



The Dialectics of Lived Moderation in an NU Madrasah Aliyah: *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah* Education, Ritual Practice, and Student Organization

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Abstract

Religious moderation is widely promoted in Indonesia to counter online-fuelled radical and intolerant narratives, yet its enactment at the school level often remains policy-driven and pedagogically thin. This study examines how moderation is internalized in an NU-affiliated *Madrasah Aliyah* in Jepara through *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah* lessons, collective rituals, and student organizations. Based on a qualitative case-study design, data were collected through classroom and school-activity observations, semi-structured interviews with seven informants (school leaders, an *Aswaja* teacher, and students), and document analysis of syllabi, lesson plans, textbooks, and internal policies (November 2023 to January 2024). The findings show that internalization progresses through intertwined stages of knowing, feeling, and doing that correspond to national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence, and cultural accommodation. However, the process remains uneven due to delayed learning resources, lecture-dominated instruction, and inconsistent family reinforcement. Sustaining moderation, therefore, requires an integrated ecosystem that links dialogical pedagogy, ritual participation, and community collaboration so that moderation becomes a lived civic-religious habit rather than a slogan.

Keywords: Student Agency, Dialogical Pedagogy, Ritual Pedagogy, Islamic Moderation, NU Madrasah.

Abstrak

Moderasi beragama dipromosikan secara luas di Indonesia untuk merespons menguatnya narasi radikal dan intoleran yang didorong oleh ruang digital, tetapi pelaksanaannya di tingkat sekolah sering kali masih berorientasi kebijakan dan lemah secara pedagogis. Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana moderasi diinternalisasikan di Madrasah Aliyah berafiliasi NU di Jepara melalui pembelajaran *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah*, ritual kolektif, dan organisasi siswa. Dengan desain studi kasus kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui observasi kelas dan kegiatan sekolah, wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan tujuh informan (pimpinan sekolah, guru *Aswaja*, dan siswa), serta analisis dokumen berupa silabus, rencana pelaksanaan pembelajaran, buku ajar, dan kebijakan internal sekolah (November 2023 sampai Januari 2024). Temuan menunjukkan bahwa internalisasi berlangsung melalui tahapan knowing, feeling, dan doing yang saling berkaitan dengan komitmen kebangsaan, toleransi, anti-kekerasan, dan akomodasi budaya. Namun, proses tersebut belum berjalan merata karena keterlambatan sumber belajar, pembelajaran yang didominasi metode ceramah, dan penguatan keluarga yang tidak konsisten. Oleh karena itu, keberlanjutan moderasi memerlukan ekosistem terpadu yang menghubungkan pedagogi dialogis, partisipasi ritual, dan kolaborasi komunitas agar moderasi menjadi kebiasaan kewargaan-keagamaan yang hidup, bukan sekadar slogan.

Kata Kunci: Agensi Siswa, Pedagogi Dialogis, Pedagogi Ritual, Moderasi Islam, Madrasah NU.

INTRODUCTION

The spread of radical and intolerant narratives has become a pressing concern for Islamic schooling in Indonesia, where recent analyses of madrasahs document recurring manifestations of intolerance and underline the difficulty of prevention through policy alone (Aprilianto et al., 2025; Sintasari et al., 2026; Wonuola et al., 2025; Yani et al., 2025). In the digital era, online networks intensify these dynamics by enabling radical ideologies to circulate within learning spaces and influence how adolescents imagine faith and social belonging (Halidin et al., 2025; Iwan Setiawan et al., 2026; Mahzumi et al., 2025). Although Moderation has been promoted as a peacebuilding and counter-extremism agenda, its enactment in educational settings is often reduced to administrative compliance, producing a superficial rather than dialogical pedagogy (Chotimah et al., 2025; Prasetyo et al., 2025). This tension makes it urgent to examine how moderation becomes an educational experience that students can recognise, feel, and live through daily practice rather than a rhetorical construct (Subchi et al., 2022; Verkuyten et al., 2022).

At the state level, the Ministry of Religious Affairs formalised the national program of religious moderation in 2019 through four indicators: national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence, and cultural accommodation (Kader et al., 2024; Khoir et al., 2024; Kurniawan et al., 2025; Syam & Ishak, 2025). These serve as moral reference points for schools in cultivating plural and balanced citizens (Purwanto & Saepudin, 2023). However, implementation across schools has been uneven. Teachers tend to view moderation as a bureaucratic requirement instead of an integrated pedagogy (Salim et al., 2024), while students often encounter it as fragmented moral instruction. The disconnection between policy and practice exposes how moderation has been constructed normatively but rarely translated into dialogical encounters in classrooms (Chotimah et al., 2025; Syam & Ishak, 2025; Yani et al., 2023). This gap demands an inquiry into how moderation becomes lived, negotiated, and interpreted within the microcosm of the school.

Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Indonesia's largest Muslim organisation, occupies a unique position within this landscape. The theological heritage of *Ablussunnah wal-Jama'ah* (*Aswaja*) has long served as NU's foundation for cultivating moderation through ritual life, communal practice, and cultural participation (Kanafi et al., 2021). Historically, NU has fused religious orthodoxy with civic nationalism, offering a model of *wasatiyyah* grounded in contextual piety (Helmy et al., 2021; Qorib & Umiarso, 2025). Yet, when institutionalised in the formal structure of education, *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah* often loses its formative depth, functioning as a local-content subject rather than a living ethos (Salim et al., 2024). This reduction transforms *Aswaja* from a dialogical worldview into a prescribed curriculum, limiting its potential to shape the spiritual and civic consciousness of students (Mubin et al., 2025; Mujahid, 2021). Such a shift illustrates the broader paradox in NU schooling where moderation is symbolically affirmed but pedagogically constrained.

Existing studies on NU education have generated valuable insights, yet the state of the art remains uneven across levels, methods, and units of analysis. Bibliometric mapping suggests that research on religious moderation in Indonesia has expanded rapidly, but much of it still prioritises conceptual framing and program descriptions over process-level explanations of how values are internalised in everyday institutional life (Zaluchu et al., 2025). Empirical work has examined curriculum

strengthening in elementary contexts (Ibda et al., 2024), digital initiatives such as *Maktabah Syumilah NU 1.0* in pesantren (Ma'arif et al., 2023), and other instructional innovations, alongside studies that position pesantren as cultural arenas for tolerance or treat *Aswaja* theology as a doctrinal basis for moderation (Hasan & Mujahidin, 2023; Kanafi et al., 2021; Ubaidillah & Faiz, 2025). While these contributions affirm NU's role, they often approach *Aswaja* as a stable framework or a local-content subject and pay limited attention to the micro-dialectics through which moderation is negotiated across classroom pedagogy, ritual participation, and student organisational life in NU-affiliated senior high schools (Akmaliah, 2020; Muhlisin et al., 2023).

Senior high schools under NU represent a critical yet understudied space in this discourse. Adolescence is a period when religious identity and social belonging are negotiated intensely, making it essential to examine how moderation is internalised within this formative stage (Rahmawati et al., 2024). While previous studies have measured students' tolerance or moral awareness, few have analysed the dynamic process through which values move from cognition to emotion and action (Gosić, 2025; Sutarja et al., 2024). A *knowing, feeling, and doing* framing in character education provides a pedagogical framework to capture this transformation, showing how values must be recognised intellectually, experienced emotionally, and enacted behaviourally (Nurhayati et al., 2025; Sutarja et al., 2024). Within NU schools, where intellectual formation intertwines with rituals and social solidarity, this tripartite model can reveal how moderation becomes a lived process rather than a formal instruction (Hidayati et al., 2020).

Seen through this lens, moderation in NU schools is best understood as a dialectical practice. The normative values of *tawasuth* (moderation), *tawazun* (balance), *tasamuh* (tolerance), and *i'tidal* (justice) are formally endorsed, but their embodiment depends on negotiation among teachers, students, and institutional contexts (Jamilah, 2021; Syaifuddin et al., 2024). Moderation is thus neither guaranteed by curriculum nor transmitted unilaterally through authority. It is continually reinterpreted and contested, shaped by experiences of affirmation and resistance. This perspective positions moderation as fragile yet vital, manifesting its meaning through the very tensions that accompany its practice (Gosić, 2025; Rohman, 2022). The present study, therefore, does not seek to celebrate success but to interpret the dialectical encounters where moderation is lived and redefined.

The rationale for focusing on NU schools derives from their dual heritage of theological conservatism and civic nationalism. Since its inception, NU has promoted a humanistic theology rooted in the prophetic principle of balance and justice (Helmy et al., 2021; Qorib & Umiarso, 2025). Through LP Ma'arif, this ethos is operationalised via the *SNP Plus* framework that integrates religious knowledge with national ideology. Yet, institutional limitations persist, including limited teaching hours, outdated materials, and dependence on teacher-centred instruction (Kosim et al., 2024). This paradox positions NU schools as laboratories of both continuity and disruption, where moderation values are affirmed symbolically but practised selectively (Burga & Damopolii, 2022; Masturin, 2023). The present study engages this contradiction to explore how institutional norms, pedagogical strategies, and student agency converge in the process of internalising moderation.

