt an integrative thematic approach as the foundation for organizing religious moderation learning activities. This approach allows values such as tolerance, empathy, and mutual respect to be integrated into various daily themes. In this way, learning focuses on cognitive aspects and simultaneously strengthens children's affective and social dimensions. Themes such as family, culture, or environment become effective pedagogical spaces to instill values of togetherness and respect for diversity.

Although the thematic pattern is the primary reference, each institution also develops additional approaches that reflect its institutional identity, ideological orientation, and socio-cultural context. For example, at TK Pembina West Pekalongan, a nationality-based approach is a prominent feature. National identity is a starting point in fostering a spirit of unity and recognition of differences. National anthems, state symbols, and heroic stories are used to internalize inclusive values in national life. The teacher acts as a facilitator of nationalism that strengthens the sense of belonging to the nation and state, without negating the cultural and religious diversity in the classroom. RA Masyitoh 06 Buaran features a religious approach rooted in local Islamic traditions. According to the principal, children's character

building is done through stories of prophets, stories of local scholars, and the habituation of respect and courtesy in daily life. This approach is based on the principle of *ta'lim wa tarbiyah*, which emphasizes the balance between teaching and moral development. In practice, the teacher functions not only as a teacher but also as a caregiver who nurtures the spiritual dimension of children with a gentle, narrative, and loving approach.

KB Labschool UIN KH Abdurrahman Wahid applies a more reflective and inclusive approach. Children are encouraged to make observations, express thoughts, and build social awareness through light dialogue and customized visual media. The principal explained that it is important for children from an early age to get used to discussing, asking questions, and appreciating different points of view. The teacher in this context acts as a facilitator of thought, not merely a source of knowledge, but a companion in the process of children's social exploration. TK Aisyiyah Qurrota A'yun emphasizes an affection-based approach and strong role models. The principal calls it the 'heart approach', where interpersonal relationships are key in learning. Moderation values such as empathy, humility, and cooperation are not conveyed through verbal instructions, but are shaped through simple routines such as greeting, giving help, or apologizing. Teachers become role models who present these values in warm and emotionally close interactions with children.

This result confirms that although the integrative thematic approach is the general basis for learning religious moderation in PAUD, the practice shows diverse approaches. Nationality-based approaches, local religious traditions, social reflection, and affective exemplification are manifestations of the diversity of praxis in line with each institution's social and cultural realities.

The approach to learning religious moderation applied by each PAUD institution in Pekalongan City shows variations that reflect each institution's identity and pedagogical vision. Although all institutions refer to the integrative thematic approach as the basic framework, its implementation is colored by a distinctive contextual emphasis. To clarify the differences in these approaches, the following is a mapping of religious moderation learning approaches based on the characteristics of each institution:

Table 2. Religious Moderation Learning Approaches in Four PAUD Institutions in Pekalongan City

PAUD Institution	Learning Approach	Main Characteristics
TK Pembina West Pekalongan	Integrative thematic based on national insight	Linking national themes with the value of togetherness and tolerance. National songs, state symbols, and folktales are used as learning tools.
RA Masyitoh 06 Buaran	Integrative, thematic, based on religious-traditional	Uses local religious narratives (stories of prophets, saints) and habituation of polite attitudes to instill the value of compassion and respect for differences.
KB Labschool UIN KH Abdurrahman Wahid	Reflective-intellectual integrative thematic	Provides space for social reflection through videos, light discussions, and observations; develops children's critical thinking skills and empathy.
TK Aisyiyah Qurrota A'yun	Integrative thematic based on affection and exemplification	Emphasizes emotional closeness, habits of courtesy, and exemplary teachers in daily interactions to build moderate morals.

The findings underline that the approach to learning religious moderation in PAUD institutions is not uniform, but develops contextually according to institutional culture and social background. The integrative thematic approach proves flexible in accommodating diverse values as it allows teachers to link moderation messages with various themes of children's lives that are concrete and close to their experiences.

