

## Practical and Discursive Consciousness of Religious Moderation within Students of Madrasah Aliyah Negeri in Cirebon

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### Abstract

*This study reveals the practical and discursive consciousness of religious moderation within students of Madrasah Aliyah Negeri in the Cirebon region. Employing a qualitative approach, data were collected through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with 20 students who were actively involved in organizations representing four madrasahs: Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 1 and 2 in Cirebon City and Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 1 and 2 in Cirebon Regency. Additionally, data were collected through participant observation and documentation. The study found that practical consciousness, which encompasses tolerance, national values, non-violence, and respect for local culture, has become an integral part of students' habituation. In contrast, discursive consciousness remains only partially reflective. It continues to rely on the authoritative discourse of institutions, meaning that students have not yet developed strong arguments to support the moderate practices they employ. These findings suggest that the internalization of moderate values still requires strategies to promote critical consciousness within the madrasah environment. Furthermore, this study bridges national religious moderation policies with students' everyday practices, demonstrating both practical habituation and discursive consciousness among the younger generation, thereby enabling madrasah institutions to evaluate and strengthen students' critical capacity.*

**Keywords:** Cirebon, Madrasah Education, Religious Moderation, Student Consciousness

### Abstrak

*Penelitian ini mengungkap kesadaran praktis dan diskursif moderasi beragama di kalangan pelajar Madrasah Aliyah Negeri di wilayah Cirebon. Menggunakan prosedur kualitatif, dengan pengumpulan data melalui Focus Group Discussion (FGD) pada 20 pelajar yang aktif dalam organisasi yang mewakili 4 madrasah, yaitu Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 1 dan 2 Kota Cirebon serta Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 1 dan 2 Kabupaten Cirebon. Selain itu data dikumpulkan melalui observasi partisipan, dan dokumentasi. Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa kesadaran praktis seperti toleransi, nilai-nilai kebangsaan, anti kekerasan, dan penghargaan terhadap budaya lokal telah menjadi bagian dari habituasi pelajar. Sedangkan kesadaran diskursif belum sepenuhnya reflektif dan masih bergantung pada wacana otoritatif institusi, sehingga pelajar belum sepenuhnya memiliki argumen yang kuat dari kebiasaan moderat yang mereka lakukan. Temuan ini mengindikasikan bahwa internalisasi nilai moderat masih memerlukan strategi untuk menumbuhkan kesadaran kritis di lingkungan madrasah. Di samping itu, penelitian ini telah menjembatani kebijakan nasional moderasi beragama dengan praktik keseharian pelajar yang memperlihatkan keperibadian dan pemahaman diskursif yang faktual pada generasi pelajar, yang memungkinkan lembaga madrasah melakukan evaluasi untuk meningkatkan daya kritis para pelajar.*

**Kata Kunci:** Cirebon, Kesadaran Pelajar, Moderasi Beragama, Pendidikan Madrasah

## Introduction

The discourse on religious moderation is often regarded as a solution to the rise of extremism and intolerance within society. In fact, the core teachings of religion inherently contain fundamental values such as mutual respect, justice, balance, and compassion. However, in today's increasingly complex social life, the understanding and application of these values often remain confined to literal interpretations and face significant challenges when implemented in everyday practice.

At the operational level, the practice of religious moderation is measured using four indicators: commitment to national values, tolerance, rejection of all forms of violence, and appreciation of local culture. Although these four indicators have been promoted through various programs and policies within the education sector, there remains a need for in-depth studies to determine the extent to which they have been internalized by students and manifested as tangible attitudes and behaviors.

Most existing studies tend to focus on conceptual elaboration or adopt a normative approach—for example, Septiyani et al.<sup>1</sup> highlights the internalization of moderation values within the context of Islamic Religious Education learning; Mandala et al.<sup>2</sup> analyzes the implementation of digital literacy in religious moderation; meanwhile, Subekti<sup>3</sup> examines the application of digital literacy for fostering religious moderation. Other studies, such as those conducted by Arlina et al., Awadin and Witro, as well as Santoso et al., also tend to delve into the exploration of philosophical ideas. Although their contributions are significant, these approaches leave a gap, specifically in the limited number of studies that explore sociological aspects and concrete behaviors, particularly within formal educational settings where the values of moderation are expected to be systematically instilled.