The study takes place at MA Zumrotul Wildan, Jepara, an NU-affiliated senior high school embedded within a rich socio-cultural context. Jepara's maritime culture, Islamic heritage, and civic activism make it a fertile environment for plural interactions. Yet, these same

conditions also expose the fragility of value transmission, as students’ family backgrounds, digital influences, and community norms mediate how moderation is embodied. Within this environment, moderation unfolds as a living negotiation among texts, rituals, and relationships. This research, therefore, aims to illuminate how moderation in NU schools emerges as a dynamic pedagogical encounter where ideals and realities coexist. It reframes moderation as an unfinished dialogue sustained by reflection, participation, and contestation across the intertwined domains of knowledge, emotion, and practice.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative case study design to explore the process of internalising Islamic moderation values through *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah* teaching at Madrasah Aliyah Zumrotul Wildan, Jepara. The case study approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth investigation of a bounded system, enabling holistic insights into the social and pedagogical dynamics that shape students’ experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2024). This design highlights how moderation values are taught, internalised, and negotiated within NU affiliated education, tracing not only the formal curriculum but also the relational and cultural dimensions that influence learning. By situating the school context within broader discourses on Islamic moderation and national education policy, the case study provides both analytical depth and contextual richness.

The fieldwork was conducted from November 2023 to January 2024, involving multiple participants who play key roles in the pedagogical and cultural environment of the school. Data were gathered through semi structured interviews with 7 informants, including the headmaster, vice principal of curriculum, teachers of *Aswaja An Nahdliyah*, student leaders from IPNU IPPNU, and selected students across grades. Observations were made during classroom sessions, school rituals, and extracurricular activities, while documents such as syllabi, lesson plans, textbooks, and internal school policies were examined. The researcher also acted as a participant observer, allowing closer engagement with daily practices while maintaining analytical distance. Table 1 summarises the main informants, reflecting the diversity of perspectives incorporated into the study.

Informant Code Position/Description
 I1 Head of LPM Ma’arif, Jepara Regency
 I2 Vice Principal of Curriculum
 I3 Principal
 I4 Student and Head of IPNU
 I5 Teacher of *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah*
 I6 Student
 I7 Student

Table 1. Table Informant

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I6	Student
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Data were analysed thematically using (Braun & Clarke, 2022) six step approach of coding, categorisation, and interpretation. Initial codes were generated inductively from the data and later grouped into broader categories aligned with Lickona’s framework of knowing, feeling,

and doing. These were cross referenced with the Ministry of Religious Affairs' four indicators of moderation, namely national commitment, tolerance, anti violence, and cultural accommodation. Triangulation across interviews, observations, and documents enhanced credibility and validity (Creswell & Poth, 2024). Ethical clearance for the study was granted by the Center for Research and Publication (CRP), Faculty of Tarbiyah and Education, Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga, under Ref. No. B.02/4/CRP/EC/X/2024 ensuring informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality for all participants. Reflexivity was maintained throughout to mitigate the influence of the researcher's proximity to NU culture, framing the findings as negotiated rather than neutral accounts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The internalisation of Islamic moderation at MA Zumrotul Wildan emerges as a dialectical process involving knowledge, emotion, and social practice. *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah* provides the main cognitive entry point, while collective traditions cultivate emotional attachment, and organisational life through IPNU IPPNU enables social enactment. Observations and documents show continuity across these domains but also reveal structural gaps such as limited resources, uneven motivation, and weak family support. Moderation thus appears fragile yet vital, shaped by affirmation, negotiation, and resistance.

Strengthening Knowledge of Moderation

The internalisation of moderation values at MA Zumrotul Wildan begins in the classroom, where *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah* provides the main cognitive gateway for students' engagement with Islamic moderation. Teaching largely follows a teacher-centred arrangement, with students facing the blackboard while notes explicitly link *tawasuth* (moderation), *tasamuh* (tolerance), and *tawazun* (balance) to Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution. This visual strategy reflects an effort to connect Islamic principles with national identity, though the classroom dynamic remains primarily directive. The *Aswaja* teacher explained that contextual examples are deliberately used to make the subject more relevant:

"We teach students to understand the importance of having a moderate attitude in religion by providing relevant case examples from their environment so they can understand it more easily and not just see it as theoretical knowledge from a book" (Interview I5).

