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# INTERNALIZING RELIGIOUS MODERATION THROUGH ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION: A VALUE-ECOSYSTEM PERSPECTIVE WITHIN INDONESIA'S MERDEKA CURRICULUM

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## Abstract

This study examines the internalization of religious moderation through Islamic Religious Education (PAI) within Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum from a value-ecosystem perspective. Using a qualitative single-case study at SD Plus IGM Palembang, data were generated through teacher interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis and analyzed through deductive–inductive coding. Findings show that national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and accommodation of local culture were manifested to varying degrees, while humanity and justice emerged as complementary ethical values. Internalization occurred through contextual and collaborative learning, project-based activities, teacher mediation and role-modeling, and school-based reinforcement. Local-cultural accommodation was observed through learning that connected religious respect with Palembang traditions, while project-based learning engaged students with national commitment, tolerance, and non-violence. Teachers identified instructional resources, pedagogical guidance, family and digital environments as relevant conditions, although the latter were not independently examined. The article advances a value ecosystem perspective that explains internalization as relational alignment and sometimes misalignment among curriculum, teacher mediation, learning activities, and school practices. The evidence supports context-specific interpretations of educational processes, not causal claims or proof of durable attitudinal change.

**Keywords**: Religious Moderation; Islamic Religious Education; Value Ecosystem. Merdeka Curriculum; Elementary Education

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## INTRODUCTION

Religious moderation has become an important educational concern in Indonesia because elementary schools introduce children to social diversity while helping them form religious and civic dispositions (Muis, 2026; Mulyana, 2023). Within Islamic Religious Education (PAI) the challenge is not merely to define those values but to help pupils encounter and enact them in age-appropriate interactions. Studies of elementary Islamic education and participatory classroom practice suggest that moderation requires more than the presentation of normative concepts (Fauyan et al., 2026a; Ibda et al., 2024: Sitohang et al, 2024).

The Merdeka Curriculum creates an important setting for addressing this challenge. Its Islamic Religious Education and Character Education learning outcomes connect religious understanding to moral conduct, respectful relation, and students' experiences (Rois et al., 2027; Syofyan et al., 2024). However, curricular flexibility is an opportunity rather than evidence of enactment. Teachers must select examples, design dialogue, respond to conflict, and connect classroom messages with everyday schools practices (Arif et al., 2026; Hanafi et al., 2026).. Research on curriculum reform and elementary school teacher readiness shows that local teaching conditions matter for such implementation (Amalia et al., 2024; Sofyan et al., 2024).

Previous scholarship has documented several relevant strands of research, including religious moderation content in PAI and school curricula (Muis, 2026; Mulyana, 2023; Shaleh et al., 2024), reflective and participatory approaches knowledge (Saepudin et al., 2023; Sihotang et al., 2024a), project-based learning and character formation (Nur Hakim et al., 2024; Rifki, et al., 2024), and school culture as setting for the habituation of moderation values (Minhaji et al., 2025; Mustafida et al., 2025; Syarifah et al., 2025). These studies are valuable, but they do not by themselves explain how curriculum, teacher interpretation, pupil activities, and school routines become connected or disconnected in "one everyday primary school case." The research problem is thus one of educational translation how formal values become visible and where the process remains fragmented.

To address this problem, this article develops a values-ecosystem perspective as an analytical lens rather than an independently tested theory. The term denotes the relational configuration through which formal curricular opportunities, teacher mediation, classroom task, and school based reinforcement support or limit the expression of moderation values. It also permit attention to uneven enactment, such as a value that is prominent in one grade but difficult to identify elsewhere. This focus contributes a process-oriented account of moderation wthitin primary level PAI instead of equating the presence of moderation language in teaching materials with demontrable pupil transformation.

The study asks (1) How are the four religious moderation indicators manifested through PAI learning and school practice at SD Plus IGM Palembang? (2) How do curricular opportunities, teacher mediation, pedagogical activities, and school routines enable or constrain


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these manifestations, including the conditions identified by teachers? (3) What theoretically and practically defensible implications can be drawn from this bounded case? The analysis contributes a transparent distinction between observed educational manifestation, teachers' accounts, and recommendations requiring further investigation.

