



Integrating Religious Moderation into the Merdeka Curriculum as a Behavioral Driver: A Correlational Analysis of Students' Religious Discipline in Indonesian Madrasahs

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between the integration of religious moderation in the Merdeka Curriculum and students' religious discipline in Madrasah Aliyah Negeri in Indragiri Hilir, Riau. Although previous research has highlighted the normative alignment between curriculum policy and moderation values, limited studies have explained the mechanisms through which these values are internalized and translated into students' disciplined religious behavior. This study addresses this conceptual gap by analyzing how curriculum implementation, school culture, and assessment practices interact to shape students' religious discipline. A quantitative correlational design was employed using cross-sectional survey data collected from 375 students selected through proportional stratified random sampling. Data were collected using a Likert-scale questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson's correlation to examine the strength and direction of relationships between variables. The findings show that both the integration of religious moderation and students' religious discipline are at high levels. Statistical analysis indicates a positive and significant relationship between the two variables, with a moderate correlation coefficient. The results also demonstrate that moderation values embedded in learning processes, school culture, and assessment systems contribute to more consistent religious practices among students. These findings provide empirical support for positioning religious moderation as a behavioral mechanism rather than solely a normative curriculum value. The study concludes that strengthening moderation-oriented curricular strategies can enhance character education outcomes and recommends that madrasah administrators reinforce school culture and assessment practices that promote the internalization of values.

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji hubungan antara integrasi moderasi beragama dalam Kurikulum Merdeka dan kedisiplinan beragama siswa pada Madrasah Aliyah Negeri di Indragiri Hilir, Riau. Meskipun penelitian sebelumnya menyoroti keselarasan normatif antara kebijakan kurikulum dan nilai moderasi, masih sedikit studi yang menjelaskan mekanisme internalisasi nilai yang mendorong terbentuknya perilaku religius yang disiplin. Penelitian ini mengisi kesenjangan tersebut dengan menganalisis bagaimana implementasi kurikulum, budaya sekolah, dan praktik penilaian berinteraksi dalam membentuk kedisiplinan beragama siswa. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain kuantitatif korelasional dengan data survei potong lintang yang dikumpulkan dari 375 siswa melalui teknik *proportional stratified random sampling*. Data diperoleh melalui kuesioner skala Likert dan dianalisis menggunakan statistik deskriptif serta korelasi

KATA KUNCI

Moderasi Beragama, Kurikulum Merdeka, Kedisiplinan Beragama, Pendidikan Karakter, Internalisasi Nilai

Pearson untuk menguji arah dan kekuatan hubungan antarvariabel. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa integrasi moderasi beragama dan kedisiplinan beragama siswa berada pada kategori tinggi. Analisis statistik mengungkapkan hubungan positif dan signifikan antara kedua variabel dengan koefisien korelasi moderat. Temuan ini juga menunjukkan bahwa nilai moderasi yang tertanam dalam proses pembelajaran, budaya sekolah, dan sistem penilaian berkontribusi pada konsistensi praktik keagamaan siswa. Penelitian ini menjadi kontribusi empiris bahwa moderasi beragama berfungsi sebagai mekanisme pembentuk perilaku, bukan sekadar nilai normatif kurikulum. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa penguatan strategi kurikulum berbasis moderasi dapat meningkatkan capaian pendidikan karakter dan merekomendasikan agar pengelola madrasah memperkuat budaya sekolah serta praktik penilaian yang mendorong internalisasi nilai.

Introduction

Character education has become a central focus of curriculum policy in many countries, including Indonesia, where values such as discipline, responsibility, and tolerance are formally embedded within learning structures (Oldham & McLoughlin, 2025). Despite this policy emphasis, a persistent gap remains between the normative expectations of curriculum documents and the actual behavioral outcomes observed in schools. Many character education initiatives remain rhetorical because they do not clearly articulate how values are internalized and translated into students' daily conduct. This condition reflects a tendency to treat character education as an additional component rather than an integral part of classroom practices and school culture, resulting in weak conceptual grounding and limited explanatory power.

Within Indonesia's educational landscape, the Merdeka Curriculum explicitly incorporates religious moderation as a core value. However, the extent to which these values are enacted in real school settings varies considerably. Studies conducted in different regions show that while moderation values are embedded in curriculum design, their implementation in school culture and non-formal activities is often inconsistent (Andriani, 2024). In Indragiri Hilir, for example, the application of religious moderation in MAN Nurul Muhtadiin was evident. Yet, the teaching of these values remained unclear due to limited facilities and learning specifications (Musliha, 2022). These local conditions highlight the need to examine how curriculum policy interacts with contextual factors in shaping students' religious discipline.