Students affirmed this approach, noting that moderation extends beyond theology into daily social interactions. As one student reflected, *"The classroom discussions helped me understand that being moderate is not just about religion but also about how we behave in everyday life, like respecting different opinions"* (Interview I7). Observations confirmed that students were not passive recipients but occasionally asked questions, responded to peers, and shared relevant experiences, transforming knowledge into a dialogical process negotiated between text, teacher, and lived realities.



Figure 1. Learning Process in the Classroom
(Observation, MA Zumrotul Wildan)

Lesson documents showed that moderation was consistently framed as both a religious obligation and a civic responsibility. Students encountered the idea of Islam as *shalih li kullli zaman wa makan*—adaptable to all times and places—while also being reminded that Indonesia’s state ideology embodies Islamic ethics. One student expressed this alignment clearly: “*Indonesia is a country that already conforms to Islamic teachings*” (Interview I4). Similarly, tolerance was observed in ritual practices, such as when a student noted, “*When the imam does not recite qunut, I still follow him and then add a prostration of forgetfulness*” (Interview I7). These examples show how moderation was interpreted not as rigid doctrine but as an adaptable orientation that binds religion, citizenship, and everyday worship.

At the same time, structural constraints undermined the continuity of this phase. Textbook shortages from LP Ma’arif often delayed distribution by up to three months, leaving students dependent on teacher dictation. The vice principal admitted, “*Sometimes we face difficulties in obtaining textbooks from Ma’arif. The delay makes it hard for students to access and study the material*” (Interview I2). Teachers and students echoed this challenge, pointing to difficulties in revising lessons and overreliance on notes: “*If the books have not arrived, we only copy from the blackboard or listen to the teacher*” (Interview I6). Observations reinforced this reality: while dialogue occasionally occurred, long monologues dominated classroom sessions, and several students appeared disengaged.

In this sense, the knowing phase is best understood as a dialectical arena shaped by both enabling and constraining forces. Curriculum design, teacher strategies, and classroom dialogue supported the process, but resource shortages, teacher-centred pedagogy, and uneven motivation restricted its depth. Rather than a straightforward transfer of knowledge, knowing moderation at MA Zumrotul Wildan reflects a negotiated process, fragile yet vital, in which values are affirmed, tested, and reinterpreted through everyday pedagogical encounters.

Collective and Emotional Experiences

If the knowing phase is about recognising moderation as knowledge, the feeling phase is about experiencing it as emotion and attachment. In Lickona's framework, this stage involves cultivating empathy, solidarity, and a moral sense of belonging. At MA Zumrotul Wildan, the process takes shape most clearly in collective religious traditions such as *tablilan*, *yasinan*, *maulid*, and *istighosah*. Participation in these practices allows students not only to recall doctrines of moderation but also to sense togetherness and tolerance in embodied ways. A student who had initially questioned their relevance later reflected differently:

"I did not understand why we had to participate in activities like Tablilan and Yasinan. However, after attending several events, I felt these activities were important. Besides gaining knowledge, I felt closer to my friends and the surrounding environment" (Interview I6).

This shift illustrates how participation can transform obligation into meaningful experience, grounding moderation emotionally.

Teachers reinforced this orientation by encouraging students to engage actively in such practices. The *Aswaja* teacher emphasised their formative role:

"Activities like Tablilan and Yasinan are very effective in instilling a moderate attitude because they learn about the importance of solidarity, togetherness, and respecting others" (Interview I5).

Observations during *maulidan* and *istighosah* confirmed that students were not merely passive attendees but also organisers, preparing logistics and leading prayers. Their involvement cultivated a sense of harmony among peers, demonstrating that *tasamuh* (tolerance) and *tawasuth* (balance) were embodied emotionally rather than taught abstractly. Yet enthusiasm was uneven: while some students embraced these roles wholeheartedly, others joined only out of obligation, reflecting varied levels of motivation and family support.



Figure 2. Collective Activities in the Village
(Observation, IPNU–IPPNU event, MA Zumrotul Wildan)

The figure illustrates how students collaborated with Ansor and IPNU in cultural preservation events, working together regardless of background. Such initiatives served as lived pedagogy of moderation, situating values in collective action rather than abstract instruction.