Religious moderation is understood here as a balanced orientation toward religious commitment and constructive engagement within a plural society, not as a synonym for tolerance alone or simply as an anti extremism intervention (Ibda et al., 2024; Supriadi et al., 2026). National commitment refers to engangement with Indonesian's civic consensus, tolerance concern respect for differences, non violence favors peaceful and non coercive relations, and accommodation of local culture concern engangement with local traditions compatible with religious commitments (Rois et al., 2027; Syofyan et al., 2024). These four dimensions served as a priori analytic categories. Humanity and justice, when present in the case material, were coded as complementary ethical values rather than portrayed as new official policy indicators.

Internalization is used in carefully delimited educational sense, values are introduced, interpreted, modeled, practiced, and reinforced through repeated learning and interaction (Firdaus et al., 2026; Siregar et al., 2025),. Observable respect, cooperation, reflective discussion, learning products, and school routines provide indications of opportunities for such internalization. They cannot, on their own, establish deeply held attitudes, permanent identity chage, or causal effects. The cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of PAI therefore as sensitizing interpretive categories, not only as independently measured outcome (Masturin, 2024; Saepudin et al., 2023).

The proposed value ecosystem comprises four empirically accessible components: (a) curricular space for contextual learning; (b) teacher's interpretation and exemplification of moderation; (c) pedagogical task and interactions in which pupils engage with the values; and (d) reinforcement through school routines and social relationships. These components are analytically connected but need not be equally strong or coordinated. Family and digital contexts were also considered as wider environments when described by teachers, they were not directly investigated as independent explanatory variables. The framework directs attention both to connections among components and discontinuities that may restrict consistent enactment across teachers and grades.

## METHODS

This study employed a qualitative single-case study design to investigate how religious moderation values were internalized through Islamic Religious Education (Pendidikan Agama Islam, PAI) within the Merdeka Curriculum at SD Plus IGM Palembang, Indonesia. The school constituted the bounded case, delimited by institutional setting, subject area, curricular context,


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and the second semester of the 2025/2026 academic year. The unit of analysis was the enactment of religious moderation through curriculum implementation, teacher mediation, classroom interaction, and school-based practices. Three PAI teachers were purposively selected as information-rich participants representing different grade levels: NA (Grades 1–3), M (Grades 4–5), and NK (Grade 6). The study was intended to provide an in-depth and context-sensitive understanding of religious moderation practices rather than statistical generalization.

Data were collected in 2026 through semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis. Interviews explored teachers' understanding of religious moderation, instructional strategies, implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, role-modeling practices, and challenges in integrating moderation values into PAI learning. Observations focused on teacher–student interactions, student participation and collaboration, and practices reflecting the four nationally recognized indicators of religious moderation: national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and accommodation of local culture. Relevant curriculum documents, lesson plans, teaching materials, and other instructional artifacts were examined to identify how these values were represented in planned and enacted learning. The use of multiple evidence sources enabled methodological triangulation by comparing teachers' accounts, observed classroom practices, and documentary evidence.

Data were analyzed using a deductive–inductive thematic approach. The four official indicators of religious moderation served as initial sensitizing categories, while humanity and justice emerged inductively as complementary ethical categories. Interview, observation, and documentary data were coded, refined, categorized, and compared across sources to identify convergence, complementarity, and inconsistency in how moderation values were translated into curriculum implementation, pedagogical practices, classroom relationships, and school reinforcement. Trustworthiness was strengthened through source and method triangulation, cross-participant comparison, attention to contradictory evidence, and the researcher's non-participant and reflexive stance. Formal permission was obtained from the school principal, and the three teachers participated voluntarily with informed consent. Participant identities were anonymized using codes, and pupils' confidentiality was protected by excluding personally identifiable information from the dataset and reporting. Where student participation involved direct data collection, appropriate parental or guardian consent and child assent should also be reported in accordance with institutional and journal ethical requirements.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that the internalization of religious moderation through Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at SD Plus IGM Palembang was enacted through interconnected curricular opportunities, teacher mediation, classroom interaction, and school-based reinforcement. Evidence from three PAI teachers (NK, M, and NA) showed that these


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manifestations varied across grade levels and instructional contexts. Rather than being transmitted solely through explicit religious instruction, moderation values were pedagogically translated into contextual learning activities, interpersonal interactions, and school practices. From a value-ecosystem perspective, this process reflects the interaction of curriculum, teacher agency, student participation, and institutional practices. However, these manifestations should be interpreted as opportunities for value internalization rather than evidence of sustained behavioral transformation.

