

# Implementation of the Program for Strengthening Religious Moderation in Aceh Madrasas

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## Abstract

Educational institutions play a critical role in fostering religious moderation, aiming to cultivate future generations with balanced attitudes and thoughts. This study investigates the understanding and awareness of religious moderation among students at MAN 4 Aceh Besar and explores the programs designed to strengthen this concept. Additionally, it examines the factors that support or hinder the success of these programs. A mixed-methods approach was employed, integrating qualitative and quantitative techniques. Data were collected through observation, interviews, documentation, and scales. Quantitative data analysis determined the level of student understanding, while qualitative methods provided insights into program implementation and influencing factors. Findings reveal that students at MAN 4 Aceh Besar demonstrate an 80.8% understanding and awareness of religious moderation, categorizing the institution as successful in supporting its objectives. Religious moderation programs are integrated into both teaching materials and extracurricular activities, ensuring a holistic approach. Supporting factors for the program's success include moral and material backing from stakeholders. However, challenges arise from both internal and external influences, which may limit the program's effectiveness. The religious moderation program at MAN 4 Aceh Besar has effectively fostered student awareness and understanding, demonstrating the institution's commitment to cultivating moderate perspectives. Continuous support and strategic interventions are necessary to address the identified challenges and sustain progress.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Plurality in Indonesia is unique and cannot be separated from humanity itself. Diversity cannot be fought because it has become *sunnahtullah*, (Enoh, Kertayasa, Amrullah, Ruswandi, & Erihadiana, 2023). However, if pluralism is not addressed well, it could potentially lead to division, therefore a positive attitude is needed through the realization of religious moderation. The concept of moderation is also called *Wasathiyah* (*middle path*). This motivates Muslims to behave inclusively, openly, moderately, accommodatingly and tolerantly towards religious adherents, cultural groups or other groups who have different political ideologies.

Terrorism and radicalism have spread on all fronts in Indonesia, (Burhanuddin & Ilmi, 2022). The rise of terrorism and radicalism has created awareness that there is another face of Islam that is different from Islam in general. This requires careful and serious anticipation. Family and school are the first and foremost bastions for providing moderate Islamic education, (Lessy et al., 2022)(Achmad, Rahmat, & Kosasih, 2023). Islam opposes anti-moderate attitudes, (H. A. Karim, 2019)(Miftahuddin, Azni, Mujahidin, Anwar, & Anwar, 2022)(Mawangir & Anica, 2023). Moderate values can be spread through education, (Lessy et al., 2022)(Afriantoni, Armelis, Khairunnisa, & Alhidayah, 2023). Moderate Islamic education can prevent students from behaving radically, on the other hand, moderate education will have implications for the understanding of Muslims to accept all forms of religious differences and be able to respect the beliefs held by other people, (A. Karim, 2012). Religious moderation not only accepts religious differences, but also accepts differences in caste, profession, and even differences in understanding, (Jailani & Suyadi, 2022). Making educational institutions a moderation laboratory is the right choice in approaching religion, (Sutrisno, 2019). Strengthening religious moderation is a realistic offer to resolve all differences (Enoh et al., 2023).

The radicalist problem in Indonesia was impact to the local area, especially in Aceh. One of the Madrasah, namely MAN 4 Aceh Besar, had problems with religious moderation, namely a phenomenon among students where, at that time, the elected head of OSIM resigned because he thought that the students who joined extracurricular activities did not have the same frequency as him, this tended to be doctrinaire from institutions affiliated with him. These students have the potential to easily blame others and feel that they are the most righteous.

From that, *bullying* happened between students regarding differences in ethnicity, language and others, such as the phenomenon of making fun of students who cannot speak the language used in Madrasah in general, such as making fun of students who cannot speak Acehnese and also students who cannot speak Indonesian. This phenomena can make relationship between one and other not strength again and can separated the unity. To overcome problems at the Madrasah, the school is trying to implement a religious moderation program as a solution that is considered capable of overcoming the problem. Espessially promote the *wasathiyah* concept, in where the man can't extreme, but they must do justice for all humanbeing.

