

**ANALYSIS OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CHARACTER EDUCATION AND/OR  
RELIGIOUS MODERATION AT MUHAMMADIYAH PLERET MIDDLE SCHOOL**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This study examines the implementation of character education and religious moderation at SMP Muhammadiyah Pleret, Bantul, Yogyakarta, as an essential effort to develop students' moral integrity and tolerance in a multicultural society. The main issue addressed in this research is the gap between the expected character values and students' real behavior, which reflects challenges in internalizing moral and moderation principles in daily school activities. The objectives are to describe the implementation of character and religious moderation programs, identify supporting and inhibiting factors, and propose strategies to strengthen these values in accordance with students' needs. The study employs a qualitative descriptive approach with data collected through interviews, observations, and documentation involving school principals, teachers, and students. The results show that the integration of ISMUBA (Islam, Muhammadiyah, and Arabic Language) programs—such as daily Qur'an recitation, Dhuha and Dzuhur prayers, Friday charity, and clean-up activities—has effectively promoted discipline, religiosity, responsibility, and tolerance among students. Teachers serve as role models and facilitators, while parental collaboration and school culture strengthen the implementation. However, limited digital utilization, lack of supervision outside school, and negative media influences remain challenges. The discussion highlights that strengthening collaboration, digital character education, and teachers' competence in moderation are crucial strategies. In conclusion, character and religious moderation education at SMP Muhammadiyah Pleret has been effectively implemented and contributes to shaping moderate, moral, and responsible students aligned with the vision of progressive Islamic education.*

*Keywords: Character Education; Religious Moderation; Islamic Education; Muhammadiyah; Student Character Development*

## INTRODUCTION

Character education and religious moderation are two crucial elements in shaping students' personalities in Islamic educational institutions. In the context of Indonesian education, particularly in Islamic-based schools like Muhammadiyah Pleret Junior High School, the implementation of character values and religious moderation is an integral part of an educational vision grounded in Islamic, humanitarian, and national values. The challenges of globalization, technological advances, and the rapid flow of information make character education and religious moderation increasingly relevant in guiding students to develop critical, tolerant, and noble attitudes.

The implementation of Character Education and Religious Moderation at the junior high school (SMP) level must adopt a systematic approach to ensure effective value integration. This approach views the school as an entity with key interacting components, including human resources, processes, and technology, all of which must be directed toward achieving a quality education (Fattah et al., 2024). Success

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The implementation of Character Education and Religious Moderation at the junior high school (SMP) level must adopt a systematic approach to ensure effective value integration. This approach views the school as an entity with key interacting components, including human resources, processes, and technology, all of which must be directed toward achieving quality education (Fattah et al., 2024). The successful implementation of this program depends heavily on systematic strategic management, emphasizing collaborative efforts among stakeholders (Fattah et al., 2024). The foundation of its implementation is based on the principle that character is a person's values formed through interactions with their environment (Nailishshifa et al., 2025). Therefore, character-building strategies, including the values of tolerance and religious moderation, must be implemented sustainably. Furthermore, the character curriculum in junior high schools must be integrated with a global perspective to shape students with critical thinking and broad perspectives. This approach, which encompasses the values of the Pancasila Student Profile (religious morals, noble character), contributes to shaping a generation ready to face global challenges, without losing the roots of national identity and culture (Irsanti et al., 2025). Character education is implemented in schools by instilling character values integrated into every subject taught at all levels of education to students (Bagus Cahyanto et al., 2022).

The reality on the ground shows that there is still a gap between expected character values and students' actual behavior. Phenomena such as declining discipline, low social empathy, and increasing intolerance among students indicate that the implementation of character education and religious moderation has not been optimal. This is as alluded to by Gunawan (2022), who stated that "character education has not shown optimal results, as evidenced by social phenomena such as student brawls, promiscuity, and corruption, which indicate severe character fragility." (Gunawan, 2022). Therefore, empirical research is needed to examine how character education and religious moderation are implemented in schools, particularly in institutions affiliated with Islamic organizations such as Muhammadiyah.