A growing body of research highlights the conceptual alignment between the Merdeka Curriculum and the principles of religious moderation, yet these studies vary in the depth of their analysis. Hilmin (2024) argues that the curriculum is structurally compatible with moderation values and has strong potential to cultivate tolerance and diversity within Islamic Religious Education. This perspective is echoed by Noviani and Yanuarti (2023), who emphasize that core moderation principles such as *tawassut*, *tasamuh*, and *syura* are explicitly embedded in curriculum design and instructional materials. However, their work remains largely descriptive, focusing on curricular intentions rather than examining how these values operate within real school environments. In contrast, Andriani (2024) provides a more critical account, demonstrating that although schools attempt to instill moderation, its implementation is uneven, particularly in non-formal contexts and within school culture.

Research at MAN Nurul Muhtadiin in Pulau Burung, Indragiri Hilir, for example, shows that moderation values are present but insufficiently articulated due to limited facilities and unclear learning specifications (Musliha, 2022). This contrasts with findings from broader studies such as those by Ulum (2025) and Hanif, Syarifudin, and Muhtarom

(2025), which report stronger integration of moderation values across instructional, cultural, and assessment domains. Meanwhile, studies by Nurdaeni, Indra, and Alim (2024) and Salamudin and Nuralamin (2024) highlight that students' religious discipline tends to increase when moderation values are consistently reinforced through school culture and structured learning activities. Taken together, these studies reveal significant heterogeneity in implementation quality. Some madrasahs demonstrate coherent and sustained moderation practices, while others struggle with structural and pedagogical constraints. This contrast underscores that the effectiveness of moderation integration is contingent not only on curriculum policy but also on institutional capacity, teacher competence, and school culture.

The literature consistently acknowledges the importance of religious moderation within the Merdeka Curriculum and its potential influence on students' religious discipline. However, existing studies remain fragmented: some focus on curriculum alignment, others on school-level implementation, and still others on student outcomes. What is missing is a systematic explanation of how moderation values move from curriculum documents into students' disciplined religious behavior, particularly through the mediating roles of school culture and assessment practices. This conceptual and mechanistic gap provides the foundation for the present study, which seeks to empirically examine the pathways through which moderation integration contributes to students' religious discipline in the context of Madrasah Aliyah Negeri in Indragiri Hilir.

This study aims to address these gaps by examining the relationship between the integration of religious moderation in the Merdeka Curriculum and students' religious discipline in Madrasah Aliyah Negeri in Indragiri Hilir. Specifically, it investigates how moderation values embedded in learning processes, school culture, and assessment practices contribute to students' disciplined religious behavior.

The scientific contribution of this study lies in its conceptual positioning of religious moderation not merely as a normative curriculum value but as a behavioral mechanism that links curricular implementation with students' religious discipline. The study advances theoretical understanding by integrating value internalization and social learning perspectives within the context of curriculum policy. Practically, the findings provide evidence-based insights for strengthening moderation-oriented strategies in madrasah settings, particularly through school culture and assessment systems that support value internalization.

Method

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional correlational design to examine the relationship between the integration of religious moderation in the Merdeka Curriculum and students' religious discipline. This design was selected because the research questions focus on identifying the strength and direction of associations between variables measured at a single point in time, rather than establishing causal effects. A correlational approach is therefore the most appropriate methodological choice for capturing naturally occurring variations in curriculum implementation, school culture, assessment practices, and student behavior within the real educational context of Madrasah Aliyah Negeri in Indragiri Hilir. By collecting data simultaneously from a large student population, the design enables a statistically robust examination of how the moderation values embedded in the curriculum correspond to students' religious discipline.

The participants in this study were 6,391 students enrolled in all Madrasah Aliyah Negeri in Indragiri Hilir Regency. The sampling frame included three schools, namely MAN 1 Tembilahan, MAN 2 Pulau Burung, and MAN 3 Kemuning. Proportional stratified random sampling was used to ensure that each school and each grade level (X, XI, XII) was represented in proportion to its actual population proportion. Students were eligible for inclusion if they were registered as active learners during the data collection period and were present to complete the questionnaire. No additional exclusion criteria were applied, as the study aimed to capture the full diversity of student experiences across the three institutions. A total sample of 375 students was obtained, which met statistical power requirements for correlational analysis. Data were collected using a five-point Likert-scale questionnaire that measured religious moderation integration through indicators of lesson planning, learning implementation, school culture, and assessment systems. In contrast, religious discipline was measured through punctuality in worship, compliance with school religious rules, participation in religious activities, and consistency in daily religious practices.