Many studies have addressed religious moderation in educational contexts. For example, Abdul Syatar (2020) examined higher education strategies for strengthening religious moderation at UIN Alauddin Makassar through curriculum enhancements to prevent radicalism. While relevant to the concept of *wasathiyah* in curricula, Syatar's focus on higher education differs from this study. Similarly, Nirwana et al. (2021) analyzed the integration of religious moderation into Islamic university learning, highlighting limited implementation among lecturers. Burhanuddin and Ilmi (2022) explored the typology of religious moderation at PTKIN institutions, identifying integrative models, cultural interpolation, and internalized Islamic education. These findings focus on higher education, contrasting with this study's focus on secondary education.

Further, Nugraha et al. (2019) assessed Islamic values and moderation in learning, concluding that Islamic education teachers implement moderation values from planning to evaluation. However, their research primarily concentrates on the teaching process, unlike this study, which comprehensively evaluates all institutional programs.

A gap remains in examining religious moderation programs holistically at the madrasah level. Most existing research centers on higher education or specific aspects like curricula or teaching processes. This study addresses this gap by exploring religious moderation at MAN 4 Aceh Besar, focusing on students' understanding and awareness, the institutional programs designed to foster moderation, and the factors influencing these programs.

The novelty of this research lies in its comprehensive approach to religious moderation in a secondary education context, considering both curricular and extracurricular dimensions. Its findings are significant for developing practical strategies to nurture moderate attitudes and address challenges in implementing such programs.

## 2. METHODS

This research employed a case study design with a mixed-methods approach, integrating qualitative and quantitative methods to provide a comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon of religious moderation at MAN 4 Aceh Besar. The study utilized analytical descriptive techniques to deeply explore and clearly describe the implementation of religious moderation programs within the institution. This approach was selected to gain a nuanced understanding of the program's impact and dynamics.

The research subjects included both teachers and students. From a total student population of 480, a sample of 48 participants was selected randomly to ensure representation. For teacher participants, purposive sampling was used to select the principal and three key teachers involved in program implementation. Data reliability was ensured through triangulation, incorporating cross-verification from multiple participants and sources.

Data collection employed multiple techniques, including participant observation, semi-structured interviews, documentation, and Likert-scale surveys. The Likert-scale data measured students' understanding and awareness of religious moderation, which were then converted into qualitative descriptions to provide deeper insights. Triangulation of data from various methods and participants ensured the accuracy and credibility of the findings.

Data analysis was conducted in three stages:

1. Data Reduction: Classifying and organizing data according to the research questions, including identifying relevant themes from observations and interviews.
2. Data Presentation: Systematically displaying the classified data, highlighting patterns and correlations within the program's implementation.
3. Data Verification: Interpreting the consolidated data to draw meaningful conclusions about the effectiveness and challenges of the religious moderation program at MAN 4 Aceh Besar.

This rigorous methodological framework allowed for a holistic understanding of the program's outcomes and its contributions to fostering religious moderation.

## 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1 The Nature of Religious Moderation in Islam

The word moderation comes from Latin *moderatio*, which means not excessive or lacking, the word also means self-control (from an attitude of extreme excess and deficiency). Official Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI) provides two meanings of the word moderation, namely reducing violence and avoiding extremes. If it is said "that person behaves moderately," that sentence also means that the person behaves naturally, normally, and not extremely, (TIM Penyusun Kementerian Agama RI, 2019).