Emotional grounding was also evident in organisational life. IPNU meetings, often marked by disagreements, became spaces where students learned to resolve differences

respectfully, turning tolerance into a daily practice. Teachers reinforced this by encouraging holistic interpretations of religious texts, reminding students not to read verses in isolation. This interpretive approach acted as both intellectual and emotional safeguard, curbing tendencies toward exclusivism.

Despite these supportive frameworks, structural fragilities remained. Teachers noted that some students required close supervision to sustain participation, while school leaders linked weak motivation to limited awareness of long-term benefits. Students often joined organisational activities out of compliance rather than conviction, suggesting that institutional mandates were not always internalised as personal commitments. Family involvement added another layer of complexity: the principal acknowledged that without parental reinforcement, the solidarity nurtured at school risked dissolving at home.

Institutional structures nonetheless played a critical role in sustaining engagement. Compulsory membership in IPNU/IPPNU, integration of organisational uniforms into the school dress code, and mandatory MAKESTA induction ensured that every student was anchored in NU's collective identity. Over time, obligations sometimes evolved into voluntary participation, as students extended their involvement into village-level branches. This trajectory demonstrates how emotional ties with moderation could deepen when institutional discipline intersected with personal growth.

The feeling phase thus emerges as a dialectical space. On one hand, rituals and organisational life fostered empathy, togetherness, and respect, offering fertile ground for emotional internalisation. On the other hand, uneven motivation, weak family support, and reliance on institutional obligation revealed its fragility. Moderation here is not a uniform outcome but a negotiated process, sustained by organisational frameworks yet vulnerable to discontinuity in students' everyday lives.

Social Practices and Concrete Action

If the *knowing* and *feeling* phases establish the cognitive and emotional foundations of moderation, the *doing phase* marks the moment when these values are translated into action. At MA Zumrotul Wildan, this occurs most visibly in students' involvement in NU-based organisations such as IPNU and IPPNU, where moderation is enacted not only in ritual but also in everyday practices. Participation in community service, *tablilan*, and religious gatherings becomes a living laboratory for moderation, situating values like *tasamub* (tolerance) and *tawasuth* (the middle path) within social encounters. One student, reflecting on this transformation, explained:

“At first, I did not understand the concept of moderation, but after joining IPNU activities like community service and Tablilan in the village, I have become better at applying it daily. I have learned to be more patient, tolerant, and respectful of differences at school and home” (Interview I7).

This testimony underscores the shift from abstract knowledge to embodied practice, where moderation becomes part of students' daily comportment.

Teachers play a critical role in facilitating this transition, positioning extracurricular activities as extensions of the classroom. As one *Aswaja* teacher described:

“We do not just teach Islamic moderation in the classroom, but we also give students the chance to practice it through IPNU and IPPNU activities. For example, during Maulidan or Istighosah

events, *our students are trained to take an active role, which helps them understand the essence of Islamic moderation*" (Interview I5).

Such accounts reveal that the pedagogy of moderation does not end with textbooks or lectures but finds continuity in the rhythms of organisational life. Observations during IPNU events confirmed this, as students assumed roles as organisers, negotiators, and collaborators in both religious and social activities.



Figure 3. Students' Participation in Community Service
(Observation, IPNU event)

The figure captures students working together during a village clean-up programme, demonstrating cooperation across social and religious differences. This event exemplified *tasamuh* in practice, as students collaborated with community members regardless of background.

Beyond routine activities, moderation also surfaces in how students address tensions in their community. When reports circulated of a local group diverging from NU teachings, students refrained from quick condemnation. Instead, they consulted teachers and worked with NU organisations such as Ansor and IPNU to seek clarification and promote dialogue. As documented:

"When we heard about practices that seemed different from NU, we didn't confront them directly. We discussed it with our teachers, and the organisation chose to clarify the issue first so it would not escalate" (Interview I5).

This approach reflects moderation not as passive tolerance but as an active effort to mediate conflict without intensifying division.

Yet the *doing phase* is not without its fragilities. Moreover, observations highlight that many of the extracurricular activities organised by IPNU/IPPPNU outside the school framework are not systematically designed by teachers as part of pedagogical practice. While valuable in offering students social experiences, these activities stand apart from the structured curriculum and are left to the initiative of youth organisations. As a result, the learning process in this phase is vulnerable to inconsistency, depending on how seriously students engage and how effectively activities outside the classroom connect back to moderation values. This gap underscores the fragility of internalisation when pedagogical integration is weak, leaving the *doing phase* oscillating between meaningful practice and symbolic compliance.