In this context, Cirebon presents an intriguing case study. As a region with a long historical legacy of diversity and cultural acculturation, Cirebon is ideally expected to embody moderate religious practice. The local Islamic tradition, inherited since the era of Sunan Gunung Jati and dynamically interacting with Arab culture (in the Panjunan area) as well as the Chinese community (in the Chinatown district), has shaped a highly inclusive social foundation. However, an irony has emerged over the past two decades as the region has increasingly drawn national attention due to the activities of radical groups. A series of events, ranging from acts of terrorism to the arrests of

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<sup>1</sup> Septiyani Septiyani, Mukromin Mukromin, and Faisal Kamal, "Internalisasi Nilai Moderasi Beragama Melalui Pendidikan Agama Islam Di SD N 2 Kapencar Kertek Wonosobo," *Jurnal Manajemen Dan Pendidikan Agama Islam* 2, no. 4 (2024): 368–76, <https://doi.org/10.61132/jmpai.v2i4.416>.

<sup>2</sup> Ican Mandala, Doli Witro, and Juraidi Juraidi, "Transformasi Moderasi Beragama Berbasis Digital 2024: Sebagai Bentuk Upaya Memfilter Konten Radikalisme Dan Ekstremisme Di Era Disrupsi," *Jurnal Bimas Islam* 17, no. 1 (2024): 127–60, <https://doi.org/10.37302/jbi.v17i1.1242>.

<sup>3</sup> Sinar Anang Subekti, "Pendidikan Berbasis Literasi Digital Dalam Memperkuat Moderasi Beragama Bagi Siswa Di SMP Negeri Satu Atap Jipurapah Plandaan Jombang," *Pediaqu: Jurnal Pendidikan Sosial Dan Humaniora* 3, no. 2 (2024): 370–91.

extremist networks in 2011, 2017, 2020, and 2023, reveal a striking paradox. Media reports also indicate that students aged 16–19 have become one of the primary targets for recruitment by these groups, and Cirebon has even been labeled a “red zone” for terrorism.<sup>4</sup>

This situation reveals a disparity between the institutionally constructed narrative of religious moderation and the social realities experienced by the younger generation at the madrasah level. Although institutions such as *Madrasah Aliyah Negeri* have been mandated to implement the values of religious moderation in accordance with the Directorate General of Islamic Education Decree No. 7272 of 2019, the effectiveness of this policy at the level of practice and discourse among students has not been extensively explored empirically. Therefore, this study is crucial for examining how students enact the values of moderation in their daily lives while simultaneously reflecting on them within social discourse. Rather than merely reiterating normative narratives or evaluating policy implementation, this research seeks to trace how a moderate religious character is shaped through the learning experiences of madrasah students in a social context that remains vulnerable to the infiltration of intolerant ideologies. In doing so, the study aims to provide both academic and practical contributions toward strengthening the religious character of the younger generation, enabling them to be more inclusive, adaptive, and capable of living harmoniously within diversity.

Theoretically, the concept of practical consciousness refers to actions carried out automatically without deliberate reflection. It is fundamentally grounded in implicit normative habits, so that actions occur without prior careful consideration.<sup>5</sup> In line with this, the concept of *habitus* shapes social actions and perceptions. For example, showing respect to parents is performed spontaneously because it has been deeply embedded through social experience. However, according to Pöllmann,<sup>6</sup> such a *habitus* can evolve through reflective processes and the strengthening of intercultural capital. In the educational context, a student’s practical consciousness is influenced not only by classroom instruction but also by daily routines, surrounding symbols, and lived social experiences.

Using the framework of *practice architectures*, Sadownik<sup>7</sup> explains that the interactions among teachers, students, and other stakeholders within the educational process unfold across three interrelated domains: sayings (the discursive dimension and cultural meanings), doings (activities and material-economic practices), and relatings (relationships and socio-political structures). Within this framework, the emergence of either moderate or

<sup>4</sup>“Cirebon Masuk Zona Merah Teroris,” Kemendagri, 2019, <https://bskdn.kemendagri.go.id/website/cirebon-masuk-zona-merah-teroris/>.

<sup>5</sup> Anthony Giddens, “The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration: Elements of the Theory of Structuration,” *Practicing History: New Directions in Historical Writing after the Linguistic Turn*, 2004, 121–42.