Meanwhile, the word moderate in Arabic is known as *al-wasathiyah*. As in Al-Qur'an surah Al-Baqarah verse 143:

وَكَذَلِكَ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا لِتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ عَلَى النَّاسِ وَيَكُونَ الرَّسُولُ  
عَلَيْكُمْ شَهِيدًا وَمَا جَعَلْنَا الْقِبْلَةَ الَّتِي كُنْتَ عَلَيْهَا إِلَّا لِنَعْلَمَ مَنْ يَتَّبِعِ الرَّسُولَ  
مِمَّنْ يَنْقَلِبُ عَلَى عَقْبَيْهِ وَإِنْ كَانَتْ لَكَبِيرَةً إِلَّا عَلَى الَّذِينَ هَدَى اللَّهُ وَمَا كَانَ اللَّهُ  
لِيُضَيِّعَ إِيمَانَكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِالنَّاسِ لَرءُوفٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿١٤٣﴾

*It means: "And thus (also) we have made you (Muslims), a just and chosen people so that you will be a witness for (deeds) of people and for the Messenger (Muhammad) to be a witness for (deeds) of you. and we do not determine the Qibla which is your Qibla, Al-Baqarag: 143, (Kementrian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2014)*

Word *al-Wasath* in the verse above means the best and most perfect. In the hadith it is also stated that *the best question is the one in the middle*, in the sense of seeing and resolving a problem, moderate Islam tries to take a compromise approach and be in the middle, as well as in responding to differences, whether religious or sectarian differences. Moderate Islam always prioritizes an attitude of tolerance, mutual respect while still believing in the truth of the beliefs of each religion and mahzab. So that everyone can accept decisions fairly, without having to get involved in anarchic actions, (Darlis, 2017). Without balance and justice, calls for religious moderation will be ineffective. Thus, moderate means that each person must not be extreme in each perspective. Both must try to find common ground.

Moderate Islam is a religious understanding that is very relevant in the context of diversity in all aspects, including religion, customs, tribes, and the nation itself. The variety of religious understanding is a historical fact in Islam. The logical consequence of that statement is the emergence of terms that follow behind the word Islam. For example Fundamental Islam, Liberal Islam, Progressive Islam, and many other labels, (Darlis, 2017).

One of the scholars who explained moderation was Yusuf al-Qaradawi. He revealed that the signs of moderation include: (1) comprehensive understanding of Islam, (2) balance between sharia provisions and changing times, (3) support for peace and respect for human values, (4) recognition of plurality of religions, culture and politics, and (5) recognition of minority rights, (Abdillah, 2016).

In Muslim-majority countries, the attitude of moderation at a minimum includes recognition of the existence of other parties, a tolerant attitude, respect for differences of opinion, and the non-imposition of one's will through violence. This is based on verses from the Qur'an, including respect for diversity and the willingness to interact. Qs. Al-Hujurat: 13:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا  
إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَىٰكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ ﴿١٣﴾

*It means "O mankind, we have indeed created you from a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes so that you may know each other. Indeed, the most honorable among you in the eyes of God is the most pious among you. Indeed, Allah is all-knowing and all-knowing." Qs. Al-Hujurat: 13, (Kementrian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2014).*

These basic criteria can actually also be used to characterize moderate Muslims in Muslim minority countries such as America, England and others. Muqtadir Khan describes moderate Muslims as people who express Islam in a friendly manner and are willing to coexist peacefully with followers of other religions and are comfortable with democracy and the separation of politics and religion (Abdillah, 2016). Religious moderation must be understood as a balanced religious attitude between the practice

of one's own religion (*exclusive*) and respect for the religious practices of others of different beliefs (*inclusive*).

Based on the explanation above, it can be understood that Islam commands its ummah to have a moderate attitude in religion. This moderation is reflected in the term *washatiyah*, which is a balanced attitude that is not extreme left or extreme right, where it has the characteristics of a comprehensive understanding of Islam, a balance between the provisions of *shari'ah* and changing times, respect for human values, recognizing plurality and recognizing minority rights.

### 3.2 Indicators, Limitations and Characteristics of Religious Moderation

In 2019, the Indonesian Ministry of Religion actively promoted religious moderation. The Indonesian Ministry of Religion designated 2019 as a year of mixed moderation, (Burhanuddin & Ilmi, 2022). This is based on extremism, radicalism and hate speech, to the point that fractured relations between religious communities are a problem faced by the Indonesian nation today. For this reason, the principles of religious moderation need to be upheld.