Using the four official indicators of religious moderation—national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and accommodation of local culture—the analysis identified all four within the case, although with varying levels of empirical support. Tolerance was the most consistently observed, particularly through respectful dialogue and collaborative learning. National commitment appeared in activities related to civic values and school ceremonies, while non-violence was reflected in teacher-guided peaceful communication and respectful responses. Accommodation of local culture was most visible in NA's lower-grade instruction through the integration of Palembang clothing, dances, and regional foods into contextual learning. These variations suggest that religious moderation was enacted differently across instructional settings rather than uniformly institutionalized across grade levels.

**Table 1.** Analytical Categories, Manifestations, and Empirical Evidence of Religious Moderation

| Analytical Category | Key Manifestation | Evidence & Interpretive Limit |
|---|---|---|
| Tolerance | Respectful dialogue, collaborative learning, and appreciation of differences | Observation, NK, Feb. 9, 2026. Indicates observed interaction, not independently measured attitude change. |
| National commitment | Learning linked to civic values, national identity, and school ceremonies | Observation, M, Feb. 10, 2026. Evidence is limited to specific learning activities. |
| Non-violence | Peaceful communication, respectful responses, and non-aggressive interaction | Observation, NA, Mar. 13, 2026. Does not establish behavioral consistency beyond the observed setting. |
| Local-cultural accommodation | Integration of Palembang clothing, dances, and regional foods into learning | Observation, NA, Mar. 12, 2026. Practice was not equally documented across grade levels. |
| Humanity and justice *(emergent theme)* | Fairness, empathy, mutual consideration, and respectful peer treatment | Observation, M, Feb. 10, 2026. Treated as complementary ethical values, not official moderation indicators. |


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| Analytical Category | Key Manifestation | Evidence & Interpretive Limit |
|---|---|---|
| Project-based expression | Student posters representing tolerance, national commitment, and non-violence | M, Grades 4–5. Artifact provenance requires verification; products alone cannot demonstrate sustained attitude change. |

As presented in Table 1, religious moderation was manifested through multiple pedagogical pathways rather than a single instructional strategy. Tolerance was particularly visible in interpersonal interactions, whereas national commitment was associated with civic oriented activities, non violence with peaceful communication, and local culture accommodation with culturally contextualized instruction. The additional themes of humanity and justice emerged from observed expressions of fairness, empathy, and consideration for others. These values provide an ethical foundation that may support moderation related practices, but they should not be related as separate official indicators. Maintaining this conceptual distinction is important because religious moderation, as articulated in the national policy framework, encompasses four established indicators, while other ethical dispositions may function as complementary educational expressions.

The differentiated manisfestation also highlight the central role of teachers as mediators between policy oriented values and classroom practices. NA's instruction for younger students emphasized familiar cultural representations and concrete examples of respectful conduct, enabling abstract principles to be introduced through experiences appropriate to early elementary development. In contrast, M's instructional approach in Grade 4-5 incorporated a reported project based poster activity through which students represented moderation related values in tangible learning products. NK's Grade 6 activities emphasized dialogue, cooperation, and respectful interpersonal engagement. These differences suggest that teachers interpreted and enacted religious moderation through pedagogical approaches adapted to the characteristic of their respective students. Such variation should not be interpreted as evidence that one teacher or instructional strategy was more effective than outcome measurements.

From a theoretical standpoint, these findings support an understanding of religious moderation internalization as a process of educational translation, in which curricular principles are reconstructed into meaningful and developmentally appropiate learning experiences. The Merdeka Curriculum provides opportunities for contextual and participatory instruction, while teachers determine how particular values are introduced discussed, and practiced in cllassroom situation. This interpretation corresponds with previous scholarship emphasizing reflective pedagogy, contextual learning, and participatory approaches in religious moderation education (Criollo-C et al., 2024; Saepudin et al., 2023). However, the present study extends this pedagogical discussion by considering how classroom practices are situated within a broader


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configuration of curricular opportunities, teacher mediation, school routines, and contextual influences.

