

Pedagogies of Pluralism: Teacher Agency in Fostering Religious Moderation among Multifaith Students

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Abstract

Keywords:

Religious moderation;
Teacher agency;
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interfaith harmony;
civic pedagogy;
inclusive schooling.

Indonesia's religious diversity presents both a national asset and a potential source of social tension, particularly in educational settings where pluralism must be actively navigated. Despite growing scholarly interest in religious moderation, empirical research on how teachers operationalize these values in multi-religious vocational schools remains limited. This study investigates the pedagogical strategies and institutional roles teachers employ to strengthen religious moderation among students from diverse faith backgrounds. Employing a qualitative case study design, data were gathered through in-depth interviews, participant observation, focus group discussions, and document analysis involving school leaders, teachers, students, and community members across two public vocational schools in North Sumatra. The findings reveal that teachers foster moderation by embedding four core values—national commitment, religious tolerance, non-violence, and local cultural accommodation—into curricular instruction, extracurricular programs, and daily school routines. Two complementary models emerged: an accommodation-based approach prioritizing habitual coexistence and cultural kinship, and a civic-Pancasila-based model grounded in structured character education and project-based learning. Crucially, the study demonstrates that religious moderation thrives not as a standalone subject but as a lived, contextual practice sustained by teacher exemplarity and supportive school policies. These findings provide actionable implications for educational policymakers and curriculum developers aiming to institutionalize inclusive pedagogies that nurture interfaith harmony and civic cohesion in pluralistic secondary education.

Abstrak

Kata kunci:
moderasi beragama;
agensi guru; pendidikan
kejuruan; kerukunan
antarumat beragama;
pedagogi kewargaan;
pendidikan inklusif

Keragaman agama di Indonesia merupakan aset nasional sekaligus potensi sumber ketegangan sosial, khususnya di lingkungan pendidikan yang menuntut pengelolaan pluralisme secara aktif. Meski minat akademik terhadap moderasi beragama terus meningkat, penelitian empiris mengenai bagaimana guru mengoperasionalkan nilai-nilai tersebut di sekolah kejuruan multiajama masih terbatas. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengkaji strategi pedagogis dan peran institusional guru dalam memperkuat moderasi beragama di kalangan siswa dari latar belakang keyakinan berbeda. Menggunakan desain studi kasus kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, diskusi kelompok terfokus, dan analisis dokumen yang melibatkan pimpinan sekolah, guru, siswa, dan tokoh masyarakat di dua SMK negeri di Sumatera Utara. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa guru memperkuat moderasi dengan mengintegrasikan empat nilai inti—komitmen kebangsaan, toleransi beragama, anti-kekerasan, dan akomodasi budaya lokal—ke dalam minat pembelajaran, ekstrakurikuler, dan rutinitas sekolah sehari-hari. Muncul dua model komplementer: pendekatan berbasis akomodasi yang mengutamakan koeksistensi habitual dan kekeluargaan budaya, serta model berbasis kewargaan-Pancasila yang bertumpu pada pendidikan karakter terstruktur dan pembelajaran berbasis proyek. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa moderasi beragama paling efektif ketika diwujudkan sebagai praktik hidup yang kontekstual, didukung oleh keteladanan guru dan kebijakan sekolah yang inklusif. Temuan ini memberikan implikasi strategis bagi pembuat kebijakan dan pengembang kurikulum dalam menginstitutionalisasi pedagogi inklusif yang memelihara kerukunan antarumat beragama dan kohesi kewargaan di pendidikan menengah pluralistik.

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INTRODUCTION

Religious diversity in Indonesian secondary education represents both a vital social asset and a potential catalyst for polarization when differences are poorly managed (Amin & Ritonga, 2024; Bazzi, 2025). Given that educators and students constitute nearly a quarter of the national population (Ingersoll et al., 2021; Sumarto & Harahap, 2019; Wiggan et al., 2020), classrooms have become critical arenas where pluralism is either fragmented or consolidated. Religion, functioning as a foundational pattern for social behavior and moral orientation (Fathallah et al., 2019), must be carefully navigated in educational settings to prevent the rise of intolerant attitudes. Understanding how moderation is practically internalized in multi-religious learning environments is therefore essential, requiring qualitative inquiry to capture the nuanced, everyday pedagogical interactions and institutional routines that large-scale quantitative surveys often overlook.