Data analysis was conducted in several stages. First, descriptive statistics were used to summarize each variable's characteristics. Second, reliability and validity tests were conducted, including Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, average variance extracted, and discriminant validity assessments, to ensure that the measurement instruments were psychometrically sound. Third, classical assumption tests were performed, including tests for normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and multivariate outliers using the Mahalanobis distance, to confirm that the data met the requirements for parametric analysis. Finally, Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was applied to examine the relationship between religious moderation integration and students' religious discipline.

All analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics version 26, and the results were interpreted in accordance with the statistical assumptions of cross-sectional correlational research. This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional correlational design. (Sugiyono, 2022). This design was selected because the variables, namely the integration of religious moderation in the Merdeka Curriculum and students' religious discipline, were measured simultaneously. (Xueying et al., 2025). Consequently, the analysis focused on examining the relationship or association between variables rather than testing causal relationships. Therefore, the research findings are interpreted as statistical relationships that describe the interconnection between variables at a single point in time. (Arikunto, 2020).

The study was conducted in accordance with ethical research principles, ensuring respect for participants' rights, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. Ethical approval was granted by the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training, Institut Agama Islam Diniyyah Pekanbaru, under approval number 072/FTK/IAIDP/X/2025. Research permission was obtained from the Head of Madrasah Aliyah Negeri in Indragiri Hilir Regency, and all data were treated confidentially and used solely for academic purposes.

Results and Discussion

Results

Internal Reliability (Cronbach's Alpha, α)

The instrument's reliability was tested through internal consistency analysis (*Cronbach's alpha*). The results of the reliability test in the trial ($n = 30$) indicated that all constructs had α values ≥ 0.70 , which means they are reliable and internally consistent. (N. Zahra, 2025).

Table 1. Reliability (Cronbach's Alpha, α)

Construct	Number of Items	α	Criterion	Description
Religious Moderation Integration (X)	24 items	0.89	≥ 0.70	Highly reliable
Students' Religious Discipline (Y)	20 items	0.86	≥ 0.70	Highly reliable

The reliability test results show that both constructs demonstrate excellent internal consistency. The Religious Moderation Integration construct, consisting of 24 items, obtained a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.89, which exceeds the minimum reliability threshold of 0.70, indicating that the items consistently measure the intended concept. Likewise, the Students' Religious Discipline construct, with 20 items, achieved a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.86, also surpassing the acceptable limit.

These findings confirm that both instruments are highly reliable, meaning that the items in each construct are internally consistent and stable in measuring their respective latent variables. Therefore, the questionnaire can be considered reliable for further quantitative analysis of religious moderation and students' religious discipline within the Merdeka Curriculum context.

Composite Reliability (CR)

The calculation of Composite Reliability (CR) assesses the structural consistency of a construct.

Table 2. Composite Reliability (CR)

Construct	CR (Composite Reliability)	Criterion	Description
Religious Moderation (X)	0.91	≥ 0.70	Good reliability
Religious Discipline (Y)	0.90	≥ 0.70	Good reliability

The results of the composite reliability (CR) analysis indicate that both constructs possess strong internal consistency. The Religious Moderation construct achieved a CR value of 0.91, while the Religious Discipline construct obtained a CR value of 0.90. Both values exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70, suggesting that the items within each construct are consistently related and accurately represent the underlying latent variables.

These results demonstrate that the instrument exhibits good composite reliability, confirming that the measurement items are homogenous and cohesive in explaining the constructs of religious moderation and religious discipline within the Merdeka Curriculum context.

Convergent Validity (Average Variance Extracted / AVE)

Convergent validity is achieved when the AVE is ≥ 0.50 , indicating that the construct explains more than 50% of the indicators' variance.

Table 3. Convergent Validity

Construct	AVE	Criterion	Description
Religious Moderation (X)	0.64	≥ 0.50	Good convergent validity
Religious Discipline (Y)	0.61	≥ 0.50	Good convergent validity

The results of the convergent validity analysis show that both constructs meet the acceptable threshold for Average Variance Extracted (AVE), which is ≥ 0.50 . The Religious Moderation construct obtained an AVE value of 0.64, while the Religious Discipline construct achieved an AVE value of 0.61. These values indicate that their respective latent constructs explain more than 50% of the variance in the indicators.

Thus, the measurement model demonstrates good convergent validity, confirming that all observed items strongly represent their underlying theoretical dimensions and meaningfully contribute to the constructs being measured in the Merdeka Curriculum context.

Inter Construct Correlation.

The correlation between variables was tested using the Pearson product-moment correlation, yielding a positive, significant coefficient.

