

Implementation of Religious Moderation Based on Local Wisdom at MAN Tanjungbalai

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the implementation of religious moderation based on local wisdom at MAN Tanjungbalai. The study employed a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation, then analyzed thematically through the stages of data reduction, coding, theme categorization, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings show that the implementation of religious moderation at MAN Tanjungbalai has been carried out through three main dimensions, namely institutional, pedagogical, and cultural. In the institutional dimension, the strengthening of religious moderation is reflected in MATSAMA activities, socialization programs conducted by the Interfaith Harmony Forum, and character-building programs within the madrasah. In the pedagogical dimension, religious moderation has begun to be integrated into the learning process and teacher development through the MGMP forum. In the cultural dimension, local wisdom has started to be utilized as an educational medium, particularly through learning activities that encourage students to recognize, document, and promote the local culture of Tanjungbalai amid the challenges of the digital era. The findings also indicate that local wisdom plays an important role in fostering tolerance, respect for differences, and accommodative attitudes toward local culture. However, the implementation of religious moderation based on local wisdom at MAN Tanjungbalai is still at a developing stage and has not yet been systematically integrated into the curriculum, habituation programs, and the evaluation of students' behavior. Therefore, more planned and sustainable strengthening efforts are needed so that religious moderation based on local wisdom can truly become part of the madrasah culture.

Keywords: *Religious Moderation, Local Wisdom, Character Education*

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Introduction

Indonesia is a plural nation built upon religious, cultural, ethnic, and local traditional diversity. In this context, religious moderation cannot be understood merely as a normative slogan, but must be manifested as a concrete educational practice so that students are able to live side by side peacefully, fairly, and openly amid differences. The relevance of this issue has become even stronger because the strengthening of religious moderation remains a national strategic agenda, while the results of the Ministry of Religious Affairs survey show that the 2025 Religious Harmony Index reached 77.89, the highest figure in the last eleven years. However, this achievement should not be interpreted as a sign that the problem has been resolved, since the educational sphere still faces challenges of intolerance, polarization, and the spread of narrow religious understandings, especially amid digital currents and rapid social change.

Religious moderation essentially teaches a way of practicing religion that is not excessive, not harsh, and does not impose one's will on others (Akhmadi, 2019). Religious moderation encourages every individual to understand religious teachings in a balanced, fair, and proportional manner (Mhd. Habibu Rahman, 2025). In this context, a person is not only required to be obedient to the teachings of his or her religion, but must also be able to respect human dignity, appreciate differences, and maintain communal life within the framework of nationhood and the constitution. Thus, religious moderation is not only about belief, but also about attitudes and behavior in everyday life (Arifin, Badrul, 2024).

In its implementation, the Ministry of (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2023) emphasizes that religious moderation has four main indicators, namely national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence, and an accommodative attitude toward local culture. National commitment indicates that religious practice must be in harmony with national values and must not conflict with the foundations of the state. Tolerance emphasizes the importance of respecting differences in belief, viewpoints, and religious practices within a plural society. Antiviolence means rejecting all forms of coercion, intimidation, and radical actions in the name of religion. Meanwhile, an accommodative attitude toward local culture indicates that religious practice in Indonesia does not have to sever its relationship with traditions that live within society.

This last indicator is very important because it affirms that religious moderation in Indonesia is not built by rejecting local culture, but can instead be strengthened through a wise acceptance of local wisdom. As long as it does not contradict the fundamental principles of religion, local culture can serve as a means of instilling peaceful, open, and grounded religious values. Therefore, local wisdom cannot be viewed merely as a complementary element, but rather as an important part of religious moderation education. Through local culture, moderate values are more easily understood, accepted, and practiced by students because they are closely connected to their daily life experiences.