Theoretically, this finding strengthens the main principle in Social Learning Theory proposed by Albert Bandura (1977): children learn through observation, imitation, and meaningful social interaction. In moderated learning, the thematic approach allows children to engage in experiences that touch both affective and cognitive aspects. As role models, teachers are key in shaping children's understanding of values such as empathy, tolerance, and respect for differences (Daniel, 2019). Furthermore, the diversity of approaches that emerged from each institution shows the pedagogical flexibility that is adaptive to local values and the needs of learners (Prabowo, 2022). For example, the prominent nationalism-based approach in Pembina Kindergarten shows that nationality can be a practical entry point to build collective awareness of diversity. Meanwhile, the religious-cultural

approach at RA Masyitoh shows that culturally familiar religious narratives have the emotional power to shape moderate attitudes in children.

Learning strategies for promoting religious moderation

The learning strategies applied in PAUD institutions in Pekalongan City show a diversity of forms but have a similar goal: instilling the values of religious moderation through an approach close to the world of children. The process of value internalization is not done verbally or instructionally, but through a series of strategies that activate children's emotional and social experiences. From the research results, four main strategies are dominantly applied by educators in the field.

First, playing while learning is the primary basis of learning activities. Play activities are developed in a structured way to insert social messages and values of diversity. In many institutions, teachers organize role-playing games that present scenarios of multicultural life, such as children helping friends of different religions or cultures. Games such as putting together a puzzle of national symbols or mini-dramas about folk tales and religious figures are used to instill symbolic meanings such as justice, unity, and empathy in a natural and fun way.

Secondly, *modeling* strategy or direct exemplification is an important foundation uniting all learning practices. Teachers convey information and appear as figures who demonstrate moderate behavior. In practice, teachers show how to resolve conflicts calmly, treat all children equally, and respond to children's curiosity about differences with openness. This attitude is consistently observed, such as in TK Aisyiyah Qurrota A'yun, which is exemplary in greeting and treating all children without discrimination, and in RA Masyitoh, which practices the delivery of prophet stories with a love and peace approach.

Third, experiential learning strategies encourage children to reflect on the social reality they encounter. At KB Labschool UIN KH Abdurrahman Wahid, teachers utilize interactive videos, observations of social activities, or simple discussions about daily events to broaden children's perspectives. Through this process, children recognize the diversity conceptually and interpret it as a part of life that must be respected. This strategy facilitates empathy by bringing children to "feel" and "see" from different perspectives, strengthening their tolerant and inclusive attitudes.

Fourth, the strategy of habituation of moderation values is applied in daily routines through consistent but straightforward actions. Teachers build a classroom atmosphere that encourages children to share, wait their turn, greet politely, or help friends in difficulty. In Pembina Kindergarten, this habituation is associated with national symbols, such as singing the national song before learning or respecting the image of *Garuda Pancasila*. At RA Masyitoh, habituation is carried out through practicing praying together, speaking manners, and respecting the teacher. Through continuous repetition, children absorb these values as part of their daily habits that shape their character.

This finding shows that the learning strategies used have strong transformative power because they are based on the real world of children. Each strategy targets children's direct and emotional experiences as the primary medium for value formation. This reinforces the assumption in Social Learning Theory, developed by Bandura, that children learn through observation and interaction, not just direct instruction. With strategies designed in a participatory and reflective manner, teachers have created educational spaces that allow the value of moderation to grow authentically and contextually in the lives of PAUD children.