Table 4. Inter Construct Correlation

Variable X	Variable Y	r	p < 0.01	Description
Religious Moderation	Students' Religious Discipline	0.52	0.000	Positive and significant relationship (moderate strength)

The correlation analysis results reveal a positive and significant relationship between Religious Moderation (Variable X) and Students' Religious Discipline (Variable Y), with a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.52$ and a significance level of $p < 0.01$. This indicates that the two variables are moderately and positively associated, meaning that greater integration of religious moderation values in the Merdeka Curriculum is associated with higher levels of students' religious discipline.

In other words, as religious moderation becomes more effectively implemented in teaching practices, school culture, and assessment systems, students tend to demonstrate stronger adherence to religious principles and disciplined behavior in their daily religious activities. This finding provides empirical evidence for the theoretical link between integrating moderation values and the development of religious character among students.

Evidence of Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was assessed using two approaches:

1. Fornell-Larcker Criterion

Table 5. Fornell-Larcker Criterion

Construct	$\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$	Correlation MA \leftrightarrow DK	Description
Religious Moderation (MA)	0.80	0.52	$\sqrt{\text{AVE}} > \text{correlation} \rightarrow \text{valid}$
Religious Discipline (DK)	0.78	0.52	$\sqrt{\text{AVE}} > \text{correlation} \rightarrow \text{valid}$

The results of the discriminant validity analysis show that the square root of the Average Variance Extracted ($\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$) for each construct is higher than the correlation between constructs. Specifically, the Religious Moderation and Religious Discipline constructs have $\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$ values of 0.80 and 0.78, respectively, both of which exceed their inter-construct correlation of 0.52.

This finding confirms that each construct is empirically distinct and measures a different conceptual domain, while still maintaining a moderate and meaningful relationship. Therefore, the measurement model demonstrates good discriminant validity, indicating that the instrument successfully differentiates between the constructs of religious moderation and students' religious discipline within the Merdeka Curriculum framework.

2. HTMT value = 0.62 (< 0.85) \rightarrow meets the threshold for discriminant validity.

Table 6. Summary of Psychometric Findings

Aspect	Value	Threshold Criterion	Status
α (Cronbach's Alpha)	0.86 – 0.89	≥ 0.70	Reliable
CR (Composite Reliability)	0.90 – 0.91	≥ 0.70	Reliable
AVE (Average Variance Extracted)	0.61 – 0.64	≥ 0.50	Valid
Correlation r (MA \leftrightarrow DK)	0.52 ($p < 0.01$)	Significant	Empirically valid
Discriminant Validity ($\sqrt{\text{AVE}} > r$, HTMT < 0.85)	Fulfilled	–	Valid

The overall psychometric evaluation demonstrates that the measurement instrument fulfills all statistical requirements for reliability and validity. The Cronbach's Alpha values (0.86–0.89) and Composite Reliability (CR = 0.90–0.91) both exceed the minimum criterion of 0.70, indicating high internal consistency and strong reliability across all constructs.

In terms of convergent validity, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values ranging from 0.61 to 0.64 surpass the 0.50 benchmark, signifying that each construct explains more than 50% of the variance in its respective indicators. The correlation coefficient ($r = 0.52$, $p < 0.01$) confirms a significant and positive empirical relationship between Religious Moderation and Religious Discipline. Furthermore, the results of the discriminant validity test ($\sqrt{\text{AVE}} > r$, HTMT < 0.85) meet the established thresholds, confirming that the two constructs are conceptually distinct yet moderately correlated.

Overall, these findings validate that the instrument used in this study is both reliable and empirically valid, making it suitable for use in quantitative research on religious moderation and students' religious discipline within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum.

The classical assumption test was conducted prior to the multivariate regression analysis to ensure that the data met the parametric requirements. All tests were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 26 with a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$.

Table 7. Normality Test

Variable	Statistic	df	Sig. (p)	Description
Unstandardized Residual	0.986	3750	0.073	Data are normally distributed

The value of $p = 0.073 > 0.05$ indicates that the residuals are normally distributed. This result is also supported by the P-P Plot curve, which forms a diagonal line with data points that are relatively symmetrically distributed. The assumption of normality is satisfied. The results of the Shapiro-Wilk normality test indicate that the Unstandardized Residual has a statistic value of 0.986 and a p-value of $p = 0.073 (> 0.05)$. This indicates that the residuals are normally distributed, meaning the errors in the regression model do not significantly deviate from normality. The finding is also visually supported by the P-P Plot, where the data points closely follow the diagonal line, suggesting that the residuals are symmetrically distributed around the mean. Since the p-value exceeds 0.05, the assumption of normality is satisfied, and the data meet the requirements for multivariate regression analysis.