A number of recent studies show that the relationship between religious moderation and local wisdom is becoming increasingly strong in the discourse of Islamic education. A bibliometric study by (Junaidi, Sri Wahyuni Tanshzil, 2025) shows that research on religious moderation has grown rapidly since 2020, with education becoming the most frequently studied domain, accompanied by thematic clusters of local wisdom and cultural practices. At the implementation level, (Muhammad Sholeh Hoddin, Wahidmurni, Basri, 2023) found that the internalization of local wisdom-based religious moderation values in Islamic Religious Education learning can be carried out through the stages of planning, implementation, and evaluation. Another finding from (Anshari et al., 2025) confirms that a local wisdom-based approach is effective when integrated into the curriculum, dialogical learning strategies, and an inclusive academic culture. These findings indicate that religious moderation becomes more operational when translated into a contextual learning system, rather than merely being delivered as verbal material or moral advice detached from the social realities of students.

In the local context, the City of Tanjungbalai has strong relevance for this study. Research on Tanjung Balai shows that the city has faced issues of intolerance, yet at the same

time possesses a rich heritage of local wisdom that has the potential to serve as a basis for strengthening religious moderation. (Irmayanti, Kartika Defi Panggabean, 2022) emphasize that Tanjung Balai has ethnic and religious diversity as well as a rich history of local wisdom that can be utilized to reduce intolerance, although its effectiveness still requires stronger synergy between institutions and society. On the other hand, Tanjungbalai Malay local wisdom such as Sinandong Gubang also contains important cultural values, but its existence has begun to erode and therefore needs to be reintroduced, especially to the younger generation in educational settings. This condition shows that education in Tanjungbalai cannot merely instill tolerance in an abstract sense, but must also relate it to the local cultural identity that lives within the community.

MAN Tanjungbalai is a relevant location for examining this issue because there are indications that the strengthening of religious moderation and concern for local wisdom have begun to appear in the institutional practices of the madrasah. In September 2025, MAN Tanjungbalai organized a socialization program on strengthening harmony and religious moderation for teaching and educational staff. In the same month, the Interfaith Harmony Forum of Tanjungbalai City also provided guidance on religious moderation to students by emphasizing the four main indicators, including an accommodative attitude toward local culture. Furthermore, in January 2026, anthropology learning at MAN Tanjungbalai encouraged students to document and promote the local wisdom of Tanjungbalai amid the challenges of digital culture. These facts indicate that the madrasah has a strong initial foundation, but they do not automatically explain how local wisdom-based religious moderation is systematically implemented in the madrasah culture, learning process, habituation practices, and students' social interactions. This is where the research gap lies and needs to be addressed.

Based on the explanation above, this article is important for examining the implementation of local wisdom-based religious moderation at MAN Tanjungbalai. This study is relevant not only for portraying the practice of religious moderation education in the madrasah, but also for explaining how local values can be integrated as sources of learning, character formation, and the strengthening of school culture. Thus, this research is expected to make a theoretical contribution to the development of contextual Islamic education, while also making a practical contribution to madrasahs in designing strategies to strengthen religious moderation that are closer to the social and cultural realities of students.

Literature Review 1. Religious Moderation

Religious moderation is a way of understanding, believing in, and practicing religious teachings proportionally. In this context, proportional means neither excessive nor dismissive of religious teachings, and not using religion as a reason to act harshly toward others. Religious moderation is not the same as weakening faith, nor does it mean mixing all religious teachings together. Its essence lies in a person's ability to remain steadfast in their beliefs while at the same time being fair, balanced, and respectful of living together in a plural society (Azmi Uwafiq Muhammad, 2023). The Ministry of Religious Affairs' book *Religious Moderation* places moderation as a perspective and religious practice that takes the middle path, while the study by (Ritonga et al., 2024) emphasizes that a moderate attitude means remaining serious in practicing religion without falling into extremism and continuing to uphold the principles of justice and balance.