The relationships among these components are synthesized in Figure 1 through an integrated project map developed from the thematic interpretation of three teachers informants. The map illustrates the analytical connections between the Merdeka Curriculum, teacher mediated learning experiences, religious moderation values, and school-based reinforcement.

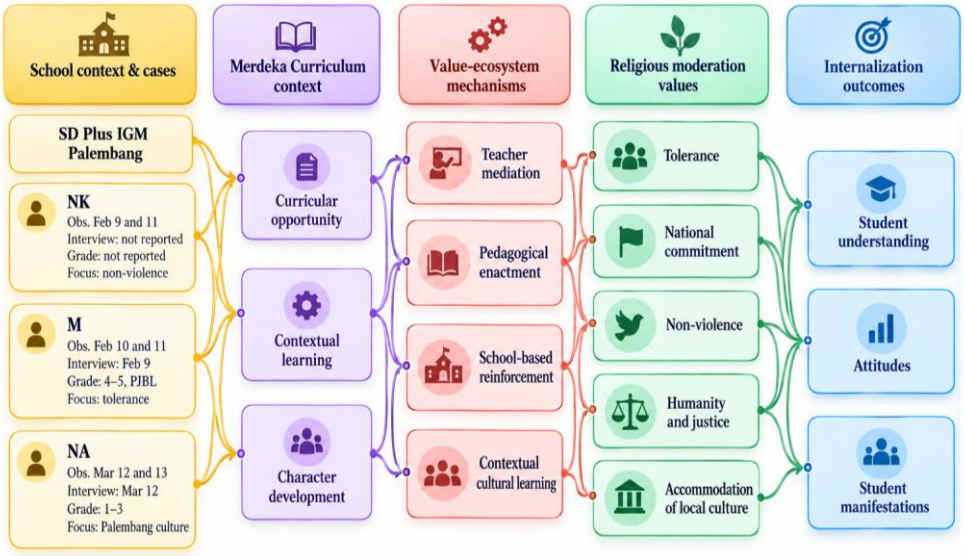


**Figure 1.** Integrated Project Map of Religious Moderation Internalization through Islamic Religious Education

Figure 1 illustrates the interconnected of religious moderation internalization within the single school case. NK' emphasized tolerance and non violence through respectful interactions, M integrated moderation values through project based learning and NA contextualized these values through Palembang's local traditions. Together, these practice highlight teacher mediation, pedagogical implementation, cultural contextualization, and school reinforcement. However, the map represents an interpretative synthesis rather than evidence of causal relationship or consistent school-wide implementation.

The interpretation provides the conceptual foundation for understanding religious moderation through a value ecosystem perspective, emphasizing relationship among curricular expectations, teacher mediation, classroom activities, social interactions, and school routines. Moderation values become educationally meaningful when students encounter, discuss, and practice them through teacher guided dialogue,


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collaborative learning, civic ceremonies, and cultural activities. However, these experiences do not necessarily demonstrate sustained internalization.

The value ecosystem perspective explains both the alignment and discontinuity of moderation practices. While interconnected educational components may reinforce moderation value, inconsistent implementation can fragment these opportunities. In this case, tolerance was evident across classroom interaction, whereas local cultural acommodation was more prominent in NA's instrruction. Thus, the presence of moderation practices does not necessarily indicate a fully schoolwide ecosystem (Mustafida et al., 2025; Sihotang et al., 2024). School ceremonies and activities further supported national commitment, collective responsibility, and respectful interactions (Observation, M, February 11, 2026). Nevertheless, the evidence does not confirm systematic integration of all moderation indicators across the school. Accordingly, the value ecosystem model serves as an analytical framework for understanding observed relationship and potential discontinuities rather than proof of a fully functioning institutional mechanism.