Table 8. Linearity Test

Relationship	F (Linearity)	Sig.	Description
X (Religious Moderation) → Y (Religious Discipline)	18.524	0.000	Significant linearity
X → M1 (School Culture)	27.841	0.000	Significant linearity
X → M2 (Learning Assessment)	15.029	0.001	Significant linearity

All relationships have significance values < 0.05 , indicating a significant linear relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The assumption of linearity is satisfied.

Linearity Test Results

The linearity test assesses whether the relationship between the independent and dependent variables is linear, thereby ensuring one of the basic assumptions of multivariate regression analysis. This test was performed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 26 with a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$.

Table 9. Linearity Test Results

Relationship	F (Linearity)	Sig.	Description
X (Religious Moderation) → Y (Religious Discipline)	18.524	0.000	Significant linearity
X → M1 (School Culture)	27.841	0.000	Significant linearity
X → M2 (Learning Assessment)	15.029	0.001	Significant linearity

All relationships show significance values < 0.05 , indicating a significant linear relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The deviation from linearity value > 0.05 indicates that the data do not deviate from a linear pattern. The assumption of linearity is satisfied; the data are suitable to proceed to the multivariate regression analysis stage.

Table 10. Mahalanobis Distance Test Results

Case Number	Mahalanobis Distance	Critical χ^2 (df = 4, α = 0.001)	Status
15	10.21	18.47	Within range
87	13.08	18.47	Within range
142	15.62	18.47	Within range
211	16.94	18.47	Within range
305	17.53	18.47	Within range
Max Value	17.53	18.47	No outlier detected

The Mahalanobis Distance analysis was performed to identify potential multivariate outliers among the observed data. The results show that all cases have Mahalanobis Distance values ranging from 10.21 to 17.53, which are below the critical Chi-Square value of 18.47 at df = 4 and α = 0.001. This indicates that none of the data points deviates excessively from the multivariate centroid of the model's variables. In other words, the dataset contains no observations that could distort or bias the multivariate regression analysis.

Since the maximum Mahalanobis Distance (17.53) is less than the critical value (18.47), it can be concluded that no multivariate outliers were detected. Therefore, all data cases are within the acceptable range and can be safely included in further analyses, such as regression and mediation testing. No case exceeds the Mahalanobis critical value, indicating that the dataset is free from multivariate outliers and is suitable for further multivariate regression analysis.

Table 11. Statistical Summary

Statistic	Result Criteria		Conclusion
Number of Variables (df)	4	–	X, M1, M2, C1
Critical Chi-Square Value (α = 0.001)	18.47	–	Reference threshold
Maximum Mahalanobis Distance	17.53	< 18.47	No outliers
Final Decision	–	–	Assumption satisfied

Multicollinearity Test

Table 12. Multicollinearity Test Results:

Predictor	Tolerance	VIF	Description
Religious Moderation (X)	0.712	1.404	No multicollinearity
School Culture (M1)	0.684	1.462	No multicollinearity
Learning Assessment (M2)	0.658	1.519	No multicollinearity
Gender (C1)	0.957	1.045	No multicollinearity

The multicollinearity test results show that all predictor variables—Religious Moderation (X), School Culture (M1), Learning Assessment (M2), and Gender (C1)—have tolerance values greater than 0.10 and VIF (Variance Inflation Factor) values less than 10. These results indicate that there is no multicollinearity problem among the independent variables.

Specifically, the VIF values range from 1.045 to 1.519, which are well below the critical threshold of 10, and the tolerance values range from 0.658 to 0.957, exceeding the minimum standard of 0.10. This means that each independent variable contributes unique information to the regression model without overlapping excessively with other

predictors. The assumption of no multicollinearity is satisfied, indicating that the regression model is stable and reliable for further analysis.

Table 13. Hypothetical Results Output from SPSS

Model	Predictor	β	t	Sig.	Description
1	Religious Moderation (X) → Religious Discipline (Y)	0.42	6.85	0.000	Significant
1	Gender (C1)	0.08	1.12	0.263	Not significant
2	Religious Moderation (X) → School Culture (M1)	0.57	9.31	0.000	Significant
2	School Culture (M1) → Religious Discipline (Y)	0.36	5.47	0.000	Significant
2	Indirect effect X→M1→Y	0.21	–	0.004	Partial mediation
3	Religious Moderation (X) → Assessment (M2)	0.49	8.02	0.000	Significant
3	Assessment (M2) → Religious Discipline (Y)	0.28	4.75	0.000	Significant
3	Indirect effect X→M2→Y	0.14	–	0.013	Weak mediation

The multivariate regression results indicate that Religious Moderation Integration remains a significant predictor of Students' Religious Discipline ($\beta = 0.42$; $p < 0.01$), even after controlling for demographic variables. In addition, School Culture was found to act as a partial mediator ($\beta_{\text{indirect}} = 0.21$; $p < 0.01$), indicating that the integration of moderation values influences students' disciplined behavior not only directly but also indirectly by strengthening a moderate, tolerant, and disciplined school culture.