To provide a more structured picture of the variety of strategies, the following is a classification of the four main strategies applied in learning religious moderation in PAUD institutions based on research data:

Table 2. Learning Strategies for Promoting Religious Moderation in PAUD Institutions in Pekalongan City

Learning Strategy	Description of Practice	Institution
Playing while learning	Multicultural themed role play, state symbol puzzle, mini drama of interfaith figures to instill values of justice and empathy	TK Pembina West Pekalongan
Modeling	Teachers demonstrate fairness, respect for differences, and peaceful conflict resolution; examples from Aisyiyah and Ra Masyitoh kindergartens.	TK Aisyiyah Qurrota A'yun; RA Masyitoh 06 Buaran
Direct experience	Discussion after watching diversity videos, observation of social activities, and stories of different experiences to build empathy (KB Labschool)	KB Labschool UIN K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid

Learning Strategy	Description of Practice	Institution
Value habituation	Politeness routines, praying together, singing national songs, respecting state symbols, and manners in daily interactions	TK Pembina, RA Masyitoh

The religious moderation learning strategies implemented in PAUD institutions in Pekalongan City reflect a diversity of approaches grounded in the real world of children. Each strategy is designed to transfer knowledge and create learning experiences that enable children to recognize, understand, and practice moderate values such as tolerance, respect for differences, and togetherness in social life. A thematic analysis of each strategy shows how the pedagogical approach, children's involvement, and the potential for forming religious attitudes combine in daily classroom activities.

The strategy of playing while learning occupies a central position in early childhood learning. Activities such as role-playing, puzzles of national symbols, and mini dramas about cross-cultural figures enrich children's imaginations and introduce national values and diversity naturally. In this process, children are not directly directed to understand specific values but instead given the space to experience and construct their own meanings through interactions in play. This approach is constructivist and holistic, where each child is free to interpret social roles with flexible guidance from the teacher (Denton et al., 2025).

The Role of Parents in Strengthening Religious Moderation Values

This research shows that the success of learning religious moderation in PAUD institutions cannot be separated from the role of the family, especially parents, as reinforcers of values. Parents serve as key agents in shaping children's inclusive and tolerant religious attitudes through everyday interactions within the home environment (Dewi & Adnyani, 2023). Findings from the four PAUD institutions in Pekalongan City, i.e., TK Pembina West Pekalongan, RA Masyitoh 06 Buaran, KB Labschool UIN KH Abdurrahman Wahid, and TK Aisyiyah Qurrota A'yun, reveal that the contribution of parents is decisive in the process of internalizing moderate values. Some parents actively assisted their children in understanding social and religious diversity. At RA Masyitoh, one mother shared that she regularly engages her child in conversations about friends from different

religious backgrounds. These discussions are conducted using gentle language and are intended to cultivate respect for others.

“... I often talk to my children about their friends who worship differently. I tell them that everyone has their own way of praying, and what matters most is that we remain kind to everyone....” (Interview with parent, RA Masyitoh, May 2024).

The same thing was also found at KB Labschool UIN KH Abdurrahman Wahid, where parents responded to learning themes communicated by teachers. Through photos of extended families that reflect diversity, parents guide children to recognize that differences in beliefs are not obstacles to loving each other.

“... We are often informed about our child’s weekly theme. When the theme is about tolerance or culture, my wife and I make a point to discuss it at home. For example, we show photos of our extended family members with different beliefs, or I share stories about public figures who represent diversity. From an early age, our children learn that being different is normal....” (Interview with parent, KB Labschool, June 2024).

This finding illustrates that the cultivation of moderation values occurs not only within the school environment but is also nurtured through warm and reflective interpersonal communication within the family. When schools and parents share a common understanding and alignment of values, character formation in children becomes both harmonious and mutually reinforcing. Furthermore, parent associations or guardian communication forums function as important spaces for dialogue among parents in supporting moderate learning. At TK Pembina West Pekalongan, the parent association serves as a platform for sharing experiences, discussing strategies for fostering tolerance in children, and facilitating communication between the school and families. According to the head of the association, one of their regular discussion sessions focuses on how to respond to children’s increasingly critical questions regarding religious or cultural differences.