The urgency of this research is based on the need to obtain concrete data regarding the implementation of character education and religious moderation at Muhammadiyah Pleret Middle School, an Islamic school with a mission to develop moderate morals and religious insight. This research aims to determine the extent to which character values (such as responsibility, discipline, honesty, and empathy) and moderation values (such as tolerance, balance, and justice) are implemented in learning activities and school culture. As Itmamul (2025) emphasized, "the integration of religious moderation values into the curriculum and school culture contributes positively to the formation of a more inclusive and harmonious student character." (Itmamul, 2025)

This study aims to: (1) describe the implementation of character education and religious moderation at Muhammadiyah Pleret Middle School; (2) analyze the supporting and inhibiting factors in the implementation of these two values; and (3) formulate strategies for strengthening character

values and religious moderation that are relevant to students' needs. The research method used is field research with a descriptive qualitative approach. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation conducted directly at Muhammadiyah Pleret Middle School. The results of the field research were then strengthened by literature reviews from various scientific sources to provide a more comprehensive theoretical basis.

To strengthen the theory, several previous studies have demonstrated the importance of integrating character education and religious moderation within the school environment. Implementing religious moderation in school education is a crucial step in encouraging critical thinking and tolerance, and fostering the values of religious moderation through school programs and activities (Tanjung Nur Fadillah et al., 2024). The implementation of character education and religious moderation relies heavily on the role of teachers as role models and facilitators in learning activities (Wardati et al., 2023). Values of religious moderation, such as tolerance and balance, can shape students' inclusive character and enable them to live peacefully within diversity (Itmamul, 2025).

Based on literature findings and initial field observations, this study develops a conceptual hypothesis that the implementation of character education and religious moderation in schools is closely related to the development of student behavior and morals. More specifically, this study assumes that the higher the level of implementation of religious moderation values in schools, the stronger the character formation of students. Furthermore, the role of teachers in providing role models and guidance is considered to have a significant influence on the effectiveness of character education. On the other hand, strengthening a curriculum based on the values of moderation is believed to increase students' moral and social awareness. Mainstreaming religious moderation in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) can be achieved through strengthening the moderation paradigm, strengthening the curriculum, and strengthening learning (Rudi, 2022).

Therefore, this study aims to empirically describe and analyze the implementation of character education and religious moderation at Muhammadiyah Pleret Middle School, supported by theory and previous research findings as supplementary material. The results are expected to contribute to the development of more effective learning models and school policies in shaping students' moderate character, noble morals, and national insight.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical design. The qualitative approach was chosen because it seeks to deeply understand the social phenomenon of how character education and religious moderation are implemented in the school environment. Descriptive-analytical research was used to describe facts, behaviors, and activities related to character formation and religious moderation values at Muhammadiyah Pleret Middle School, then analyzed them based on theory and previous research findings. This study focuses not only on collecting numerical data but also on exploring the meaning, understanding, and interpretation of concrete actions occurring in the field.

This research was conducted at Muhammadiyah Pleret Junior High School in Bantul Regency, Yogyakarta Special Region. This location was chosen purposively because the school has unique characteristics as an Islamic educational institution that integrates religious learning with social and national values. The research subjects included the principal, Islamic Education teachers, guidance and counseling teachers, and several students who were deemed to understand or were directly involved in the implementation of character education and religious moderation activities at the school.

The primary instrument in this research was the researcher herself (human instrument), who acted as observer, interviewer, and data analyst. In addition, this study also utilized tools such as interview guides, observation sheets, and documentation forms to record empirical data in the field. These instruments were compiled based on indicators of character education implementation (such as discipline, responsibility, empathy, honesty) and religious moderation values (such as tolerance, justice, balance, and openness).

The data in this study were collected through three main techniques:

1. Interviews

In-depth interviews were conducted with the principal, teachers, and students to obtain information regarding the implementation of character education and religious moderation

activities in the school. These interviews were conducted openly, using flexible question guides to allow respondents to freely discuss their experiences and perspectives.

## 2. Observations

Observations were conducted directly within the school environment to observe learning activities, teacher-student interactions, and religious and social activities that reflect the application of character and moderation values. These observations included both intracurricular and extracurricular activities relevant to the research theme.