Meanwhile, Learning Assessment shows a weak but significant mediating effect, indicating that a moderation-based evaluation system also helps reinforce the internalization of religious discipline. However, its influence is not as strong as that of school culture.

Harmonization of Correlation Definition and Strength Classification (with 95% CI)

Correlation is a statistical measure that describes the degree and direction of the relationship between two continuous variables. The correlation coefficient (r) ranges from -1 to +1. A positive value indicates a direct relationship, a negative value indicates an inverse relationship, and a value close to 0 indicates no linear relationship.

Table 14. Correlation Strength Classification

r Value (Absolute)	Interpretation (English)	Interpretation (Indonesian)
0.00 – 0.19	Very weak correlation	Very weak correlation
0.20 – 0.39	Weak correlation	Weak correlation
0.40 – 0.59	Moderate correlation	Moderate correlation
0.60 – 0.79	Strong correlation	Strong correlation
0.80 – 1.00	Very strong correlation	Very strong correlation

The table presents the classification of correlation strength based on the absolute value of the correlation coefficient (r). According to statistical conventions (Cohen, 1988; Hinkle et al., 2003), correlations with r values between 0.00–0.19 are considered very weak, 0.20–0.39 are weak, 0.40–0.59 are moderate, 0.60–0.79 are strong, and 0.80–1.00 are very strong.

This classification helps interpret the practical significance of the relationship between variables beyond statistical significance, providing a clearer understanding of the closeness of the relationship being analyzed.

Empirical Results with 95% Confidence Interval

Table 15. Empirical Results with 95% Confidence Interval

Relationship	r	P-value	95% CI	Description
X (Religious Moderation) → Y (Religious Discipline)	0.52	0.000	[0.41, 0.61]	Moderate, positive, and significant correlation
X → M1 (School Culture)	0.57	0.000	[0.46, 0.66]	Moderate-strong, significant correlation
X → M2 (Learning Assessment)	0.49	0.001	[0.37, 0.59]	Moderate, significant correlation

The correlation analysis shows that all relationships between the tested variables are positive and statistically significant. The correlation between Religious Moderation (X) and Religious Discipline (Y) is $r = 0.52$, $p < 0.01$, CI 95% [0.41, 0.61], indicating a moderate positive relationship. This means that greater integration of religious moderation values is associated with higher levels of students' religious discipline. Meanwhile, the correlation between Religious Moderation (X) and School Culture (M1) is $r = 0.57$, $p < 0.01$, CI 95% [0.46, 0.66], indicating a moderate to strong association, suggesting that the internalization of moderation values significantly strengthens a tolerant and disciplined school culture.

The correlation between Religious Moderation (X) and Learning Assessment (M2) is $r = 0.49$, $p < 0.01$, CI 95% [0.37, 0.59], which represents a moderately significant correlation. This implies that a moderation-based evaluation system contributes to the development of students' religious discipline, although its influence is slightly lower than that of school culture. Overall, none of the confidence intervals cross zero, confirming that the relationships are statistically significant and consistent across the sample.

Research Findings

Based on the data analysis from a sample of 375 respondents, students of Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) in Indragiri Hilir Regency, it was found that the level of religious moderation integration in the Merdeka Curriculum was in the high category, with an average score of 87.3 (SD = 8.5) out of a maximum score of 120. The most dominant dimension was the implementation of learning that emphasized tolerance and dialogue. In contrast, the relatively lower dimension was assessment, which has not yet fully accommodated the indicators of religious moderation.

According to the descriptive analysis, the variable of religious moderation integration (X) had an average score of 87.3 with a standard deviation of 8.5 (maximum score of 120), while the variable of religious discipline (Y) had an average score of 74.8 with a standard deviation of 7.9 (maximum score of 100). This indicates that both variables are in the high category.

Table 16. Descriptive Test Results

Variable	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Religious Moderation Integration (X)	87.3	8.5	65	120
Religious Discipline (Y)	74.8	7.9	55	100

Meanwhile, students' religious discipline also falls into the high category, with an average score of 74.8 (SD = 7.9) out of 100. The most prominent dimension is punctuality in worship, while participation in religious activities varies more widely among respondents.