Existing scholarship on religious moderation in Indonesia has predominantly examined Islamic-specific institutions such as *madrasahs*, *pesantrens*, and Islamic universities, focusing largely on curricular integration, policy frameworks, or cognitive learning outcomes (Hasan & Juhannis, 2024). While these studies provide valuable theoretical foundations, they leave secular vocational schools with diverse student populations relatively underexplored. Empirical evidence indicates that conservative and intolerant attitudes have increasingly penetrated formal secondary education (Beyer & Brese, 2024; Kustati et al., 2023), yet scholars consistently note a persistent gap in translating moderation principles into inclusive, practice-oriented pedagogies (Fasyiransyah et al., 2025; Mizani, 2022). More critically, prior research tends to frame moderation as a top-down policy directive or a standalone subject, neglecting the *lived practices* of teachers as primary agents who operationalize abstract values into daily classroom instruction, extracurricular engagement, and school-wide habituation.

To address this limitation, this study specifically investigates how teachers strengthen religious moderation among multi-religious students in public vocational schools. Unlike previous research that isolates moderation to religious education subjects or institutional policy analysis, this paper focuses on cross-disciplinary pedagogical strategies, teacher agency, and institutional culture as interconnected mechanisms for fostering interfaith harmony. The research centers on comparative practices at two state vocational schools in North Sumatra, aiming to reveal how moderation is contextualized beyond doctrinal teaching into lived, school-embedded educational practice.

This study argues that religious moderation in pluralistic vocational education is most effectively sustained not through isolated curricula, but through teacher-led, context-responsive models that integrate national commitment, cultural accommodation, and civic character education. By examining this argument, the research demonstrates two complementary pedagogical frameworks—an accommodation-based model and a civic-Pancasila-based model—that collectively prove moderation thrives when institutional policies, teacher exemplarity, and student participation intersect. Consequently, this study repositions vocational schools from peripheral settings to strategic laboratories for cultivating inclusive, practice-oriented religious moderation in plural societies (Amalia, 2026).

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research method using a case study approach to obtain an in-depth understanding of religious moderation practices within real-life educational settings. Referring to Yin's case study framework, this approach is particularly suitable for investigating contemporary social phenomena in which the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly evident. The case study method is designed to answer "how" and "why" questions, allowing researchers to explore complex social processes, interactions, and meanings without manipulating variables. In the context of education, this approach enables a holistic examination of how religious moderation is practiced, interpreted, and internalized through daily interactions among teachers and students in multi-religious school environments.

The research was conducted at SMKN 1 and SMKN 2 Rantau Utara, selected purposively due to their multi-religious student composition and their reputation for harmonious interfaith relations. Prior to the main study, a preliminary field visit (grand tour) was undertaken to gain an initial understanding of the school culture and to identify key actors relevant to the phenomenon under investigation. Research participants were selected through purposive sampling, focusing on information-rich individuals such as school principals, teachers, multi-religious students, and members of the surrounding community. Data were collected through multiple techniques, including participant observation, in-depth interviews, document analysis, and focus group discussions (FGDs). This triangulated approach allowed the researcher to capture both formal practices and everyday social interactions related to the strengthening of religious moderation in the school context.

Data analysis was conducted concurrently with data collection following the interactive model proposed by Miles et al (2019) which consists of data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. This iterative process enabled continuous reflection and refinement of emerging findings throughout the research. To ensure trustworthiness, the study applied credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability criteria through techniques such as triangulation, member checking, prolonged engagement, and audit trails. Through this rigorous methodological process, the study sought to produce credible and contextually grounded insights into the role of teachers in strengthening religious moderation among multi-religious students.