<sup>6</sup> Andreas Pöllmann, “Habitus, Reflexivity, and the Realization of Intercultural Capital: The (Unfulfilled) Potential of Intercultural Education,” *Cogent Social Sciences* 2, no. 1 (2016): 1–12, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2016.1149915>.

<sup>7</sup> Alicja R Sadownik, ( *Re* ) *Theorising Involvement in Early Childhood Education and Care*, 2023.

intolerant attitudes among students is primarily the result of continuous social habituation rather than merely the outcome of conceptual reflection.

Conversely, discursive consciousness (<sup>8</sup> refers to an individual's ability to reflect on and articulate the reasons, purposes, and meanings behind their actions. This form of consciousness is rational in nature and can be expressed verbally. It emerges from communicative practices that are dialogical and rational, in which individuals actively formulate, critique, and reconstruct values through discourse. Onebunne et al. <sup>9</sup> identifies three core characteristics of discursive consciousness: the ability to explain actions rationally, the willingness to communicate understanding openly, and the openness to re-examine actions when confronted with critical situations.

These two forms of consciousness are deeply interrelated: practical consciousness establishes the habitual basis of action, while discursive consciousness enables critical reflection and verbalized reasoning about values in practice. This study positions their interaction as an evolving process through which students' moderate religious behavior is formed within the interplay of social routines, reflective agency, and institutional structures in the *madrasah* context.

## Method

This study employs a qualitative approach, utilizing in-depth interviews conducted through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). This method facilitates reflective dialogue among participants by using critical questions posed by the researcher to explore the practical and discursive consciousness of religious moderation. Participants were purposively selected, focusing on students actively involved in madrasah organizations, including the student council (OSIS) and religious extracurricular activities. Data were collected from four locations: Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) 1 and 2 in Cirebon City and MAN 1 and 2 in Cirebon Regency. A total of 20 students participated, with five students representing each madrasah.

Primary data were also obtained through observations focusing on religious extracurricular activities to observe the practice of religious moderation within each institution. Additionally, data were collected from relevant documents, including regulations, books, journals, and other research findings related to the research topic. The collected data were then analyzed through the following stages: assigning appropriate codes or labels to the data, categorizing themes based on the research questions, presenting the data narratively, and relating the findings to relevant theories and literature.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Giddens, "The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration: Elements of the Theory of Structuration."

<sup>9</sup> Ifeoma Blessing Morah Lucky Amarachukwu Onebunne, "Discursive Consciousness in Ngugi Wa Thiongo 's ' The River Between ' and Alex Guma ' s ' A Walk in the Night '," *CONSTELLATIONS: Journal of the NYI Global Institute of Cultural, Cognitive, and Linguistic Studies*, no. 2 (2024): 1-19.

<sup>10</sup> Creswell. JW, "Research Design: Pendekatan Kualitatif, Kuantitatif dan Mixed," *Pustaka Pelajar*, 2015, 383.

## Results and Discussion

### Manifestations of Practical Consciousness of Religious Moderation within Students

The practice of religious moderation among students demonstrates the integration of moderate values into everyday behavior. This pattern does not emerge solely from theoretical understanding but is formed through repeated social experiences that eventually become relatively stable habits. To understand how this pattern operates, the following discussion elaborates several field findings that reflect students' practical consciousness of religious moderation.

One of the dominant characteristics of this practical consciousness is students' ability to maintain social harmony despite differences, both in terms of interreligious diversity and variations in religious practices within Islam. When students were asked about their views on differences in worship practices, one of the responses expressed was that such differences are natural and need not be debated, since the ultimate purpose is the same, namely, worshiping God. In their daily interactions, they are accustomed to avoiding jokes that offend other religions, refraining from debates about differences in religious practices, and remaining calm in the face of variations such as prayer methods, sholawatan traditions, and the use of identity symbols like cropped trousers and beards.

This phenomenon suggests that the value of *tasamuh* (tolerance) has been ingrained in social habits that are consistently practiced. Referring to Giddens' perspective<sup>11</sup>, this condition can be explained through the concept of practical consciousness, which is the capacity of individuals to act in accordance with norms without needing to provide explicit rational justification. In other words, respect for differences is not always based on consciously articulated theological arguments but has become part of deeply rooted routines.