The success of Religious Moderation in life can be seen from the following four harmonious and interrelated indicators: a) National commitment, especially on Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution, b) Tolerance towards differences in religion, race, ethnicity and culture, c) Non-violence, both verbal, physical and mental violence, and d) Accommodating to local culture as long as it does not conflict with basic religious teachings, (TIM Penyusun Kementerian Agama RI, 2019). Apart from that, religious moderation also maintains unity and integrity between religious communities, respecting each other and helping each other, in accordance with the motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, which means different but still one. Because Indonesia is a country that has many tribes, religions and races. Thus, the attitude of religious moderation is in accordance with the ideology of the Indonesian state, which is reflected in *Bineka Tunggal Ika's* motto. There are elements of tolerance, accommodative attitude, anti-violence and national commitment.

Limitations on religious understanding and practice can be considered excessive if they violate three things: a) Human values, for example committing acts that degrade human dignity or even eliminating the existence of humanity itself can be said to violate human values. The actions were clearly excessive or extreme. b) Mutual agreement, for example in social life there are certainly many regulations that have been mutually agreed upon by all residents in the neighborhood where they live, if a resident in the name of the religion he adheres to violates the agreed agreement then he can be considered excessive. c) Public order, if someone in the name of religious teachings violates public order, they can be considered excessively religious, (Ainul Aswad, 2023).

Bearing in mind that the substance of religious moderation is in nature *tawassut* (middle), it is necessary to limit how to behave between different beliefs with faith that do not deviate or are in accordance with religious teachings. Among the verses regarding the limits of tolerance are as follows: a) Not Risking Faith; Surah Al-Kafirun orders a Muslim to renounce himself from other religions related to *aqidah* and *muamalah*. So the correct concept of tolerance is to allow other people to practice their religion without hindering them, not by following them. b) Not Spreading Hate each other; Allah SWT forbids His servants from spreading hatred between people of different beliefs. As Allah SWT says in Qs. Al-Hujarat: 11, (Shiddiq, 2017). This verse also provides restrictions or, more precisely, prohibitions or orders not to make fun of each other, especially people of different religions, which will give rise to conflict, (Shiddiq, 2017). c) Not Forcing Other Religious Groups; Al Qur'an surah al-Baqarah: 256 explains that there is no compulsion in religion, (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2014). In inviting to goodness should be done in a polite way, there is no compulsion for people to follow what is conveyed. When a *da'wah* has reached him then after that he has the right to choose. From this description, it can be seen that in the Qur'an there are 3 restrictions that a person should not do, including not risking his religion, not spreading hatred to each other, and not forcing other religious groups.

The understanding and practice of religious practice of a moderate Muslim has the following

characteristics: *Tawassuth* (take the middle path), *Tawazun* (balanced), both earthly and spiritual, *I'tidal* (straight and firm) namely putting something in its place, *Tasamuh* (tolerance), namely recognizing and respecting differences, *Musawah* (egalitarian), *Shura* (deliberation), *Ishlah* (reform) adhering to principles *al-muhafazhah ala al-qadimi al-shalihwa al-akhdzu bi al-jadidi al-ashlah* (preserving old traditions that are still relevant and implementing new things that are more relevant), *Aulawiyah* (putting priority first), *Tathawwur wa ibtikar* (dynamic and innovative), *Tahadhdhur* (civilized), (Nur & Lubis, 2015). The ideas above show that there are 10 characteristics who have religious moderation attitude there are *Tawassuth*, *Tawazun*, *I'tidal*, *Tasamuh*, *Musawah*, *Syura*, *Ishlah*, *Aulawiyah*, *Tathawwur wa ibtikar* and, *Tahadhdhur*

### 3.3 Supporting and Inhibiting Factors for Religious Moderation and Efforts to Strengthen It

#### 3.3.1 Supporting Factors

Several supporting factors; *First*, Coordination. Coordination is carried out by strengthening cooperation by determining goals, recognizing each individual's character, diligently communicating between people, determining rules and conducting evaluations. *Second*, leadership and bureaucratic support. Leadership can influence the development of society in a reciprocal relationship. Here a leadership figure is needed who creates an attitude of moderation in society.