In this phase, Lickona’s notion of moral action becomes particularly relevant: moral knowledge and feeling must culminate in practice to shape character. The experience of students at MA Zumrotul Wildan also resonates with Durkheim’s perspective on education as the cultivation of social cohesion. Through community service, rituals, and conflict mediation, moderation is not only learned but enacted, contributing to the maintenance of harmony in both school and society. Seen through a Suhadian lens, the *doing phase* embodies the dialogical interplay of ideals and lived contexts, where moderation is simultaneously affirmed, tested, and reinterpreted in the fluid terrain of everyday practice.

Reading Islamic Moderation from the Classroom to Student Organisations in NU Madrasahs

The findings across the phases of *knowing*, *feeling*, and *doing* suggest that the internalisation of Islamic moderation at MA Zumrotul Wildan unfolds as a dialectical rather than linear process. Knowledge of moderation is introduced through *Aswaja* lessons, emotional attachment is nurtured in collective rituals, and practical embodiment occurs in social actions mediated by IPNU and IPPNU. These three spheres, however, are not isolated; they intersect in the daily negotiations of teachers, students, and institutions. Teachers become agents of *knowing* and *feeling*, while extracurricular organisations expand the space for *doing*, producing a layered field of internalisation that is simultaneously structured and fluid. An overview of this process is presented in Figure 4.

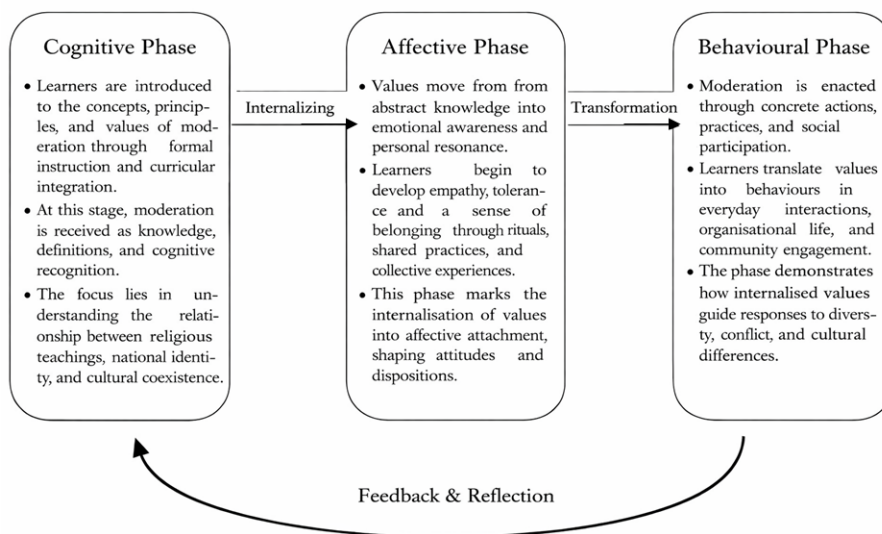


Figure 4. The Process of Internalizing Moderate Islamic Religious Values

This dialectic is marked by negotiation rather than seamless continuity. On the one hand, students’ testimonies show how classroom teaching resonates in rituals and eventually in community practices, signalling a productive link across the phases. On the other, limitations such as delayed textbooks, uneven motivation, and the tendency of activities to become ceremonial point to fragilities that complicate internalisation. In this sense, moderation emerges less as an accomplished goal than as an ongoing negotiation between institutional aspirations

and social realities. The process is dialogical—shaped by the encounter between the formal curriculum, the emotional texture of NU traditions, and the contingent practices of youth organisations.

Table 2. Indicators of Moderation and Their Expressions at MA Zumrotul Wildan

Indicator	Evidence from Fieldwork	Interpretation
Moderate		
National Commitment	Linking <i>tawasuth</i> to Pancasila and UUD 1945 in lessons; students affirm that Indonesia already conforms to Islamic teachings.	Moderation is framed as alignment between faith and citizenship, reinforcing the compatibility of Islam and the nation.
Tolerance (<i>Tasamul</i>)	Acceptance of differences in <i>qunut</i> practice; respectful resolution of disagreements in IPNU meetings.	Tolerance is embodied both in ritual adaptation and organisational dialogue, showing operational rather than abstract values.
Anti-Violence	Students mediate community tensions peacefully, consulting teachers and organisations before acting.	Moderation is enacted as conflict management, privileging dialogue over confrontation.
Cultural Accommodation	Participation in <i>tablilan</i> , <i>yasinan</i> , <i>manlid</i> , and cultural preservation events.	Moderation is lived as respect for local traditions, blending theology with cultural heritage.