This attitude is also in line with Bourdieu's concept of habitus,<sup>12</sup> which refers to a set of dispositions formed through repeated social interactions. Habitus not only guides behavior but also shapes patterns of thought and spontaneous responses of individuals. In this context, students' choice to avoid debates over differences in religious practices is not merely a momentary reaction, but rather the result of internalized values that have been accumulated over time through social practice.

Although this model appears promising, there is a crucial aspect that should not be overlooked. The habit of avoiding conflict and differences of opinion carries the risk of fostering excessive tolerance toward deviant religious practices if a critical mindset does not accompany it. In other words, if tolerance is applied only in practice without a foundation of reflective understanding, there is a strong possibility that it will turn into a form of

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<sup>11</sup> Giddens, "The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration: Elements of the Theory of Structuration."

<sup>12</sup> Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*.

passive compliance. To prevent this phenomenon, strengthening religious literacy becomes essential so that a moderate attitude is not merely symbolic but is instead grounded in a solid conceptual understanding.

In terms of nationalism, institutional routines have already been integrated into students' activities, although they do not constitute the dominant aspect. Respect for national symbols, participation in flag ceremonies, and adherence to madrasah regulations reflect the interconnection between religious moderation and national consciousness. For students, the values of unity and loyalty to the state are perceived as being in harmony with religious teachings, and therefore not contradictory to them. This is significant, considering that one of the main characteristics of radical ideologies is the rejection of the nation-state and the democratic system.

**Table 1: Practical Consciousness of Religious Moderation among Students**

| <b>Indicators of Religious Moderation</b> | <b>Practical Consciousness</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|-------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Tolerance in Daily Life</b>            | Students are accustomed to respecting differences in religious practices, avoiding debates over rituals, refraining from continuing jokes that offend religion, and responding calmly to variations in prayer methods or identity symbols. |
| <b>National Commitment</b>                | Respecting national symbols, actively participating in flag ceremonies, and complying with madrasah regulations                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Non-Violence</b>                       | Rejecting violent ideologies, discussing provocative issues with teachers or peers, and reporting anti-democratic pamphlets to the madrasah authorities.                                                                                   |
| <b>Respecting Local Culture</b>           | Participating in local traditions such as Muludan and Grebeg Syawal, as well as cultural art activities such as Topeng Dance, Wayang, and Sintren.                                                                                         |

Another dimension of practical consciousness identified is resistance to radical ideologies. Field findings indicate that students do not readily accept information containing violent ideologies or radical propaganda. When they encounter provocative issues, they tend to discuss them with peers or report them to teachers. Even pamphlets containing anti-democratic messages are not allowed to circulate freely but are immediately reported to the madrasah authorities.

This practice reflects a fairly strong internal social control mechanism. Within the framework of structuration theory, this phenomenon can be understood as a form of reflexive monitoring of action, which refers to the ability of individuals to monitor their own actions and manage the information they receive. This consciousness is crucial in the digital era, where the spread

of radical ideologies often occurs through social media with narratives that are difficult to identify.

However, this resistance tends to be collective rather than individual. Students more often seek confirmation through discussions with teachers or peers rather than conducting independent analysis. This pattern suggests that social structures, specifically teacher authority and madrasah norms, continue to be dominant factors in shaping their responses to radical ideologies. This condition reinforces the dialectical relationship between agents and structure. Agents possess the capacity to act, but their actions remain constrained by structures, namely institutional rules and values.

A critical aspect to note is that this resistance is not yet entirely based on genuinely independent individual reasoning. Dependence on the authority of teachers and the madrasah institution remains high, which can become a vulnerability when structural influence weakens, for instance, outside the madrasah environment. Therefore, strengthening digital literacy and critical thinking is necessary to ensure that the values of moderation can endure in more complex social spaces.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to these two aspects, appreciation for local culture also represents a form of practical consciousness of religious moderation. Students not only value religious practices such as sholawatan and tahlilan but also actively participate in preserving Cirebon's local traditions, for example, the Muludan celebration at Keraton Kasepuhan and Grebeg Syawal. Cultural art-based extracurricular activities, such as the Cirebon Mask Dance, Wayang Kulit performances, and Sintren art, serve as means for internalizing values of togetherness and respect for diverse cultural expressions. Recent studies emphasize that moderation grounded in local wisdom is effective in harmoniously uniting religious and cultural identities.<sup>14</sup> However, the challenge lies in ensuring that this involvement is not merely ceremonial but capable of fostering a substantive understanding of the values embedded in these traditions.