With this understanding, religious moderation does not stop at the conceptual level, but extends to social behavior. A person can be called moderate not only because they understand their religious teachings correctly, but also because they are able to demonstrate a peaceful, open, and responsible form of religiosity in everyday life (Mubarak & Sunarto, 2024); (Munawar et al., 2024). In a plural society such as Indonesia, healthy religiosity must be reflected in attitudes that respect differences, reject hostility in the name of religion, and maintain harmonious social relations. Therefore, religious moderation can be understood as an effort to connect individual piety with social and national responsibility.

Academically, religious moderation has developed into one of the important themes in Islamic studies, education, and nationalism in Indonesia. A systematic and bibliometric study by (Junaidi, Sri Wahyuni Tanshzil, 2025) shows that scientific publications on religious moderation have increased sharply since 2020. The study also shows that the educational context is one of the most dominant domains in research on religious moderation. These findings confirm that schools and madrasahs are viewed as strategic spaces for instilling an inclusive, peaceful, and responsible way of practicing religion in the younger generation.

2. Local Wisdom

Local wisdom is essentially a worldview, knowledge, values, and life strategies that grow out of a community's long experience in dealing with life's problems. Local wisdom does not emerge suddenly. It is formed through historical processes, social interaction, adaptation to the environment, and the repetition of ways of life considered good and beneficial by the local community (Inayati, Fajriah, 2024); (Limayasa Ayu Oktarini, 2025). Therefore, local wisdom can be understood as collective wisdom that lives within a particular community and serves as a guide in thinking, behaving, and acting. In Njatrijani's study, local wisdom is understood as a worldview, knowledge, and various life strategies manifested in the activities of local communities to address the needs and problems they face. The study also emphasizes that local wisdom is not only an inherited legacy passed down through generations, but can also emerge from the interaction of communities with the natural environment, social change, and other cultures.

In the social context, local wisdom has a very important function. It not only preserves cultural identity, but also serves as a means of building social order, strengthening mutual trust, and maintaining relations among groups (M Solichin, 2019); (Manshuruddin, Tumiran, 2021) Local values that have long been accepted by society usually work more effectively in shaping social behavior because they do not feel foreign or coercive. That is why local wisdom is often regarded as strong social capital in character education, conflict resolution, and the strengthening of social harmony. When values such as mutual respect, peaceful coexistence, deliberation, and mutual cooperation are deeply rooted in a community's culture, those values can become a highly effective bridge for instilling moderate attitudes in religious life.

Research Methodology

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design. This approach was chosen because the research focuses on gaining an in-depth understanding of the implementation process of local wisdom-based religious moderation at MAN Tanjungbalai in its real context. The research site was selected because this madrasah has direct relevance to the research theme, both through its efforts to strengthen religious moderation and its attention to local culture in educational activities. The research subjects included the head of the madrasah, vice principals, Islamic Religious Education teachers, teachers related to cultural content or anthropology, student affairs advisors, and students selected purposively based on their involvement in and knowledge of the implementation of religious moderation and local wisdom in the madrasah. The object of this study was the implementation of local wisdom-based religious moderation as seen from the aspects of learning, madrasah culture, habituation, social interaction, as well as the supporting and inhibiting factors in its implementation.

The research data consisted of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through semi-structured interviews and direct observation, while secondary data were collected through documentation such as school programs, learning tools, school regulations, activity archives, photographs, and other relevant documents. The main instrument in this study was the researcher, supported by interview guidelines, observation sheets, recording devices, and field notes. Data were analyzed using a thematic analysis model through the stages of data collection,

data reduction, coding, theme categorization, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. To ensure data validity, this study applied source triangulation and technique triangulation by comparing data from various informants and cross-checking the results of interviews, observations, and documentation so that the research findings would be more valid, in-depth, and scientifically accountable.