“... We once discussed how to respond when children ask about their friends who follow different religions. We shared our experiences, and the teacher also offered guidance. That way, parents don’t feel alone in addressing these questions...” (Interview with Head of Parent Association, TK Pembina, May 2024)

The existence of such discussion spaces offers both social and psychological support for parents who may feel uncertain or confused about how to explain

diversity to their children. Moreover, the school's open and non-judgmental approach fosters a sense of trust and comfort, encouraging more collaborative engagement with families. However, variations in parental involvement remain evident. At TK 'Aisyiyah Qurrota A'yun, for example, some parents express selectiveness toward learning materials that reference other religions. According to teachers at the institution, such resistance typically stems from a lack of understanding or underlying concerns, but it can be gradually addressed through patient dialogue and sustained, communicative engagement.

"...Some parents are not fully open, for example, when we talk about other religions, they express concern. But if we explain things gradually, and their child shows interest and enjoyment, they usually come to understand." (Interview with teacher, TK 'Aisyiyah Qurrota A'yun, May 2024)

This finding indicates that strategies to reinforce moderate learning at home cannot be homogenized from one family to another. Teachers need to build personal relationships with parents and create bridges of understanding through humanist and contextual approaches (Primary Education Department, Uludag University, Bursa, Turkey et al., 2016). Overall, the results of this study show that parents act as reinforcers and filters of values obtained by children from schools. Daily interactions at home become a space for practicing the values of tolerance, empathy, and respect for differences. When parents support the learning process in schools, religious moderation values are more likely to be fully internalized in the child's personality.

From the perspective of Social Learning Theory, developed by Albert Bandura, parental involvement is part of the social system where children observe and imitate behavior. Bandura explains that children learn not only from instructions, but also from the social models around them. In this case, parents serve as primary models at home. Children will observe and imitate these behaviors in response to their social environment when they demonstrate an open, welcoming attitude towards differences and respect for religious diversity (Bigler & Liben, 2007). This process is reinforced by positive feedback provided by parents, such as praise, hugs, or verbal reinforcement, so that the tolerant behavior shown by children will continue to be repeated and become a habit. Consistency between learning patterns at school and attitudes modeled at home strengthens the value internalization

process. Children do not experience value confusion because they find that teachers and parents show similar attitudes and responses to diversity. This synergy is an important foundation in instilling the values of religious moderation deeply and sustainably in the lives of young children.

CONCLUSIONS

This study demonstrates that religious moderation education in PAUD institutions plays a vital role in shaping children's inclusive and tolerant religious attitudes. Through developmentally appropriate strategies, such as learning through playing, teacher role-modeling, direct experiential learning, and the habituation of values in daily routines, religious moderation can be effectively internalized. Children begin to exhibit awareness of religious and cultural diversity in their surroundings. Activities such as guided discussions, storytelling, and peer collaboration nurture empathy, peaceful conflict resolution, and mutual respect.

The success of this internalization process is closely linked to parental involvement. Parents reinforce the values of moderation through warm communication and reflective dialogue at home, making the home environment a critical complement to school-based learning.

This study contributes to the broader discourse on the intersection of early childhood education, moderate religious practice, and the cultivation of social character. It provides empirical insights for integrating inclusive Islamic and national values into children's learning experiences and offers a foundation for developing humanistic and peace-oriented educational policies.

Based on the findings, it is recommended that PAUD institutions consistently embed religious moderation principles into their curricula. Teachers should be supported through ongoing professional development that promotes reflective, contextual, and socially responsive pedagogies. Moreover, synergy between schools and families must be strengthened to ensure value reinforcement across both domains. Educational policies should also create space for innovative learning models that cultivate tolerance, cooperation, and respect for diversity from an early age.

Ultimately, this research affirms that early childhood education serves as a strategic foundation for fostering a peaceful, inclusive, and civil society. Through inclusive learning experiences, children come to understand diversity as a social reality and embrace it as a shared value, positioning PAUD as a vital space for developing moderate religious attitudes and preparing future generations for life in a pluralistic world.

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