The existence of the educational trisector is a forum that is considered effective in efforts to instill religious moderation. Therefore, a comprehensive review of the curriculum is needed to support the implementation of strengthening religious moderation in the three educational institutions. Learning about religious moderation in non-formal institutions such as TPA and other religious course institutions needs to prioritize religious moderation education by implementing Islamic values from an early age, (Ali & Firmansyah, 2023). Both formal and informal.

One of the efforts to embed an attitude of moderation in Indonesian society is through education. The Indonesian Ministry of Religion is making efforts to strengthen religious moderation in a project to strengthen the profile of Pancasila students. Based on KMA 347 of 2022, strengthening the profile of Pancasila students in the madrasah environment is projected in two aspects, namely the profile of Pancasila students and the profile of students *The grace of God (Rahmatan lil 'alamin)*. The guidebook prepared by the independent curriculum (*kurikulum merdeka*) development team presents several strategies for strengthening the profile. *First*, Profile strengthening projects are integrated with lesson substance. *Second*, designed collaboratively between subjects. *Third*, carried out in an integrated manner in developing talents and interests.

To strengthen religious moderation, it is necessary to strengthen the profile of Pancasila students and *rahmatan lil alamin* students through a curriculum that is integrated into the tri center of education. Based on this description, various factors influence the implementation of strengthening religious moderation. In terms of supporting factors, among them are the cooperation and communication built by stakeholders and the support of leaders or bureaucracy.

#### 3.3.2 Inhibiting Factors

Meanwhile, factors inhibiting religious moderation efforts include, *First*, Lack of budget. If there is a good budget, the community will feel the positive impact by living in peace, (Indarwati, Sulton, & Ardhana J.M, 2022). *Second*, lack of socialization insight into religious moderation. *Third*, unsupportive educational institutions. The explanation shows that the inhibiting factors that exist in strengthening religious moderation are the lack of budget to socialize the strengthening of religious moderation, the lack of socialization of religious moderation strengthening programs and the lack of implementation of educational socialization of course, hampering the planned religious moderation strengthening program.

### **3.4 Understanding and Awareness of Religious Peserta Of Students MAN 4 Aceh Besar**

Madrassah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) 4 Aceh Besar has 65 teachers and staff and a student population of 480 for the 2023/2024 academic year: There has been an increasing of awareness of religious moderation. The results of the research conducted by the researcher provide an overview of the students' understanding and awareness of religious moderation at MAN 4 Aceh Besar, presented through the results of an attitude scale test in the form of a Likert scale (Documentation, n.d.).

Based on the data calculations, it was concluded that the students at MAN 4 Aceh Besar, from a 10% sample taken for all the test items, achieved an average score of 80.8%. This percentage indicates a "Good" category. It shows that students were able to answer questions related to understanding and awareness of religious moderation. Additionally, the students' understanding of religious moderation has led to the emergence of two generations of national religious moderation ambassadors, (Ismail, 2023). This demonstrates that efforts to enhance religious moderation in the Madrasah have yielded positive results.

This data shows that the efforts of the Indonesian government through the Ministry of Religious Affairs as said by Burhanuddin and Ilmi, have been implemented by Madrasahs, so that students reflect the characteristics of religious moderation as stated by Yusuf Qardhawi, namely having a comprehensive understanding of Islam, a balance between the provisions of shari'ah and changing times, respecting human values, recognizing plurality and recognition of minority rights.

This success certainly needs to be emulated by other educational institutions. It is also important to be socialized in various other educational institutions, so that the spirit of strengthening religious moderation in Indonesia can be more evenly distributed.