Taken together, these findings highlight the strength of NU schools in embedding moderation values through both formal and informal channels. The school provides the cognitive scaffolding, teachers facilitate emotional attachment, and youth organisations extend learning into community spaces. Yet these roles do not always converge neatly. The school cannot fully control what happens in extracurricular or family environments, leaving gaps where values may dissipate or become symbolic. At the same time, institutional mandates like compulsory IPNU membership can transform obligation into genuine participation, illustrating the dialectical transformation from formality to lived practice.

The synthesis therefore portrays moderation as a practice full of vitality but also fragility. It thrives where curricular, ritual, and social experiences reinforce one another, but falters where motivation wanes or structures are absent. To illustrate this dialectic more clearly, the hindering factors identified in each phase are summarised in Table 3. The table highlights how institutional strengths often coexist with contextual weaknesses, showing that internalisation unfolds through negotiation rather than uniform progression.

Table 3. Supporting and Hindering Factors of Internalising Islamic Moderation at MA Zumrotul Wildan

Phase	Hindering Factors
Knowing (Cognitive Dimension)	- Delay in textbook distribution from LP Ma'arif . - Students rely heavily on teachers' notes, limiting independent study. - Predominance of lecture method reduces dialogical exploration.
Feeling (Emotional Dimension)	- Uneven student motivation; some join only out of obligation. - Observations show passive students in rituals. - Family support inconsistent, weakening reinforcement at home.

Phase	Hindering Factors
Doing	- Practices sometimes remain ceremonial, seen as formal obligations.
(Practical Dimension)	- Not all students continue moderation habits outside school.
	- IPNU/IPPNU activities outside school not fully integrated into pedagogy, limiting consistent outcomes.

The mapping of hindering factors across the three phases makes it clear that internalisation is never a closed or perfect circle. This suggests that moderation in education is not something simply transmitted but something that must be lived, questioned, and renegotiated within each context. The process demonstrates that values in education are always contingent and contextual, shaped as much by institutional design as by the everyday realities of students' lives. In this sense, moderation becomes less a fixed product than an evolving practice, fragile but vital, whose authenticity lies precisely in its ongoing negotiation.

To conclude, the internalisation of Islamic moderation at MA Zumrotul Wildan reflects the enduring role of NU schools as agents of *wasatiyyah*, while also exposing the limits of institutional authority in shaping students' moral identities. Moderation does not emerge as a finished product but as a living process that unfolds through textbooks and rituals, through obligations that may later become voluntary commitments, and through ideals constantly tested in reality. Within these tensions, the dialectics of moderation find their most genuine form, revealing both its promise and its fragility in cultivating balanced Islam within Indonesia's plural society.

Discussion

The study shows that moderation at MA Zumrotul Wildan does not move in a straight line but circulates through knowing, feeling, and doing, resonating with the four state indicators of religious moderation. At first glance, the combination of classroom instruction, ritual practices, and student organisations appears to form a coherent ecosystem that sustains moderation. Yet the reality reveals discontinuities in which what is known is not always felt, and what is felt is not always enacted (Jamilah, 2021; Masturin, 2023). Staged accounts of character formation help us name these gaps, but they do not explain the negotiations through which values are reinterpreted in daily school life (Gosić, 2025; Muhlisin et al., 2023). Moderation thus emerges not as a fixed achievement but as an unsettled practice that is constantly being reworked (Abdullah et al., 2025; Burga & Damopolii, 2022; Rohman, 2022).

The uneven movement between cognition, affect, and behaviour suggests that internalisation is less a transfer of values than a field of tension. Students may articulate definitions of tolerance yet remain distant from the emotions that sustain it, or they may express feelings of openness without turning them into concrete action (Mujahid, 2021; Mujahidin, 2024). Education becomes fragile when it reproduces a banking model rather than cultivating dialogical encounters (García-Carrión et al., 2020; Zainudin et al., 2025). What surfaces here is not failure but the dialectical character of moral learning, moments of hesitation that invite reflection. Such fragility complicates the usual narratives of character education and points instead to moderation as a praxis negotiated within lived contradictions (Ma'arif et al., 2023; Yani et al., 2025).