Results

The findings indicate that the implementation of religious moderation at MAN Tanjungbalai has been positioned as part of the institutional direction of the madrasah. This can be seen from the delivery of religious moderation materials during the Masa Ta'aruf Siswa Madrasah (MATSAMA) program in July 2025. In this activity, it was emphasized that religious moderation aims to help students understand and practice religious teachings in a fair and balanced manner so that they may avoid extreme or excessive behavior. On the following day, the Head of MAN Tanjungbalai also delivered a session on the importance of religious moderation to the MATSAMA participants. This fact shows that from the very beginning of the school introduction period, the madrasah had already attempted to instill a proportional religious perspective in new students.

This strengthening effort did not stop at the student orientation stage. In September 2025, the Interfaith Harmony Forum of Tanjungbalai City provided guidance on religious moderation to MAN Tanjungbalai students and explained its four main indicators, namely national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence, and an accommodative attitude toward local culture. In another official report from the same period, it was also emphasized that madrasahs have a vital role in instilling the values of religious moderation in a plural society. These findings show that the implementation of religious moderation at MAN Tanjungbalai has received reinforcement from both internal and external parties of the madrasah.

The findings also reveal that religious moderation at MAN Tanjungbalai has begun to be directed into the educational process, not merely into ceremonial activities. This is evident from the madrasah MGMP forum, which discussed religious moderation, a love-based curriculum, and deep learning. This direction indicates that strengthening religious moderation is no longer assigned only to student affairs or general guidance activities, but is beginning to be positioned as part of teacher competency development and learning strategies. Substantively, this condition is important because education-based implementation must enter the classroom, teacher interaction patterns, and the pedagogical approaches used in teaching and learning activities.

These findings indicate that the madrasah is moving from the stage of introducing values to the stage of integrating values. In other words, religious moderation is no longer understood merely as moral material delivered occasionally, but is beginning to be directed as part of the culture of learning. However, based on the available data, such integration still appears to be in its early strengthening phase and has not yet been fully reflected as a well-documented system across all subjects, teaching tools, and indicators for evaluating student behavior. Therefore, the existing implementation can be assessed positively, but it still requires strengthening at the level of the operational curriculum and more consistent classroom practice.

The findings further show that local wisdom has begun to be positioned as an educational medium at MAN Tanjungbalai. This is evident in anthropology learning in January 2026, which addressed cultural resilience and continuity in the era of digital transformation. In that learning process, students were encouraged to understand that the flow of digital globalization poses a major challenge to the existence of local culture, yet technology can also be used to document and promote the local wisdom of Tanjungbalai. The learning activities were even concluded with a group project assignment in the form of a creative content design based on local culture. These findings indicate that local culture is no longer understood merely as knowledge content, but is beginning to be treated as a contextual and applicable learning experience.

Substantively, this direction is relevant to the need to strengthen religious moderation. An accommodative attitude toward local culture is one of the indicators of religious moderation that was also conveyed to MAN Tanjungbalai students in activities organized by the Interfaith Harmony Forum. Thus, learning about the resilience of local culture can be understood as a strong entry point for instilling a form of religiosity that does not oppose tradition, but instead respects social identity and the cultural heritage of the community. At this point, local wisdom functions not merely as cultural content, but as a medium for value education.

The findings also show that the context of Tanjungbalai provides a strong foundation for the implementation of local wisdom-based religious moderation. Research by Mailin, Lahmuddin, and Waris explains that the City of Tanjung Balai has a history of intolerance, yet at the same time possesses a rich heritage of local wisdom with the potential to build religious moderation within society. The study emphasizes that local wisdom in Tanjung Balai can become an important instrument because it is closely connected to community life and has strong social constructive power. This makes a local wisdom-based religious moderation approach highly relevant when applied in local educational institutions, including MAN Tanjungbalai.