### **3.5 Religious Moderation Strengthening Program at MAN 4 Aceh Besar**

Based on an interview with Mr. Musiarifsyah Putra, a teacher of Aqidah Akhlak, regarding the religious moderation strengthening program at MAN 4 Aceh Besar, the program can encompass various efforts as follows: a) Curriculum that Encourages Religious Moderation: Developing a curriculum that promotes better understanding of religion, tolerance values, and appreciation for diversity. b) Teacher Training: Providing training to teachers so that they can teach and facilitate discussions that support religious moderation. c) Extracurricular Activities: Organizing extracurricular activities such as discussion groups, seminars, or workshops that explore issues of religious moderation. Additionally, involving students in national activities such as religious moderation ambassadors. d) Character Education Program: Encouraging the development of traits like empathy, tolerance, and interfaith understanding through character education programs. e) Educational Resources: Providing books, teaching materials, and other resources that promote religious moderation. f) Evaluation and Monitoring: Conducting continuous evaluation to ensure that these programs are effective and aligned with the goals of religious moderation, (Musiarifsyah Putra, 2023).

Based on the observations. It found out that religious moderation materials are included in extracurricular activities such as scouting. In these scouting activities, students are guided to have a moderate understanding and attitude towards religion. This attitude is instilled even during the introduction period for new students, integrated through learning activities. From the vision and mission perspective, the orientation is also towards moderation, as seen in the motto and Core Values of MAN 4 Aceh Besar, which is "BERMOTIF," an acronym for "Dignified, Moderate, and Competitive," with a focus on moderation.

From a learning perspective, the Aqidah Akhlak teacher plays a significant role because the subject of religious moderation is included in this course. However, other teachers also have a responsibility to incorporate religious moderation values into every lesson delivered through certain teaching methods or approaches, (Musiarifsyah Putra, 2023).

Meanwhile, stakeholders outside the Madrasah also contribute to the preparation process for national religious moderation ambassadors. For example, there is support when MAN 4 Aceh Besar students become national religious moderation ambassadors, with financial support from various

parties such as the committee, the regional office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, although with varying amounts. Sending religious moderation ambassadors from the School certainly plays an important role in increasing the spirit of strengthening religious moderation in Madrasahs, because their presence will be able to be an example for other students, besides that the School ambassadors can also conduct socialization to various school institutions to campaign for various important information about religious moderation.

The optimization of religious moderation is also pursued by enhancing teacher quality. Interviews with teachers revealed that educators and staff from the madrasah were sent to the Provincial Religious Training Center in Aceh to receive specialized training on religious moderation. Some teachers successfully completed these programs and were awarded certificates for their competency. Nationally, they also participated in religious moderation competency programs to further strengthen their understanding and implementation skills (Ismail, 2023). Research indicates that individuals practicing moderate and inclusive teachings are more likely to exhibit tolerance (Rahman, Walid, & Humaidi, 2022).

The various training programs for strengthening religious moderation have proven to be highly impactful. Continuous professional development is deemed essential for teachers and staff to remain effective in delivering the program's objectives.

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the quality of teachers, particularly in their understanding of religious moderation, is a pivotal factor. Accurate information and proper guidance from teachers are necessary to ensure the program's success. Teacher readiness and commitment are critical, as resistance from educators could hinder the program's implementation and effectiveness. Strengthening teacher quality ensures a solid foundation for fostering religious moderation among students.

Efforts to strengthen religious moderation at MAN 4 Aceh Besar certainly should be an example to other schools. For this reason, madrasah needs to provide socialization of the programs that have been carried out by involving government support, so that the uniqueness of the practice of implementing strategies to strengthen religious moderation that has been carried out can be applied more widely in various other educational institutions. In addition, these efforts will also be able to counter negative issues in the form of violence and hatred in various educational institutions which are certainly the enemies of religious moderation itself. In the national context, of course, the programs that have been implemented are considered appropriate to overcome national issues that are developing in Indonesia, especially the issue of radicalism. These efforts can certainly counter the development of radicalism and intolerance thoughts that develop.