RESEARCH RESULTS DAN DISCUSSION

Results

School Context and Religious Diversity

The findings of this study indicate that both SMKN 1 and SMKN 2 Rantau Utara operate within socio-religious environments characterized by diversity, which significantly shapes the schools' approaches to religious moderation. Based on field observations, interviews, and document analysis, religious plurality is not treated as an incidental condition but as a lived reality embedded in daily school interactions. The presence of students from different religious backgrounds creates continuous opportunities for interfaith encounters within academic, extracurricular, and social spaces.

At SMKN 1 Rantau Utara, religious diversity is more complex due to the presence of Muslim, Protestant, and Catholic students. Institutional documents show that Muslim students constitute the majority, followed by Protestant and Catholic minorities. Despite this imbalance, observations reveal that classroom seating, group work, and school

activities are not segregated by religion. One school leader explained, *"We never separate students based on religion. In class, everyone sits together and works together naturally."* (Principal Interview, December 2023). This finding suggests that diversity is normalized rather than problematized in daily practice.

Document analysis further confirms that the school explicitly accommodates religious diversity through its policies and facilities. Places and times for worship are arranged in ways that do not privilege one religious group over another. A teacher noted, *"All students have the same rights here. Religion does not determine who gets access or opportunities."* (Teacher Interview, December 2023). This institutional stance provides a structural foundation for religious moderation.

In contrast, SMKN 2 Rantau Utara presents a relatively simpler religious composition, consisting primarily of Muslim and Protestant students. However, this does not reduce the relevance of moderation practices. Observations indicate that religious diversity is integrated into broader civic and national identity narratives promoted by the school. According to the principal, *"Although our students come from different religions, we emphasize that they are united first as Indonesian citizens."* (Principal Interview, January 2024). Overall, the school contexts demonstrate that religious diversity at both institutions is managed through inclusive policies and everyday interaction patterns. These contexts serve as the structural and cultural backdrop for the internalization of religious moderation values among students.

Core Values of Religious Moderation Internalized by Students

Commitment to Nationalism and Love for the Homeland

Findings show that commitment to nationalism functions as a primary value through which religious moderation is internalized by students at both schools. Observations reveal that national rituals such as flag ceremonies, commemorative events, and scout activities are consistently framed as moments to reinforce unity beyond religious difference. Teachers frequently link patriotism with respect for diversity. One teacher from SMKN 1 stated, *"The best moment to teach love for the homeland is during the flag ceremony, because students feel emotionally connected to the nation at that time."* (Teacher Interview, December 2023). Students echoed this sentiment, noting that national activities help them feel equal regardless of religion.

Figure 3 illustrates how scout activities function as an effective medium for strengthening national commitment among multi-religious students. Through joint participation in scouting programs, students from different religious backgrounds engage in cooperative tasks, leadership training, and discipline-building activities that emphasize unity, responsibility, and shared national identity. The figure demonstrates that scouting serves as a practical space where religious differences are transcended by common goals and collective experiences, thereby reinforcing values of nationalism, mutual respect, and social cohesion as key components of religious moderation in the school context.

Religious Tolerance (Tasamuh)

Tolerance emerges as an actively practiced value rather than a mere conceptual ideal. Field observations indicate that students participate in each other's religious events through supportive roles without engaging in theological interference. For instance, Christian students were observed assisting in Ramadan activities, while Muslim students supported Christmas and church-related events. A student from SMKN 1 explained, *"Helping friends during their religious events is normal for us. We don't*

see it as crossing boundaries.” (Student Interview, December 2023). Teachers emphasized that this form of tolerance is intentionally cultivated through habituation.



Figure 1. Christian Students Distributing Iftar Meals during Ramadan

Figure 1 illustrates a concrete practice of religious moderation through the active involvement of Christian students in distributing iftar meals during the month of Ramadan. This activity reflects the internalization of tolerance, empathy, and interreligious solidarity, where students participate in religiously significant social practices without compromising their own faith identities. The figure demonstrates that shared humanitarian values can bridge religious differences and foster harmonious relationships, positioning interfaith cooperation as a lived expression of religious moderation within the school environment.