The findings of this study show that the implementation of religious moderation at MAN Tanjungbalai has developed through three main pathways, namely the institutional, pedagogical, and cultural pathways. The institutional pathway is visible in the madrasah's commitment to presenting religious moderation material in MATSAMA and in guidance provided by the Interfaith Harmony Forum. The pedagogical pathway can be seen in efforts to bring religious moderation into teacher development forums and classroom learning. The cultural pathway is reflected in the use of themes of cultural resilience and the promotion of local wisdom in anthropology learning. This pattern shows that religious moderation does not stand as a slogan detached from education, but is beginning to be built through activities that touch the structure of the madrasah, teachers, and students.

These findings are in line with developments in religious moderation research in Indonesia. A bibliometric study by Junaidi and Sri Wahyuni Tanszil (2025) shows that since 2020, research on religious moderation has developed rapidly, with the educational context becoming the most dominant domain. The study also shows a strong cluster connecting religious moderation with local wisdom and cultural practices. These findings reinforce the view that education is indeed a strategic arena for shaping an inclusive, peaceful, and responsible way of practicing religion, while local culture provides a contextual medium for instilling these values in students. Thus, the strengthening direction emerging at MAN Tanjungbalai has strong theoretical relevance.

From the perspective of implementation, the findings of this study reveal that MAN Tanjungbalai has moved beyond the normative stage, but has not yet fully reached the systemic stage. The normative stage means that the institution has introduced religious moderation as a good value. The programmatic stage means that the institution already has concrete activities to strengthen it. Meanwhile, the systemic stage means that the value has been integrated into the curriculum, cross-subject learning, school culture, habituation patterns, and measurable evaluation.

Based on the available data, MAN Tanjungbalai appears strong at the normative and programmatic stages, but there is still insufficient evidence to state that its implementation has become systemic. This is not a minor weakness. It is a crucial point. Many educational institutions appear active because they hold many activities, but in reality have not yet built a consistent value system throughout the entire educational process. The discussion also shows that local wisdom holds an important position in strengthening religious moderation in Tanjungbalai. Studies on Tanjung Balai show that local wisdom contains values of inclusiveness, social closeness, respect for cultural heritage, and potential for conflict resolution. In the madrasah context, this potential is visible when students are directed to use

digital technology to document and promote local wisdom. This approach is appropriate because the younger generation cannot simply be given advice about tolerance. They need to be directly involved in experiencing that local culture can become a learning space for respecting identity, building social relations, and maintaining diversity. Therefore, the strengthening of religious moderation will be more effective when it is not separated from the cultural context surrounding students.

Based on this discussion, it can be understood that the implementation of local wisdom-based religious moderation at MAN Tanjungbalai has shown a constructive direction. The madrasah already has an institutional foundation, has begun to develop pedagogical pathways, and has opened cultural spaces that are relevant to the local context. However, its long-term effectiveness depends greatly on the willingness of the madrasah to transform activities that are still partial in nature into a complete, planned, and sustainable educational system. This is the point that will determine whether local wisdom-based religious moderation will truly become part of the madrasah culture or merely remain a program agenda that appears good on the surface.

Conclusion

The implementation of local wisdom-based religious moderation at MAN Tanjungbalai has shown a clear and constructive direction, but it has not yet fully reached a systemic and comprehensive form. The strengthening of religious moderation has also begun to be directed into the professional sphere of teachers through discussions on religious moderation, a love-based curriculum, and deep learning, indicating an effort to move the values of moderation from a merely ceremonial level to a pedagogical one. At the same time, elements of local wisdom have started to be meaningfully incorporated into learning, particularly through anthropology classes that encourage students to understand cultural resilience in the digital era as well as to document and promote the local culture of Tanjungbalai. As a result, local culture is positioned not merely as supplementary material, but as a medium for value education that is closely connected to students' daily lives. Therefore, MAN Tanjungbalai may be considered to have a fairly strong institutional, pedagogical, and cultural foundation for developing local wisdom-based religious moderation. However, its implementation still needs to be strengthened so that it does not remain only at the normative and programmatic stages, but becomes genuinely integrated into the curriculum, habituation practices, madrasah culture, and the continuous evaluation of students' behavior.

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