The role of teachers and madrasah structures in reinforcing a moderate habitus cannot be overlooked. Based on FGDs with students, all acknowledged that the primary reference within the madrasah environment is the teacher. Teachers serve as mediators when potential conflicts arise due to differences in religious practices, as guides to keep discussions within a moderate framework, and as facilitators of activities rooted in local culture. Teacher interventions not only resolve issues on a case-by-case basis but also promote values of inclusivity through enjoyable and contextually relevant activities. From the perspective of structuration theory, students' social practices, such

<sup>13</sup> Mohammad Fahri Husaeni, "Critical Literature Review on Moral Education System in Indonesia: How Islamic Education and Pancasila Education Monopolize Morality in Schools," *Muslim Education Review* 2, no. 1 (2023): 65–98, <https://doi.org/10.56529/mer.v2i1.163>.

<sup>14</sup> Sabriadi HR Fajriah Inayati, A. Fajar Awaluddin, "Internalisasi Nilai Moderasi Beragama Berbasis Kearifan Lokal Pada Siswa SMAN 13 Bone Melalui Pembelajaran PAI-BP," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 9, no. 2 (2024): 224–36, <https://doaj.org/article/71f4274e4bdb4f8c8b98e653d7164833>.

as respecting differences and rejecting radical ideologies, are the result of value reproduction through repeated interactions between agents and structures. However, if teacher interventions are limited to control without providing space for critical dialogue, moderation risks becoming mere formal compliance rather than substantive internalization. Madrasah structures also reinforce the meaning of moderation through institutional routines that teach the interconnection between religious values and national loyalty. Activities such as flag ceremonies, adherence to regulations, and respect for national symbols demonstrate that religious moderation among students is not merely an abstract concept but is manifested in consistent social practice.

### **Representation of Students' Discursive Consciousness of Religious Moderation**

In structuration theory, discursive consciousness is an individual's ability to reflect on their actions and articulate them verbally with rational reasoning.<sup>15</sup> This consciousness positions the individual not merely as an actor but as a subject capable of explaining the meaning behind their actions. Unlike practical consciousness, which operates automatically, discursive consciousness requires reflective and communicative capacities. In the context of this study, a discursive consciousness of religious moderation is evident among students of Madrasah Aliyah Negeri in the Cirebon region, as they demonstrate the ability to understand the values of moderation argumentatively, refer to religious texts, and, in some cases, relate them to social realities.

The findings indicate that this consciousness is represented across four main dimensions of religious moderation as formulated by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, namely tolerance, national consciousness, rejection of violence, and appreciation of local culture. Each dimension is not only normatively internalized but also articulated through explanations grounded in religious values and social experiences. This indicates a reflective process that integrates religious frameworks with social logic, applying transformative learning, where teachers and students construct new meanings through dialogical and reflective processes.

In the dimension of tolerance, students understand differences as an inevitability originating from divine will. This consciousness does not emerge spontaneously but is articulated in the form of theological arguments affirming that humans are created differently to know one another, not to be in conflict. This understanding reflects students' ability to position differences as instruments of social harmony rather than threats to religious identity. Within Habermas' theory of communicative action, this attitude can be understood as a form of communicative rationality, where social relations are built on the recognition of equality and mutual respect. Discursive consciousness in this aspect is necessary because students do not merely accept differences but relate them to religious norms considered authoritative. In other words,

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<sup>15</sup> Giddens, "The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration: Elements of the Theory of Structuration."



although the tolerant attitude is an institutional product, critical reasoning, developed through reflection on broader social life, has already emerged among the students.

The dimension of national consciousness is also clearly reflected in students' narratives. They understand nationalism not as a secular construct separate from religion but as an integral part of religious practice. The religious legitimacy of national consciousness is evident in their interpretation of love for the homeland as a component of faith, which has become a cultural reference within the Indonesian Islamic tradition. This awareness demonstrates students' ability to integrate religious identity with national identity, a position that avoids the dichotomy between religious loyalty and loyalty to the state. The equal articulation of national and religious values simultaneously serves as an antithesis to exclusivist discourses that view nationalism as a deviation from Islamic teachings.