## 3. Documentation

This technique was used to collect data from school documents such as Lesson Plans (RPP), student regulations, religious activity reports, activity photos, and other relevant documents. Documentation serves to strengthen the results of interviews and observations, thereby increasing the validity and reliability of the data obtained.

In addition to these three techniques, this study also utilized several articles and previous research findings as secondary data to complement and enrich the analysis. These articles included works by Gunawan (2022), Tanjung Nur Fadillah et al. (2024), and Itmamul (2025), which provide a theoretical basis for the importance of integrating character education and religious moderation in schools.

Data analysis was conducted interactively through three main stages:

### 1. Data Reduction

Selecting, focusing, and simplifying raw data from interviews, observations, and documentation according to the research focus.

### 2. Data Display

Organizing the reduced data into descriptive narrative form for easy reading and interpretation.

### 3. Conclusion Drawing/Verification

Interpreting the meaning of the data and drawing thematic conclusions regarding the implementation of character education and religious moderation in schools.

To increase the validity of the data, this study employed source and method triangulation techniques, comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation to ensure the consistency and validity of the information.

### 1. Character Education

Is the process of systematically instilling moral, ethical, and personality values through learning and familiarization, with the goal of developing students with integrity, discipline, and responsibility.

### 2. Religious Moderation

Is a perspective, attitude, and practice of religion that balances religious understanding and humanitarian values, characterized by tolerance, justice, and a lack of religious extremism.

The implementation of Character Education and/or Religious Moderation in the context of this study refers to all school activities, both curricular and non-curricular, that strive to internalize moral values and moderation in students of Muhammadiyah Pleret Middle School.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Implementation of Character Education and Religious Moderation**

Character education and religious moderation at Muhammadiyah Pleret Middle School are part of the school's efforts to instill progressive and moderate Islamic values. Based on interviews, the school emphasized that "the character education program for religious moderation at school is not just a subject, but also an educational resource given to students as a provision for the future." The implementation of this program is integrated into ISMUBA (Islam, Muhammadiyah, and Arabic) activities through religious habits such as morning tadarus, dhuha prayer, dzuhur prayer in congregation, memorization, Friday alms, and Healthy Friday and Clean Friday activities. This program instills the values of discipline, religiosity, responsibility, and social concern (Researcher interview with the principal, 2025).

This activity aligns with the view of Febriana et al. (2021), who stated that "a nation's success is greatly influenced by the ability of its citizens to behave constructively, with peaceful, orderly, and modest characters" (Febriana et al., 2021). These values are the primary foundation for developing students with a religious and moderate character. Furthermore, strong character building must be achieved through a holistic, integrative, and sustainable habituation strategy. This approach is

identical to the concept implemented by Muhammadiyah Pleret Middle School through consistent, routine religious activities (Ardiyanti & Khairiah, 2021).

Teachers play a crucial role in internalizing character values and religious moderation in students. According to an interview, one teacher stated, "We encourage the children to shake hands when they arrive at school to foster politeness and mutual respect" (Researcher interview with school principal, 2025).

The role of teachers extends beyond teaching to moral guidance and role models. This is reinforced by Muhammad et al. (2023), who assert that "mainstreaming religious moderation in education is an important strategy for maintaining harmony in a multicultural society." (Muhammad et al., 2023). This means that teachers are crucial agents in instilling values of tolerance and respect for differences, in line with the spirit of Muhammadiyah, which emphasizes Islam as a blessing for all creation. Furthermore, the implementation of religious moderation in schools needs to focus on the role of teachers, programs, and school activities that encourage critical and tolerant thinking. (Tanjung Nur Fadillah et al., 2024). This statement aligns with the practice at Muhammadiyah Pleret Middle School, where teachers not only convey the values of moderation theoretically but also through role models and daily practices. The evaluation system at Muhammadiyah Pleret Middle School is implemented continuously. In interviews, teachers explained that "through intensive mentoring mechanisms at school and periodic coordination with parents, we ensure the internalization of moral values." Evaluation of the implementation of character education at Muhammadiyah Pleret Middle School is conducted consistently within the family environment.

Furthermore, Aini et al. (2024) emphasized that "character education shapes a young generation with integrity, empathy, and responsibility." These findings align with interviews with teachers at Muhammadiyah Pleret Middle School, who stated that "many students have successfully implemented the program, as evidenced by their improved discipline and morals, although some still require special guidance." (Aini et al., 2024).