The effort certainly does not stop at this research. Of course, the results of this study need to be carried out further by subsequent researchers to strengthen sustainability and get new strategies on strengthening other religious moderation in madrasahs and elsewhere in general. As well as finding other strategies to counter various factors that can weaken efforts to strengthen religious moderation in Madrasah.

### ***3.6 Supporting and Inhibiting Factors of the Religious Moderation Strengthening Program at MAN 4 Aceh Besar***

The successful implementation of the religious moderation program at MAN 4 Aceh Besar is supported by several key factors. One crucial factor is stakeholder support, evident in the provision of financial assistance for selected moderation ambassadors. This funding plays a vital role in facilitating various activities and strengthening programs, including socialization efforts aimed at promoting religious moderation within the madrasah. Such support underscores the commitment of stakeholders to fostering a culture of moderation.

Another significant factor is the alignment of the institution's vision with religious moderation. MAN 4 Aceh Besar's motto, "BERMOTIF" (Bermartabat, Moderat dan Kompetitif – Dignified, Moderate, and Competitive), reflects its emphasis on moderation as a core principle. This vision serves

as a guiding framework for organizing activities that reinforce the values of moderation, ensuring that these principles are consistently integrated into the institution's programs.

Efforts to improve teacher quality also contribute substantially to the program's realization. Teachers are trained as key drivers of religious moderation within the Islamic school, with the government demonstrating its commitment by funding these initiatives. Such training ensures that educators are equipped to model and instill values of tolerance and moderation in their students. According to Albert Bandura's learning theory, students learn behaviors through observation and imitation. Teachers who exemplify religious tolerance provide a powerful model for students, enabling them to internalize and emulate these values in their actions (Wahyuni & Fitriani, 2022). This comprehensive approach underscores the institution's dedication to creating an environment that promotes understanding, respect, and moderation.

### **3.6.2. Inhibiting Factors of the Religious Moderation Strengthening Program at MAN 4 Aceh Besar**

In addition to supporting factors, there are several challenges inhibiting the strengthening of the religious moderation program at MAN 4 Aceh Besar. One significant challenge is the influence of social media, which exposes students to radical sermons and content (Musiarifsyah Putra, 2023). Such material can lead students away from moderation, fostering behaviors that undermine the program's objectives. Radical content may even prompt learners to imitate violent behavior, rendering the religious strengthening efforts ineffective. To counter this, proactive measures are necessary, such as training teachers in religious moderation, displaying banners promoting tolerance and warning against intolerance, and creating educational platforms that emphasize the value of tolerance within the madrasah environment.

Another critical issue is the lack of understanding among some teachers. Internally, resistance arises from teachers who have been influenced by misinformation outside the school, leading them to discourage students from participating in religious moderation activities. Efforts to address this involve providing these teachers with accurate information and a deeper understanding of religious moderation, emphasizing principles that promote harmony rather than hatred.

Externally, institutions affiliated with deviant ideologies pose additional challenges. These organizations sometimes engage directly with schools to propagate their views. However, the school actively counters such influences by presenting arguments aligned with its moderation principles (Ismail, 2023). Addressing these internal and external challenges requires gradual, in-depth socialization and consistent communication among all stakeholders to strengthen the program's foundation (Zahroh, 2022).

Based on the collected data, the religious moderation strengthening program at MAN 4 Aceh Besar includes the following:

#### *a. Understanding and awareness of religious moderation among students at MAN 4 Aceh Besar*

The data obtained shows that the understanding and awareness of religious moderation among students at MAN 4 Aceh Besar are in the "good" category. This is based on the questionnaire the students completed, which considers indicators of success in religious moderation, including national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence, and acceptance of traditions. Through instilling the values of religious moderation by the school, students can understand and apply these four indicators.