**Table 2: Discursive Consciousness of Religious Moderation within Students**

| <b>Indicators of Religious Moderation</b> | <b>Discursive Consciousness</b>                                                                                                                                       |
|-------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Tolerance in Daily Life</b>            | Students understand differences as divine will, using them as a basis for building social harmony. Text-based arguments (ta'aruf) are employed to reject exclusivism. |
| <b>National Commitment</b>                | Nationalism is regarded as part of faith, not secularism. Religious identity and national identity complement each other.                                             |
| <b>Non-Violence</b>                       | Rejection of violence is accompanied by normative legitimacy through the prohibition of killing and the principle of peace in sacred texts.                           |
| <b>Respecting Local Culture</b>           | Local culture is embraced as an identity compatible with religious values, as long as it does not conflict with sharia.                                               |

Discursive consciousness is also evident in the rejection of violence. Students not only refrain from violent actions but also reject the legitimacy of ideologies that invoke religion to justify violence. This rejection is grounded in normative principles articulated through references to religious teachings that prohibit killing and promote peace. Such articulation indicates that the orientation toward non-violence is based not only on state regulations but also on a moral foundation derived from sacred texts. According to Mellor and Shilling,<sup>16</sup> religious dispositions can be understood as open to reflective reassessment. Individuals are capable of evaluating and reorganizing

<sup>16</sup> Philip A. Mellor and Chris Shilling, "Re-Conceptualising the Religious Habitus: Reflexivity and Embodied Subjectivity in Global Modernity," *Culture and Religion* 15, no. 3 (2014): 275–97, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14755610.2014.942328>.

inherited religious habits, particularly when confronted with the challenges of modernity and global currents. This reflective process demonstrates the agent's capacity to assess potential justifications for violence critically and subsequently construct new, more inclusive, and humane attitudes. Within Bourdieu's theoretical framework <sup>17</sup>, this indicates a reflective distance from the old habitus that may contain intolerant tendencies, showing that students can reconstruct their cognitive dispositions through interaction with new, more inclusive discourses.

Appreciation of local culture also serves as an essential indicator of discursive consciousness. Students view local culture not as a threat to the purity of religious teachings, but as an expression of identity that can complement religious values, provided it does not conflict with the principles of Sharia. This consciousness demonstrates the ability to negotiate values between religious teachings and cultural practices. It also reflects students' awareness that moderation is not only related to interfaith relations but also to the preservation of cultural identity within a religious framework. From the perspective of social practice theory, this suggests that students' actions are not merely the result of routine repetition, but also reflect a process of reflection that enables the integration of religion and culture. Such negotiation is crucial to prevent the emergence of puritanical attitudes that reject all elements of local tradition in the name of religious purification.

These findings indicate that students in the Cirebon region possess a reflective capacity to understand and articulate the values of religious moderation. However, it should be noted that the emerging discursive consciousness still has the potential to be reproductive, limited to the repetition of formal discourses acquired through religious education in madrasahs. It raises questions about the authenticity of such consciousness, whether it arises from a process of equal dialogue or merely from internalization of institutional authority. Thus, although the indicators of discursive consciousness appear strong, strengthening religious moderation in the future requires more deliberative pedagogical strategies that not only emphasize mastery of normative discourse but also encourage students to develop critical capacity through dialogue, problematization, and broader social interaction experiences. Such strategies are essential to ensure that religious moderation is genuinely internalized as an autonomous value orientation, rather than merely a rhetorical construct controlled by formal educational structures.

### **Challenges of Implementing Religious Moderation in Madrasahs**

The implementation of religious moderation in Madrasah Aliyah Negeri cannot be separated from several structural and cultural challenges. One of the main challenges is the homogeneous social environment of the madrasahs. As Islamic educational institutions, the madrasahs only enroll students of the Islamic faith, most of whom come from a Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) background. This situation limits social interaction to internal differences within Islam,

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<sup>17</sup> Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*.

such as variations in prayer practices, sholawatan traditions, and the use of identity symbols. The lack of interfaith plurality reduces students' opportunities to test tolerance values in a heterogeneous social context. Consequently, the moderation values taught tend to remain at a normative level rather than a reflective consciousness developed through complex social interactions, as the formation of inclusive attitudes requires discursive spaces that allow for equal dialogue and open exchange. However, the homogeneous reality in the madrasahs does not provide such spaces, so the moderate attitudes developed more closely resemble products of internal regulation rather than outcomes of critical deliberation. As a result, religious moderation is vulnerable to becoming a form of formal compliance that is not autonomous, persisting only as long as the influence of the madrasah structure exists.