Table 1. Accommodation of Religious Activities at SMKN 1 Rantau Utara

No.	Description of School Practices in Religious Activities
1	The school provides equal space and opportunities for students of different religions to participate in religious activities.
2	The school allows Christian students to participate in distributing iftar meals during the month of Ramadan.
3	The school permits Christian students to be involved in charitable food-sharing activities during the fasting month.
4	The school provides space and permission for Christian students to hold regular worship services every Friday.
5	The school also provides space for Muslim students to conduct religious activities and celebrate Islamic holy days at school, such as the commemoration of the Prophet Muhammad’s birthday (Maulid Nabi).
6	The school provides equal opportunities for Muslim and Christian students to participate in student organizations (OSIS).
7	The school ensures equal representation and leadership opportunities for Muslim and Christian students within student organizations (OSIS).
8	The school provides equal opportunities for students of different religions to achieve academic and non-academic accomplishments.
9	The school facilitates joint iftar distribution activities involving both Muslim and Christian students, with Christian students actively participating.

Table 1 presents various forms of institutional accommodation provided by SMKN 1 Rantau Utara to support religious activities among multi-religious students. The table shows that the school ensures equal access, participation, and leadership opportunities for both Muslim and Christian students in religious, organizational, and academic

contexts. These accommodations reflect a school policy grounded in inclusivity and fairness, enabling students to practice their religious beliefs freely while maintaining social harmony. The findings indicate that institutional support plays a crucial role in creating a safe and respectful environment for strengthening religious moderation in daily school life.

Harmony and Non-Violence

Another core value internalized by students is harmony without violence. Interviews reveal that teachers consistently remind students to avoid actions that may disturb interreligious harmony. Conflicts, when they occur, are addressed through dialogue and mediation rather than punitive measures. One teacher stated, *“We always tell students that conflict must be resolved wisely. Violence only creates new problems.”* (Teacher Interview, February 2024). Students confirmed that they rarely experience conflicts related to religion, indicating the effectiveness of preventive guidance.

Accommodation of Local Culture

Local cultural values play a significant role in reinforcing moderation. At both schools, cultural arts – particularly Batak traditions – are integrated into learning and extracurricular activities. Observations show students from different religions performing traditional dances and music together. An arts teacher explained, *“When students perform local culture together, religious differences disappear. What matters is shared identity.”* (Arts Teacher Interview, March 2024).

Kinship through Clan (Marga) Identity

At SMKN 1, clan (marga) identity functions as a powerful social bond that transcends religious affiliation. Students often identify each other through clan relations before religious identity. One student remarked, *“Before asking religion, we usually ask about clan. It makes us feel like family.”* (Student Interview, March 2024). This kinship system reinforces social cohesion and minimizes religious boundaries in daily interaction.

Teachers’ Strategies in Strengthening Religious Moderation at SMKN 1 Rantau Utara

The findings indicate that teachers at SMKN 1 employ an accommodation-based strategy in strengthening religious moderation. This strategy emphasizes equal access, habituation, and daily demonstration rather than formal instruction alone. Teachers integrate moderation values across subjects, school activities, and disciplinary systems. According to the principal, *“Moderation is not taught as a separate lesson. It is integrated into everything we do at school.”* (Principal Interview, March 2024). Observations confirm that teachers model inclusive behavior by participating in religious events of different faiths. Teachers also utilize extracurricular activities such as scouts and flag-raising teams to reinforce shared values of discipline and nationalism. A teacher noted, *“In scouting, students from different religions cooperate naturally. That is moderation in practice.”* (Teacher Interview, March 2024).