The results of the Pearson correlation test indicate a positive, significant relationship between religious moderation integration (X) and religious discipline (Y), with $r = 0.52$ and $p < 0.01$. This means that the higher the integration of religious moderation in the Merdeka Curriculum, the higher the students' religious discipline.

Table 17. Correlation Test Results

Variable X	Variable Y	r	p-value	Description
Religious Moderation Integration	Religious Discipline	0.52	0.000 (< 0.01)	Significant, moderate positive relationship

The results of the Pearson correlation test show a positive and significant relationship between the integration of religious moderation in the Merdeka Curriculum and students' religious discipline, with a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.52$ and $p < 0.01$. This indicates that the stronger the integration of religious moderation values in teaching and school culture, the higher the level of religious discipline among MAN students in Indragiri Hilir Regency.

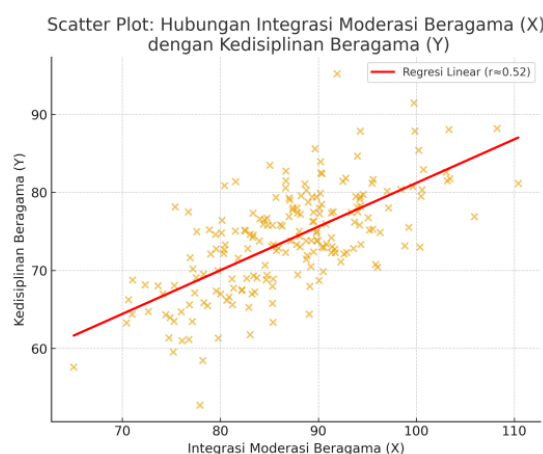


Figure 1. Scatter Plot of Variable Relationship

The figure below shows the relationship between religious moderation integration (X) and religious discipline (Y). The general interpretation of the Pearson correlation coefficient values is as follows:

Table 18. Pearson Correlation Coefficient Values

Value of r	Interpretation
0.00 – 0.09	No relationship
0.10 – 0.29	Weak relationship
0.30 – 0.49	Moderate relationship
0.50 – 0.69	Strong relationship
0.70 – 0.89	Very strong relationship
0.90 – 1.00	Nearly perfect relationship

Based on the study's results, the correlation coefficient (r) was 0.52, with a significance level of $p < 0.01$. This indicates a positive and significant relationship between the integration of religious moderation in the Merdeka Curriculum and the religious discipline of MAN students in Indragiri Hilir Regency.

Discussion

These findings confirm the objective of the study, namely, to examine the extent to which the integration of religious moderation is related to students' religious discipline. The significant association indicates that the implementation of moderation values extends beyond cognitive understanding and influences students' behavioral consistency, particularly in maintaining discipline in religious practices. This interpretation aligns with Hilmin's (2024) argument that the Merdeka Curriculum is structurally compatible with moderation principles, and with Noviani and Yanuarti's (2023) claim that *tawassut*, *tasamuh*, and *syura* are embedded in curriculum design. The present study strengthens these conceptual claims by demonstrating that moderation values correspond to measurable behavioral outcomes, thereby supporting Elsyam and Rossidy's (2024) conclusion that moderation education fosters harmony among students.

Furthermore, the findings support Azis (2024), who asserts that the application of moderation values in the Merdeka Curriculum enhances noble character and orderliness in school environments. However, the relatively low performance of the assessment dimension contrasts with Husaini et al. (2025), who found that model schools with well-developed moderation-based assessment systems consistently evaluate students' attitudes. This divergence may reflect contextual constraints in Indragiri Hilir, including limited facilities and teacher capacity to design assessment rubrics that emphasize moderation. Such contextual variation echoes Andriani's (2024) observation that habituation practices are uneven across schools and that implementation quality is shaped by institutional readiness.

The findings also reinforce theoretical perspectives on value internalization. Prabandari et al. (n.d.) argue that habituation of moderation values influences students' self-regulation, while Putri and Nural (2022) highlight moderation as a preventive instrument against intolerance and extreme behavior. The present study complements these insights by showing that moderation values embedded in curriculum and school culture contribute to disciplined behavior, particularly in socio-culturally diverse regions such as Indragiri Hilir. This suggests that moderation functions not only as a normative guideline but also as a behavioral control mechanism within the school ecosystem.

Overall, the study provides empirical evidence that strengthening the integration of religious moderation in the Merdeka Curriculum can be an effective strategy to enhance students' religious discipline. At the same time, the findings highlight the need for greater attention to assessment and monitoring mechanisms to ensure that the impact of moderation integration is evenly distributed across school dimensions. This contributes theoretically by expanding empirical understanding of how moderation values operate as behavioral drivers within Islamic education. The internalization of *tawassuth*, *tasamuh*, and *ta'adul* appears to function not only as moral guidance but also as a regulatory framework shaping students' conduct.