Another challenge arises from students' habitual avoidance of debates regarding differences in religious practices. While this habit effectively maintains harmony, it has the potential to produce symbolic tolerance if not accompanied by a strengthened understanding of religious literacy. Such attitudes reflect a practical consciousness that operates automatically. In the long term, this condition may lead to permissiveness, in which students are unable to distinguish between differences that can be tolerated and normative deviations.

Another issue that emerges is the underdeveloped independence of students' reasoning when confronting ideological discourse. While their rejection of violent ideologies appears strong, their responses tend to be collective and dependent on authority figures such as teachers or the madrasah administration. This finding suggests that reflexive monitoring of action, as noted in <sup>18</sup>, among students is not yet fully optimal. Such dependence becomes a vulnerability when structural influences weaken, for instance, when they navigate open digital spaces. In this context, strengthening digital literacy and critical thinking skills is an urgent necessity to enable students to recognize and independently reject radical narratives.

Furthermore, the local cultural dimension, which serves as an instrument for reinforcing moderation, must not be limited to ceremonial participation alone. Students' engagement in traditions such as Muludan, Grebeg Syawal, and Cirebon arts (Tari Topeng, Wayang, and Sintren) must go beyond passive presence. Independent reflection is needed to demonstrate a synergy between religion and culture. Conversely, if involvement remains purely ceremonial without critical reflection, the internalization of moderation values will be shallow. Experiential learning based on cultural practices can have a transformative impact when accompanied by reflection that fosters new perspectives among students.

Teachers and the madrasah institutional structure play a strategic role in strengthening moderation. However, if teacher interventions emphasize behavior control without opening spaces for critical dialogue, moderation values risk being reduced to formal procedures. Habitus that is merely

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<sup>18</sup> Giddens, "The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration: Elements of the Theory of Structuration."

reproduced without innovative meaning will be insufficient to generate autonomous value orientations. Therefore, a more deliberative pedagogical approach is required, providing students with opportunities to negotiate meaning through discussion, problematization, and dialogical experiences.

The discussion highlights that the challenges of religious moderation in madrasahs are not only related to limited interfaith interaction but also include risks associated with formalized values, a weak reflective capacity, and dependence on authority. Addressing these challenges requires strategies that go beyond strengthening curriculum content and aim to develop transformative approaches. For instance, in teaching Islamic Cultural History, a contextual approach is necessary, comparing and critically examining the historical context of Islam during the Prophet Muhammad's era with contemporary Indonesian Islam. This approach should integrate critical religious literacy, digital literacy, and social experiences that allow students to apply and test moderation values in broader contexts. By adopting such strategies, religious moderation can evolve into an autonomous, adaptive value orientation that remains resilient in the face of contemporary social dynamics.

## **Conclusion**

This study has found that religious moderation among students of Madrasah Aliyah Negeri in Cirebon is shaped through two dimensions of consciousness: practical and discursive. At the practical level, moderation is manifested through social habits such as respecting differences, avoiding conflicts, and maintaining harmony. Meanwhile, discursive consciousness is reflected in students' ability to articulate moderate values argumentatively, referring to religious texts and linking them to social realities.

However, neither form of consciousness is yet fully autonomous. The practice of moderation tends to be routine, while discursive consciousness is primarily reproductive; students have not yet developed fully autonomous critical awareness because they rely on formal discourse constructed by educational authorities, such as teachers and institutional rules in the madrasah.

Theoretically, this study enriches the sociological perspective on religious moderation by highlighting empirical aspects at the level of students' personalities. Practically, the findings can serve as a reference for implementing religious moderation education in madrasah settings, particularly in enhancing critical and reflective capacity in moderation practices through contextual learning strategies and strengthening social and religious literacy.

Nevertheless, this study is limited to a homogeneous social context, so the examination of tolerance dynamics only covers internal variations within Islam. Further research is needed in more pluralistic environments, including longitudinal and quantitative approaches, to assess the sustainability and breadth of moderation internalization in facing diversity challenges in Indonesia.

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