Table 2. Teachers’ Strategies for Strengthening Religious Moderation at SMKN 1 Rantau Utara

No.	Teachers’ Strategies	Description
1	Integration of Religious Moderation in Classroom Instruction	Teachers integrate values of religious moderation – such as nationalism, tolerance, harmony, and respect for diversity – across subjects, including religious and non-religious lessons, rather than treating moderation as a standalone topic.
2	Habituation through School Rituals and National Activities	Teachers strengthen religious moderation through routine activities such as flag ceremonies, national commemorations, and school assemblies,

		emphasizing unity, shared citizenship, and love for the homeland beyond religious differences.
3	Utilization of Extracurricular Activities	Extracurricular programs such as scouting (<i>Pramuka</i>), flag-raising teams (<i>Paskibra</i>), and cultural arts are used as practical spaces for interreligious cooperation, discipline building, and the internalization of national and tolerant values.
4	Demonstration of Tolerance in Religious Celebrations	Teachers actively demonstrate religious moderation by facilitating and participating in religious celebrations of both Muslim and Christian students, including Islamic holy days, Christian worship services, and joint social-religious activities.
5	Accommodation-Based Religious Policy	Teachers support school policies that provide equal access, space, and opportunities for students of different religions to practice worship and religious activities without discrimination.
6	Enforcement of Social Discipline and Non-Violence	Teachers consistently enforce school discipline aimed at preventing religious conflict, bullying, and violence, emphasizing dialogue, fairness, and peaceful conflict resolution among students.
7	Moral and Character Guidance	Teachers provide continuous moral guidance to cultivate empathy, mutual respect, responsibility, and social harmony, particularly in interactions among students of different religious backgrounds.
8	Cultural-Based Approach to Moderation	Teachers integrate local cultural values, such as Batak traditions and kinship (<i>marga</i>), into learning and extracurricular activities to strengthen social cohesion and reduce religious boundaries.
9	Role Modeling and Exemplary Behavior	Teachers and school leaders serve as role models by consistently displaying inclusive attitudes, respectful communication, and active involvement in students' religious and social activities, reinforcing moderation through lived example.

Table 2 illustrates that teachers at SMKN 1 Rantau Utara employ multidimensional and practice-oriented strategies to strengthen religious moderation among students. The strategies are not limited to classroom instruction but extend to school rituals, extracurricular activities, and institutional policies that promote inclusivity and equal religious accommodation. Teachers deliberately integrate moderation values into daily learning, national activities, and moral guidance, enabling students to experience tolerance and harmony through direct interaction rather than abstract discourse. The table also shows that role modeling and cultural-based approaches play a crucial role in reinforcing moderation, as teachers consistently demonstrate respectful attitudes and utilize local cultural values to bridge religious differences. Overall, these strategies reflect an accommodation-based model of religious moderation in which coexistence, cooperation, and non-violence are cultivated through habitual practice and inclusive school culture.

Teachers' Strategies in Strengthening Religious Moderation at SMKN 2 Rantau Utara

At SMKN 2 Rantau Utara, teachers adopt a strategy closely aligned with the Pancasila Student Profile framework. Religious moderation is embedded within civic education, project-based learning, and national character development. Teachers frame moderation as an integral component of being a responsible citizen.

The principal stated, *"Moderation is part of the Pancasila student character. It is not separate from our national values."* (Principal Interview, March 2024). Observations show that project-based learning activities require students to collaborate across religious lines, reinforcing tolerance and cooperation. Teachers also utilize regular flag ceremonies as platforms to communicate messages about unity and respect. Preventive dialogue is emphasized to address potential misunderstandings before conflict arises.



Figure 2. Pancasila Student Profile Project Activities at SMKN 2 Rantau Utara

Based on Figure 2, it shows multi-faith students participating in a Nusantara cultural activity, illustrating an activity that strengthens the values of harmony and the power of togetherness in strengthening Nusantara culture. According to the principal of SMKN 2 Rantau Utara, this Pancasila profile strengthening activity is implemented in flag-raising activities, environmental stewardship, and Nusantara cultural dance. The following is a picture of students participating in mutual cooperation in cleaning the school environment.