**Table 2.** Value-Ecosystem Components, Empirical Manifestations, and Interpretive Boundaries

| Value-Ecosystem Component | Key Manifestation | Interpretive Boundary |
|---|---|---|
| Curricular opportunity | Curriculum flexibility enabled contextual and participatory PAI learning. | Based on teacher accounts; no systematic policy-implementation audit was conducted. |
| Teacher mediation | NA integrated local culture; M used project-based activities; NK facilitated respectful dialogue and collaboration. | Practices varied across teachers, and observation coverage was unequal. |
| Pedagogical enactment | Classroom discussion, cooperative activities, contextual examples, and student poster production. | Participation and task completion do not independently demonstrate sustained value internalization. |
| School-based reinforcement | Civic ceremonies, institutional routines, and shared school activities. | Consistency across the whole school was not independently established. |
| Local-cultural contextualization | Palembang cultural elements were incorporated into learning about diversity and respect. | Most clearly documented in NA's instructional context. |
| Family and digital environments | Teachers identified possible influences from family interaction and online religious content. | Based mainly on teacher reports; family practices and students' digital experiences were not directly investigated. |

Table 2 illustrates the value ecosystem as interconnected yet distinct educational components, encompassing curricular opportunities, teacher mediation, pedagogical enactment,


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school routines, and local cultural contextualization. These components create opportunities for students to encounter and practice moderation values, although their individual presence does not guarantee ecosystem coherence.

Teachers identified curricular flexibility as supporting contextual learning while limited technical guidance, training, and instructional resources potentially constrained implementation. These findings emphasize the importance of teacher readiness and institutional support in value oriented education (Criollo-C et al., 2024; Saepudin et al., 2023). Teachers also perceived family environments and digital platforms as potential influences on students' religious understanding (Azman et al., 2025; Joseph et al., 2026). However, these perceptions were addressed through informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality and cannot establish causal relationships (Syamsuni et al., 2025).

The findings suggest several educational implications. Curricular objectives should integrate the four official moderation indicators through contextual learning, structured dialogue, and respectful interactions, consistent with the Merdeka Curriculum. Teacher professional development should strengthen collaboration may reinforce moderation values through school routines and civic participation. These recommendations remain conceptual rather than experimentally validated intervemtions.

The study contributes a value ecosystem perspective that distinguishes intended values in curricular policy, enacted values in educational practices, and internalized values requiring evidence of sustained students and behavior. The findings primarly document intended and enacted values, highlighting potential pathways toward internalization without demonstrating their long-item outcomes.

The study has limitations, as the internalization of religious moderation values remains largely dependent on teachers' understanding, creativiity, and initiative in contextualizing learning materials, while pedagogical support and professional development opportunities still need to be strengthened. Therefore, future research is recommended to examine the contribution of teachers' pedagogical competence, continuous professional development, and institutional support to the consistency and sustainbility of religious moderation values internalization in Islamic Religious Education.

## CONCLUSION

This study shows that, within the bounded case of SD Plus IGM Palembang, the internalization of religious moderation through PAI under the Merdeka Curriculum emerged through interactions among curricular opportunity, teacher mediation, pedagogical enactment, and school-based reinforcement. The four official indicators of religious moderation national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and accommodation of local culture, were manifested to


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varying degrees in classroom and school practices. Empirical examples included the integration of religious respect and Palembang cultural traditions in Grades 1–3 and project-based learning in Grades 4–5 through which students produced posters addressing national commitment, tolerance, and non-violence. These findings document educational manifestations of value internalization rather than stable or longitudinal changes in students' attitudes or identities.

The article's scholarly contribution is a bounded value ecosystem interpretation of how curricular opportunity, teacher mediation, pupil activities, and school reinforcement connect and sometimes fail to connect, in the internalization of religious moderation. Strengthening those connections is a plausible design principle for PAI, but its efficacy requires further testing. The limitations of the available corpus and the need to verify its ethical and chronological documentation are explicit conditions for final editiorial submission.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

AI serving as the corresponding author, was responsible for conceptualizing the study, developing the research methodology, collecting and analyzing the data, drafting the manuscript, and managing correspondence with the journal. IW contributed to the theoretical framework, research supervision, and critical revision of the manuscript. WI contributed to data analysis, interpretation of findings, and manuscript review. AO contributed to data validation, strengthening the discussion, and reviewing the final manuscript. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript. The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest related to this research. All the writers, agreed to the final version of the paper and say there are no problems, with the way this study is being shared.

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