#### *b. Religious Moderation Strengthening Program at MAN 4 Aceh Besar*

The school has undertaken efforts to strengthen religious moderation. In terms of vision and mission, it leans towards moderation, as seen from the motto and Core Values of MAN 4 Aceh Besar, "BERMOTIF," an acronym for "Bermartabat, Moderat dan Kompetitif," where one of the focuses is on moderation. Teachers play a crucial role in strengthening and instilling the values of religious moderation in students, where these values can be integrated into all school activities, not just in classroom learning.

In addition, strengthening the attitude of religious moderation among students is also supported by teachers' understanding of religious moderation, which can foster students' attitudes of moderation. The provision of moderate-based learning materials can enhance students' understanding of religious moderation concepts. Providing good examples will instill religious moderation attitudes in students. Teachers' efforts to instill moderate attitudes in students help them navigate issues that could lead to division, (Zakaria, 2021). Furthermore, the strengthening of religious moderation through family and community support will certainly further support the realization of these attitudes. Moderate education provided by parents and the community will create a generation with good character, justice, non-extremism, and impartiality, except in matters that are correct according to Islamic law, (Nora, 2021).

#### *c. Supporting and inhibiting factors of the religious moderation strengthening program at MAN 4 Aceh Besar*

In every effort, there must be find out supporting factors and obstacles may arise. This is also the case in the religious moderation strengthening program at MAN 4 Aceh Besar. From observations and interviews, the supporting factors found include the efforts carried out by the school and the cooperation and support from relevant authorities, which ensure the continuity of this program. The obstacles faced by the school include the time needed for the religious moderation program to be well received and socialized to all parties and to apply moderate attitudes within each individual. The success of this program relies on the responsibility of all parties, and it is hoped that the challenges faced can be overcome so that the religious moderation program can be effectively implemented. Religious moderation is crucial for resolving problems, as it can maintain tolerance among students, (Maharani & Rahmani, 2023). Increasing religious tolerance certainly plays a role in preventing violations, as has happened. The SETARA Institute report reported that in 2008, there were 367 violations of freedom of religion in 265 events, and 68% stated that they refused to build houses of worship. Therefore, religious strengthening programs need to be strengthened, this is also necessary to help Peace Education programs. which are often initiated in various conflict areas (Usmi, 2024). In addition, it also helps interfaith education programs, such as interfaith education figures that are needed to strengthen religious tolerance, (Manahung, Solong, Datunsolong, Hasiru, & Tilome, 2022).

## **4. CONCLUSION**

The findings of this study reveal that students at MAN 4 Aceh Besar demonstrate strong understanding and awareness of religious moderation, attributed to the well-implemented strengthening program. The program is supported by the madrasah's vision and mission, such as the "BERMOTIF" motto emphasizing moderation, and is operationalized through integrated curricula, extracurricular activities, and stakeholder support, including financial assistance for moderation ambassadors. Efforts to enhance teachers' understanding through training also contribute significantly to the program's success. These findings imply that the madrasah's approach to fostering religious moderation serves as a model for other educational institutions, highlighting the importance of institutional vision, comprehensive programming, and stakeholder involvement.

However, challenges persist, including the influence of radical content on social media, limited understanding among some teachers, internal resistance, and external threats from deviant ideologies. Addressing these obstacles requires targeted measures, such as collaborating with the Ministry of Information and Telecommunications to filter harmful content, organizing training to correct misconceptions about religious moderation, and providing students with programs that reinforce tolerance and inclusivity.

This study is limited to the context of MAN 4 Aceh Besar and does not encompass other madrasahs or educational institutions, suggesting the need for broader research to generalize findings. Future research should focus on developing scalable models for religious moderation programs, addressing challenges like media influence and teacher resistance, and exploring their applicability in diverse educational settings. These efforts are essential for strengthening religious moderation across

Indonesia's educational landscape, ensuring its alignment with national and provincial goals for fostering harmony and inclusivity.

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