Although the program is running well, the school faces several challenges, such as limited time, inadequate supervision of students outside of school, and the influence of the digital environment. This aligns with findings that "character education has not shown optimal results due to the weak consistency of student behavior outside the school environment." (Gunawan, 2022). Furthermore, (Luqmanul Hakim Habibie et al., 2021) emphasize the importance of "instilling the value of moderation in teaching materials such as the Quran, Islamic jurisprudence, and Islamic aqidah (morals) so that students can behave fairly and balanced." These values can serve as a strategic guide for Muhammadiyah Pleret Middle School to strengthen the integration between the curriculum and habituation activities.

Therefore, to ensure the sustainability of the program, the school can strengthen collaboration with parents and utilize information technology as a digital character education medium. This aligns with Muhammadiyah's spirit of progressive Islamic education, which is not solely focused on rituals but also on developing moderate, intelligent, and socially empowered individuals.

## **Analysis of Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in the Implementation of Character Education and Religious Moderation**

### **Supporting Factors**

Based on the results of the analysis of several studies in reference documents, the main supporting factors for the implementation of character education values and religious moderation in schools include:

a. The Role of Teachers and Role Models

According to (Itmamul, 2025), teachers play a key role as role models and facilitators in instilling values of religious moderation such as tolerance, justice, and balance. Teachers' exemplary behavior helps shape students' inclusive and harmonious character.

b. School Curriculum and Programs

Research (Albana, 2023) and (Suryadi & Anwar, 2023) demonstrate that strengthening the curriculum and extracurricular activities (such as the ISMUBA program: tadarus, dhuha prayer, Friday almsgiving, and Friday clean-up) are effective tools for fostering moderate attitudes and building students' religious character.

c. Government Policies and Educational Institutions

The national policy on religious moderation from the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs is a crucial driving factor. This policy strengthens synergy between educational institutions to reduce intolerance and extremism through education (Gunawan Heri, 2023) and (Muhammad et al., 2023).

d. Parental and Community Support

Based on field interviews, the school not only supports students at school but also collaborates with parents through monthly parent-teacher meetings and sharing sessions about children's character development at home. This strengthens the continuity of character education within the family environment.

e. A Religious and Inclusive School Culture

A school environment that comprehensively implements Islamic values through routine activities such as shaking hands with teachers each morning, praying together, and memorizing, creates a religious culture conducive to student character development (Antonius, 2022) and (Aini et al., 2024).

### **Inhibiting Factors**

Despite many supporting factors, research also found a number of obstacles in implementing character education values and religious moderation in schools, including:

a. Lack of Utilization of Educational Technology

(Wardati et al., 2023) revealed that technological developments have not been optimally utilized in the learning process. This hampers schools' efforts to integrate character values and moderation into digital learning media

b. Normalization of Intolerant Behavior

Some students still exhibit intolerance and exclusivism, particularly in the context of social and religious diversity (Gunawan Heri, 2023) and (Luqmanul Hakim Habibie et al., 2021). This presents a significant challenge for schools to instill the value of *wasathiyah* (middle path)

c. Limited Supervision Outside of School

As noted in field interviews, school supervision of students' lives outside the school environment is still limited, resulting in character values sometimes not being transferred to their homes or social environments.

d. Teacher Competency Constraints

Some teachers lack a deep understanding of the concept of religious moderation, so their implementation is often formalistic, neglecting aspects of student awareness and reflection (Tanjung Nur Fadillah et al., 2024).

e. The Influence of the Digital and Social Environment

The negative influence of social media, promiscuity, and students' weak self-control can hinder the development of strong and moral character (Gunawan, 2022) and (Antonius, 2022).

### **Strategies for strengthening character values and religious moderation that are relevant to students' needs**

The strategy of strengthening character values and religious moderation in schools is a strategic effort to shape students with noble character, tolerance, and the ability to live harmoniously in diversity. Character education and religious moderation are not only part of religious studies but are also implemented through programs, activities, and school culture that reflect high moral and spiritual values. Character education serves to internalize moral and ethical values in students so they can face the challenges of the digital era, which is fraught with the potential for moral degradation and intolerant behavior (Antonius, 2022).