Table 3. Teachers' Strategies for Strengthening Religious Moderation at SMKN 2 Rantau Utara

No.	Teachers' Strategies	Description
1	Integration of Religious Moderation with Civic and Pancasila Education	Teachers integrate religious moderation values into Civic Education and the Pancasila Student Profile (P5), emphasizing unity, diversity, and national responsibility.
2	Project-Based Learning (P5) on Diversity and Social Responsibility	Teachers implement interdisciplinary projects that require collaboration among students of different religious backgrounds to address social and humanitarian issues.
3	Strengthening National Commitment through School Ceremonies	Teachers utilize flag ceremonies, national holidays, and civic commemorations as platforms to reinforce national identity and respect for diversity.
4	Dialogical Approach to Religious Differences	Teachers facilitate open discussions and guided dialogues on religious diversity to foster mutual understanding and prevent prejudice or radical perspectives.

5	Preventive Guidance and Mentoring	Teachers provide continuous guidance through mentoring and counseling to anticipate and prevent potential religious conflict or intolerance.
6	Equal Accommodation of Religious Practices	Teachers support school policies that ensure equal opportunities for Muslim and Christian students to conduct worship, religious celebrations, and spiritual activities.
7	Integration of Moderation Values in Vocational Learning	Teachers embed moderation values such as cooperation, discipline, and mutual respect within vocational and workplace-simulation learning contexts.
8	Role Modeling of Inclusive and Civic-Oriented Behavior	Teachers consistently model inclusive attitudes, fairness, and commitment to national values in daily interactions with students.
9	Collaboration with School Leadership and Community	Teachers collaborate with school leaders and community figures to reinforce religious moderation as a shared educational responsibility.

Table 3 demonstrates that teachers at SMKN 2 Rantau Utara employ a civic-oriented and preventive approach to strengthening religious moderation. The strategies emphasize the integration of moderation values with national character education, particularly through the Pancasila Student Profile and project-based learning. Teachers actively link religious tolerance to citizenship, social responsibility, and vocational readiness, ensuring that moderation is internalized as both a religious and civic virtue. The table also shows that dialogical engagement, mentoring, and role modeling are central to preventing intolerance and fostering harmonious interreligious relations. Overall, these strategies reflect a civic-Pancasila-based model of religious moderation that aligns educational practice with national unity and pluralism.

Models of Religious Moderation Strengthening (Comparative Model)

Comparative analysis reveals two distinct yet complementary models of religious moderation strengthening. At SMKN 1 Rantau Utara, moderation is strengthened through an accommodation-based model emphasizing daily coexistence, cultural kinship, and equal treatment. At SMKN 2 Rantau Utara, moderation is reinforced through a civic-Pancasila-based model that integrates national identity, structured projects, and character education.

A teacher summarized this distinction clearly: *“At SMKN 1, moderation grows from daily habits; at SMKN 2, it grows from structured character programs.”* (Teacher Interview, March 2024). Despite different emphases, both models demonstrate that religious moderation is most effective when supported by institutional policy, teacher exemplification, and student participation.