Most accounts of moderation education highlight success stories in which curricula are aligned with *Aswaja* values, students are portrayed as more tolerant, and communities appear cohesive (Basri et al., 2023; Suntana & Tresnawaty, 2022). These portrayals matter, yet they often leave unspoken the fragility of everyday implementation where ideals do not always hold (Kanafi et al., 2021; Kosim et al., 2024). The present findings complicate this narrative by drawing attention to how moderation is constantly negotiated and never fully settled (Muhlisin et al., 2023; Zaluchu et al., 2025). Some studies have hinted at this ambivalence by suggesting that moderation is less a finished identity than a contested space (Margiansyah et al., 2025; Saim & El-Muhammady, 2025; Suryani et al., 2025). In this light, the contribution of the present study is not to celebrate achievement but to foreground fragility as an integral part of moderation's lived reality (Sulaeman et al., 2022; Ubaidillah & Faiz, 2025).

The internal setting of the school embodies both promise and contradiction. On one hand, the curriculum of *Aswaja*, religious rituals, and student associations create avenues for students to rehearse moderation in structured ways. On the other hand, the dominance of lectures, delayed materials, and weak motivation interrupt the continuity of these processes (Kosim et al., 2024; Yani et al., 2023). This duality reflects a broader tension between reproduction and transformation in educational practice (Masturin, 2023; Xie & Lin, 2025). Other studies note that while cognitive knowledge of tolerance can be secured, dialogical and participatory engagement is often absent (Muhtifah et al., 2021; Ubaidillah & Faiz, 2025). The presence of student organisations points to alternative sites where values are collectively negotiated and moderation is more experienced than imposed (Mujahidin, 2024).

What happens outside the school makes moderation even more complex. Family dynamics, socio-economic pressures, and the digital sphere constantly reshape how students carry and contest the values they learn. A lesson of tolerance can be undermined by discriminatory voices at home or reinforced by inclusive encounters in community rituals (Mahzumi et al., 2025). Other studies suggest that external realities often weigh more heavily than curricular intent, making moderation a matter of negotiation rather than transmission (Syarifuddin et al., 2024). These contradictions expose the boundaries of formal education while opening possibilities for critical praxis within students' wider social worlds (Cholil & Parker, 2021; Putra et al., 2024).

Theoretically, these findings extend Lickona's staged model by showing that internalisation is not a ladder but a dialectic of rupture and negotiation (Gosić, 2025). Practically, they reveal how continuity requires more than curricular design and depends on timely provision of materials, dialogical pedagogy, and stronger school–family partnerships (Kanafi et al., 2021; Purwanto & Saepudin, 2023). Research in other contexts confirms that community-based learning environments deepen students' commitments precisely because values are encountered in diverse social arenas (Miftah et al., 2023; Yahya & Rahmat, 2021). From this perspective, moderation becomes a practice sustained by networks rather than by isolated instruction. Such an approach resists normative rhetoric and situates moderation within the unfinished work of everyday negotiation.

This study's scope, limited to a single madrasah with a short timeframe and the researcher's proximity to NU culture, cannot capture the full diversity of moderation's expressions. Future research should pursue comparative cases across different schools and

pesantren to reveal how settings shape both fragility and resilience. Longitudinal approaches are also needed to trace how moderation evolves as students leave school and negotiate wider social contexts. Interdisciplinary work that integrates family, community, and digital environments can enrich understanding of the dialectics at play. In this sense, moderation is not a finished outcome but an unfolding process always caught between ideals and realities.

CONCLUSION

This study finds that the internalisation of religious moderation at MA Zumrotul Wildan unfolds through a dialectical interaction of knowing, feeling, and doing rather than a linear progression. Aswaja An-Nahdliyah lessons function as the main cognitive gateway, collective NU rituals cultivate affective attachment, and student organisational life (IPNU/IPPNU) provides practical spaces where moderation is enacted in everyday relations and community engagement. However, the process remains uneven and fragile, constrained by delayed learning resources, lecture-dominated instruction, varied student motivation, and inconsistent family reinforcement.

Scholarly, the study contributes by clarifying the process-level mechanism through which moderation is negotiated across classroom pedagogy, ritual participation, and organisational practice in an NU-affiliated senior high school context, thereby complicating policy-oriented accounts that treat moderation as a settled outcome of curriculum endorsement. It also extends staged character-education models by showing how ruptures and negotiations shape the movement between cognition, affect, and action. The study is limited to a single case with a short fieldwork period and a small set of informants, so the findings are not intended for broad generalisation. Future research should pursue comparative and longitudinal designs across different NU and non-NU schools and more systematically examine family and digital environments to understand how moderation is sustained or interrupted over time.

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