Implementation of character strengthening strategies in schools can be done through various habit-building activities integrated into school programs. Based on interviews and field research instruments, activities such as the ISMUBA (Islam, Muhammadiyah, Arabic) program, Quran recitation, congregational Dhuha and Dzuhur prayers, Friday almsgiving, Healthy Fridays, Clean Fridays, and women's activities serve as primary vehicles for instilling religious character values, discipline, and responsibility in students (interview, researcher with school principal, 2025). These programs play a crucial role in shaping positive student habits that impact not only school life but

also daily life at home and in the community. Character education needs to be implemented through role models and ongoing practice, not just theoretical teaching (Gunawan, 2022).

Furthermore, collaboration between schools and parents is also a crucial strategy in strengthening character education. Based on the results of the school program evaluation, teachers regularly communicate and collaborate with parents so that the process of character building in children can continue at home (interview, researcher with school principal, 2025). This effort is in line with the view (Aini et al., 2024) which states that family and social environment involvement is a significant supporting factor in the success of character education, because moral values cannot be instilled instantly, but through a continuous process between home and school.

In the context of religious moderation, schools play a crucial role in instilling the values of tolerance, justice, and balance in students. Strengthening religious moderation can begin with providing a deep understanding of religious teachings that emphasize compassion, peace, and respect for differences (Wardati et al., 2023) and (Suryadi, 2022). This implementation can be realized through dialogue-based learning, cross-cultural discussions, and extracurricular activities that foster openness and empathy toward others. Integrating the values of religious moderation into the Islamic Education curriculum, particularly in the subjects of the Qur'an and Hadith, Fiqh, and Aqidah and Akhlak, emphasizes the teachings of balance (wasathiyah) in religion (Luqmanul Hakim Habibie et al., 2021). Teachers play a central role as role models in instilling the values of religious moderation and character through daily behaviors that reflect compassion, openness, and fairness. Teachers' exemplary behavior is a dominant factor in forming a moderate school climate with strong character (Itmamul, 2025).

These strategies are highly relevant to the needs of today's students, who live amidst the rapid flow of information, globalization, and social change. The main challenges students face are weakened empathy, increasing intolerance, and a tendency toward individualistic behavior. Therefore, strengthening character values and religious moderation is a solution to developing a generation with integrity, social sensitivity, and the ability to position themselves fairly in the face of differences. Religious moderation in education serves to foster critical, tolerant, and peace-loving attitudes, which are crucial in a pluralistic society (Rahayu & Fanreza, 2024).

Therefore, strengthening character values and religious moderation needs to be carried out in an integrated and sustainable manner through synergy between the curriculum, school activities, teacher role models, and family support. Schools are not only places for the transfer of knowledge but also centers for the formation of character and humanitarian values. Through the implementation of these strategies, it is hoped that students will grow into religious, moderate individuals who will contribute positively to the life of the nation and state.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the research results and discussion, it can be concluded that the implementation of character education and religious moderation at Muhammadiyah Pleret Middle School has been well-run and integrated into various school activities. Character values such as discipline, responsibility, religiosity, and social awareness are instilled through the ISMUBA (Islam, Muhammadiyah, and Arabic) program, routine religious activities such as morning Quran recitation, congregational Dhuha and Dhuhur prayers, Friday almsgiving, and the Clean and Healthy Friday programs. Teachers serve as role models and primary facilitators in instilling moral values and moderation in students through habituation and role modeling. Factors supporting the successful implementation of the program include: the active role of teachers, support from the school curriculum and programs, collaboration with parents, and a religious and inclusive school culture. However, several obstacles remain, such as the lack of use of educational technology, limited supervision of students outside of school, and the negative influence of social media on student behavior. Strategies for strengthening character values and religious moderation relevant to students' needs include increasing collaboration between schools and families, optimizing learning technology for digital character education media, and improving teacher competency in understanding and implementing religious moderation values contextually. These efforts are expected to strengthen the integration of character education and religious moderation within the school environment, thereby shaping a young generation that is religious, tolerant, and virtuous in accordance with Muhammadiyah's vision of progressive Islamic education.

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