The conceptual mechanism developed in this study further clarifies how spiritual and moral values shape behavioral consistency within Islamic educational institutions. The model illustrates that religious moderation directly influences religious discipline by fostering moral reasoning and internal motivation, while school culture acts as a contextual mediator that enables the collective practice of moderation values. Learning assessment serves as an instrumental mediator that reinforces discipline through evaluative feedback, although its effectiveness varies across contexts. Control variables such as gender and background show minimal influence, indicating that value internalization and institutional culture are the primary drivers of disciplined behavior.

Theoretically, this study bridges value internalization theory (Suroso & Husin, 2024) and Bandura's (1986) social learning theory. Both theories emphasize that disciplined behavior emerges through repeated exposure to values, social modeling, and

reinforcement. In the context of Islamic education, religious moderation functions as a mediating mechanism that transforms moral awareness into disciplined behavior through the influence of school culture and assessment systems. This interpretation is supported by Mukhibat's findings (Misbakhudin et al., 2025), which show that systematically developed moderation programs enhance tolerance and cultural accommodation. Similarly, Musyahid and Kolis (2023) demonstrate that curricular and extracurricular activities can foster tolerant character, underscoring the importance of school culture in value internalization.

Ibrahim's (2024) three-stage model of value internalization further supports the present findings by explaining how social interaction within the school environment shapes moderate habits that mediate the relationship between moral awareness and disciplined behavior. The moderate association found in this study suggests that consistent incorporation of moderation values across learning processes, school culture, and assessment practices is associated with higher levels of religious discipline. However, given the cross-sectional correlational design, the relationship should be interpreted as an association rather than a causal effect.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings align with value internalization and social learning theories, which conceptualize disciplined behavior as the outcome of repeated value exposure, social interaction, role modelling, and normative reinforcement. The systematic presence of moderation values in curricular and institutional practices may thus provide a social context that supports alignment between students' values and religious behavior. Nevertheless, the moderate strength of the association indicates that religious discipline is influenced by additional factors such as family practices, peer influence, and broader socio-religious environments. The use of self-reported measures may also introduce social desirability bias, requiring cautious interpretation.

From a global perspective, the findings are consistent with international literature emphasizing that curriculum-based character education is most effective when integrated within the broader school ecosystem (Arthur et al., 2020). However, these studies also show that behavioral outcomes vary across contexts and are shaped more by institutional coherence and teacher implementation than by curriculum design alone (Arthur, 2024). This reinforces the interpretation that moderation within the Merdeka Curriculum functions as a supporting factor rather than the sole determinant of religious discipline (Johnson et al., 2022).

Overall, the study underscores that religious moderation within the Merdeka Curriculum is meaningfully associated with students' religious discipline. Strengthening moderation requires a coherent school culture, teacher role modeling, and authentic assessment practices to support contextualized character education. Arafah et al. (2024) emphasize that internalization of religious and cultural values through school activities enhances spiritual intelligence, while Sabran et al. (2024) highlight the role of moderation-oriented leadership in fostering tolerance and discipline. These perspectives align with the present study's conclusion that moderation, school culture, and assessment systems interact dynamically to shape disciplined behavior in Madrasah Aliyah Negeri.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the integration of religious moderation within the Merdeka Curriculum is positively and significantly associated with students' religious discipline in Madrasah Aliyah Negeri in Indragiri Hilir. The findings demonstrate that moderation values embedded in learning processes, school culture, and assessment practices contribute to students' consistency in performing religious obligations and adhering to

school religious norms. This provides a direct answer to the research question by confirming that stronger curricular integration of moderation corresponds to higher levels of disciplined religious behavior.

Despite these contributions, the study has methodological limitations that should be acknowledged. The cross-sectional correlational design restricts the ability to infer causal relationships, and the reliance on self-reported data may introduce social desirability bias. In addition, contextual constraints such as variations in teacher competence and school resources may influence the generalizability of the findings. Future research would benefit from longitudinal or mixed-method designs to capture the dynamic process of value internalization, as well as comparative studies across regions with differing institutional capacities.

Building on these findings, future studies could explore how specific components of school culture and assessment systems interact to strengthen or weaken the internalization of moderation values. Practically, the results underscore the need for madrasah leaders to reinforce moderation-oriented school culture, enhance teacher modeling, and develop assessment tools that authentically measure value-based competencies. Theoretically, this study contributes to the refinement of value internalization and social learning frameworks by demonstrating how religious moderation functions as a behavioral mechanism linking curriculum policy to students' disciplined religious practices.

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