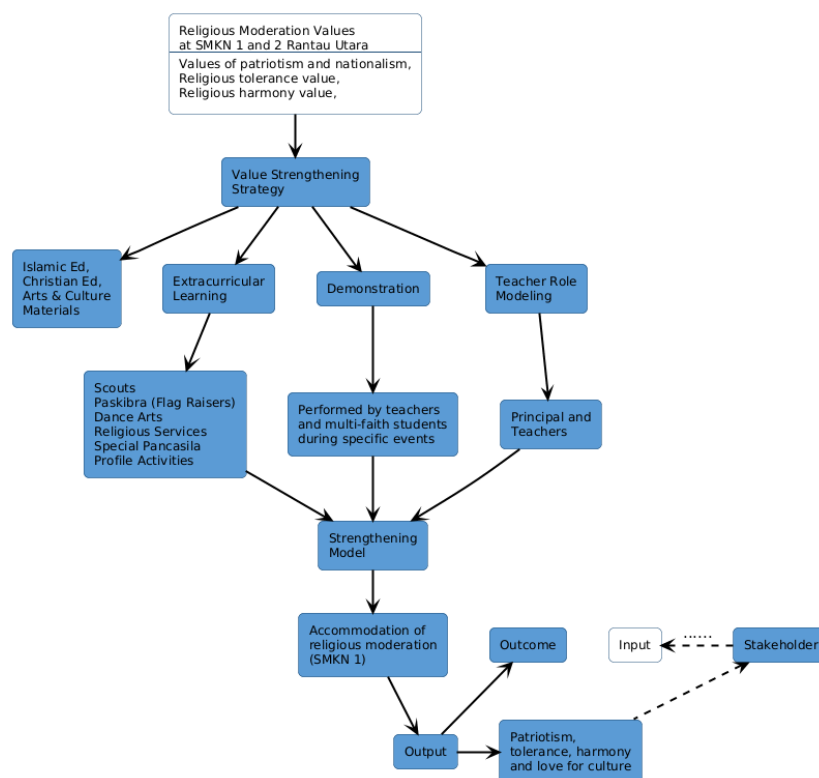


Figure 3. Comparative Model of Religious Moderation Strengthening at SMKN 1 and SMKN 2 Rantau Utara

The image above illustrates the systematic flow of implementing and strengthening the values of religious moderation—such as patriotism, tolerance, and harmony—in SMKN 1 and 2 Rantau Utara. This process begins with stakeholder input that is translated into concrete strategies through four main approaches: integration of learning materials (Religion and Arts and Culture), extracurricular activities (such as Scouts and *Paskibra*), interfaith demonstrations, and direct role models from the principal and teachers. The synergy of these four aspects forms a reinforcement model that accommodates a climate of moderation in schools, producing outputs and outcomes in the form of harmonious student character and a love of national culture, which then provides positive feedback to stakeholders.

Discussion

The strengthening of religious moderation among multi-religious students at SMKN 1 and SMKN 2 Rantau Utara takes place within the framework of national religious education policy that positions public schools as strategic spaces for the internalization of moderate religious values. Although formal school administration falls under the authority of the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Religious Affairs plays a substantive role through the development of Islamic and Christian Religious Education curricula, as regulated in Ministerial Decree No. 211 of 2011 and the Directorate General of Islamic Education Decree No. 7272 of 2019. The findings indicate that core values of religious moderation—particularly national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and accommodation of local culture—are not taught as separate subjects, but are systematically integrated into classroom learning and school activities. This approach aligns with the Ministry of Religious Affairs' policy direction (2019–2023),

which emphasizes value integration and pedagogical strategies as key mechanisms for strengthening religious moderation in schools, especially given the limited instructional time allocated to religious education.

In practice, national commitment emerges as a dominant value internalized through both classroom instruction and extracurricular activities. Teachers at both schools consistently integrate values of patriotism, Pancasila, and national identity across subjects, including Islamic and Christian Religious Education as well as arts and cultural studies (Aryasutha et al., 2025; Rugaiyah & Ma`arif, 2025; Zhakina et al., 2025). Activities such as flag ceremonies, scouting programs, and flag-raising teams function as effective media for developing moral awareness and collective identity among students from different religious backgrounds. These findings reinforce previous studies which argue that religious moderation is most effective when it engages affective and experiential dimensions rather than remaining at the cognitive level (Bisri et al., 2024; Kustati et al., 2023; Latifa et al., 2022; Marjani, 2023). In this context, students do not merely understand national values conceptually, but experience them as shared commitments that harmonize religious identity with national belonging.

Religious tolerance at SMKN 1 and SMKN 2 Rantau Utara is manifested in the form of active tolerance, characterized by interfaith cooperation in religious and social activities. The schools provide equal opportunities for Muslim and Christian students to perform worship, celebrate religious holidays, and participate in student organizations as well as academic and non-academic achievements. Practices such as mutual assistance during Ramadan, Christmas, and Islamic commemorations demonstrate that tolerance extends beyond passive acceptance of difference toward concrete collaboration. This finding is consistent with (Amirudin, 2025; Fuad & Masuwd, 2023; Jamaludin, 2022; Muhajarah & Soebahar, 2024; Mukhibat et al., 2023), who emphasize that active tolerance is a defining feature of religious moderation in plural societies. At the same time, these results challenge concerns raised by several surveys regarding the vulnerability of schools to intolerance, showing that inclusive school policies and teacher mediation can effectively mitigate interreligious tension (Hutagaol et al., 2025; Suryani & Muslim, 2024).

The value of non-violence is strengthened through school discipline policies, equal educational services, and the integration of the Pancasila Student Profile framework. Both schools reject all forms of physical and symbolic violence in the name of religion by ensuring fairness in learning processes, disciplinary measures, and student leadership structures. When conflicts arise, they are addressed through dialogue and educational approaches rather than punitive or repressive measures. This finding supports studies by (Harmi, 2022; Imamah, 2023; Muis, 2026; Nurhayati et al., 2025; Shawmi et al., 2025; Yanti, 2023), which highlight the effectiveness of integrating religious moderation with character education and civic values. The emphasis on faith, global diversity, cooperation, and social justice demonstrates that religious moderation is not merely a religious agenda, but an integral part of national character education (Dewi et al., 2025).

A distinctive contribution of this study lies in the role of local cultural accommodation and cultural kinship—particularly Batak clan (*marga*) identity—in strengthening religious moderation. Cultural learning and extracurricular activities rooted in local traditions serve as social bridges that transcend religious boundaries, enabling students to develop a shared sense of belonging without negating religious differences. Clan-based kinship functions as social capital that reduces the potential for religious conflict, supporting arguments by (Islamy, 2022) on the importance of local

wisdom in fostering moderation. Overall, the findings reveal an integrative and collaborative model of religious moderation strengthening that connects moral knowledge through instruction, moral feeling and action through social and cultural engagement, and moral modeling through teacher exemplarity and inclusive school policies. This model demonstrates that religious moderation in multi-religious schools is most effective when it operates as a living, contextual, and sustainable value system.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that religious moderation in multi-religious vocational schools is most effectively sustained not through isolated doctrinal instruction, but through two complementary, context-responsive models: an accommodation-based approach centered on daily habituation, equal religious access, and local cultural kinship, and a civic-Pancasila-based model structured around national character education, project-based learning, and preventive dialogue. An unexpected but critical finding emerged regarding the transformative role of local cultural identity – specifically the Batak *marga* (clan) system – which functions as a powerful social bridge that naturally transcends religious boundaries and fosters cohesion without theological compromise. Furthermore, the data demonstrate that teacher exemplarity and institutional habituation, rather than formal curriculum delivery, serve as the primary mechanisms for internalizing moderation values.

Academically, this research confirms prior assertions that religious moderation requires affective and experiential engagement beyond cognitive learning. However, it significantly extends existing scholarship by shifting the empirical focus from Islamic-specific institutions (*madrasahs* and *pesantrens*) to secular vocational schools, demonstrating how moderation can be successfully operationalized in plural, non-religious educational settings. The study introduces a novel dual-framework model (accommodation vs. civic-Pancasila) and positions teacher agency and local cultural capital as critical, previously under-theorized variables in the discourse on interfaith harmony in education.

Despite these contributions, the study is limited by its qualitative case study design and its geographical concentration in two vocational schools in North Sumatra, which restricts statistical generalizability. Additionally, reliance on observational and interview data may be influenced by social desirability bias. Future research should employ mixed-methods or longitudinal designs across broader geographical regions and diverse educational contexts to evaluate the long-term sustainability of these pedagogical models. Comparative studies involving general high schools, Islamic institutions, and higher education would further enrich the theoretical framework. Ultimately, such research is essential to inform scalable, evidence-based policy decisions that institutionalize inclusive, practice-oriented religious moderation across Indonesia's plural educational landscape.

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