

## Ustadz as agents of religious moderation in islamic boarding schools: concepts, strategies, and impacts at pesantren mta, karanganyar

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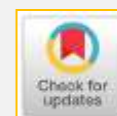
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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of *ustadz* as agents of religious moderation at the Majelis Tafsir Al-Qur'an (MTA) Islamic Boarding School in Karanganyar, Central Java, through a qualitative case study involving 12 informants using interviews, observations, and documentation. The findings indicate that educational background and preaching experience influence the *ustadz's* understanding and strategies in internalizing moderation, whether through sermons, discussions, exemplary conduct, or non-formal activities, although consistency remains uneven. The *ustadz* play a role in fostering tolerance and social harmony, with positive impacts on students' mindsets, making them more critical, inclusive, and tolerant, despite some still perceiving moderation as a weakening of principles. Challenges include student resistance, limited *ustadz* capacity, and the influence of digital media, while opportunities involve media literacy, inter-community activities, and internal policies. The success of religious moderation depends on curriculum integration, role modeling, and sustainable social guidance, which can be replicated in other Islamic boarding schools.

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### Introduction

Religious moderation has become one of the strategic issues in Indonesia over the past decade, in line with increasing social dynamics involving differences in beliefs, religious interpretations, and worship practices (Riska Dwi Lestari, 2023). The government, through the Ministry of Religious Affairs, has designated religious moderation as a national priority program due to its urgency in maintaining harmony amid the nation's diversity (Syarifin et al., 2025). This issue has evolved not only as an academic discussion but also as a practical necessity in the field, particularly within Islamic educational institutions that play a crucial role in shaping the character of the younger generation.

The polarization of religious issues on social media, the rise of hate speech, and the strengthening of intolerance have become serious concerns among various groups.

Analyses of public conversations on Twitter reveal that differences in views on religious matters frequently trigger heated debates, often leading to fragmentation in digital spaces. Such interactions not only reflect polarized opinions but also have the potential to escalate social tensions in real life. The surge of negatively toned interactions highlights significant challenges in preserving social harmony, particularly when provocative and intolerant content spreads rapidly through social media networks (Faizin, 2024). Social media thus plays a dual role: on one hand, it serves as an effective medium for promoting messages of tolerance and harmony; on the other, it can fuel radicalism, disinformation, and hate speech, intensifying social polarization. Unregulated online interactions may erode interreligious harmony, making it necessary to use social media wisely and responsibly to foster constructive interfaith dialogue and prevent the escalation of religion-based conflicts (Putri et al., 2024).

Islamic educational institutions, especially pesantren, play a pivotal role in addressing these challenges. Pesantren function not only as centers for transmitting religious knowledge but also as spaces for character formation, social value inculcation, and shaping students' perspectives on diversity (Alisia Zahro'atul Baroroh & Abdul Khobir, 2024). The success of pesantren in internalizing the values of religious moderation directly influences the quality of students' social interactions within society (Mardani & Siswanto, 2025).

The study by Surawan et al. (2022) reveals that the implementation of religious moderation education at a pesantren in Central Kalimantan has been effective due to the strategic roles of *kyai* and *ustadz*. They not only transfer knowledge but also serve as role models, program innovators, and organizational drivers who integrate academic and managerial dimensions. The five principal roles they assume—conservator, innovator, transmitter, transformer, and organizer—facilitate the internalization of values such as justice, balance, unity, and brotherhood among students. These findings affirm that the success of religious moderation education in pesantren greatly depends on the educators' capacities to shape students capable of living harmoniously within diversity.

A study at Pesantren Darul Fikri by Rusmiati et al. (2022) shows that strengthening religious moderation is a preventive measure against the emergence of radicalism. The research underlines the strategic role of pesantren as centers of Islamic education that must mainstream moderate ideas aligned with the values of *rahmatan li al-'alamin*. The effectiveness of this program is significantly influenced by the roles of key actors—*kyai* and *ustadz*—who are responsible for transmitting religious knowledge and serving as moral exemplars for students. Although the term “religious moderation” is not widely used in pesantren, its substantive values are already understood through the study of classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*). Through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), teachers and *ustadz* demonstrated greater openness, acknowledged gaining new insights, and expressed an increased sense of nationalism. These findings illustrate that internalizing the values of religious moderation is essential to preventing intolerance, conflict, and extremism in religious practice.

A research gap emerges when examining Pondok Pesantren Majelis Tafsir Al-Qur'an (MTA) Karanganyar. This pesantren has a distinctive da'wah vision and social interaction pattern, yet it has received little empirical attention, particularly regarding the role of *ustadz* as agents of religious moderation. In fact, the position of *ustadz* in this pesantren is strategic, as they serve as authoritative figures who influence students' ways of thinking, attitudes, and behaviors.

Karanganyar, located in Central Java, is known for its relatively high index of religious harmony (Wahyu & Yani, 2020). However, potential frictions remain, especially in rural areas that are vulnerable to intolerant narratives. Incidents such as the rejection of

certain cultural events or concerns over non-halal food in the surrounding community illustrate the ongoing sensitivity of religious issues. Within this context, the role of *ustadz* at MTA Karanganyar extends beyond classroom teaching; they also act as moral guides, behavioral role models, and mediators of social relations among students, alumni, and the community. This positions *ustadz* as key actors capable of internalizing moderation values in students' daily lives.

Although the concept of *wasathiyah* (moderation) has long been taught in pesantren, the term "religious moderation" has only become popular in recent years following government policies (Asrori, 2020). Differences in *ustadz*' interpretations of the term may influence how they implement it. Some interpret it as a balance between textuality and contextuality, while others emphasize role modeling and simple living as the essence of moderation. These variations are important to examine because they shape teaching strategies and student guidance. *Ustadz* with a conceptual and contextual understanding of moderation tend to be more adaptive in responding to differences, whereas those with a more normative understanding may limit students' interactions with groups outside the pesantren (Syahri, 2021).

Aside from comprehension, the strategies used to internalize moderation values also play an important role. Whether *ustadz* rely more on one-way lectures, interactive discussions, role modeling, or experiential learning will affect the depth of students' understanding of moderation. These variations must be evaluated to determine the most effective approach. In addition, the influence of digital media presents a new challenge, as students now easily access information from various sources, including intolerant religious narratives (Raharjo, 2024). Such exposure may obstruct internalization efforts if pesantren lack adequate digital literacy strategies.

Based on the above background, this study seeks to answer key questions: how *ustadz* at MTA Karanganyar understand religious moderation, what strategies they use to internalize it in students, what impacts it has on students' mindsets and behaviors, and what challenges and opportunities they face. This research is expected to fill a gap in the literature, provide practical recommendations for pesantren management, and contribute to strengthening social harmony in society.

## Method

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study method focused on the Majelis Tafsir Al-Qur'an (MTA) Islamic Boarding School in Karanganyar, Central Java (Assyakurrohim et al., 2022). This approach was chosen to explore in depth the role of *ustadz* as agents of religious moderation within real-life contexts involving social interactions, cultural values, and the learning dynamics of the pesantren environment. The research was conducted over a three-month period, from May to July 2025. A total of 12 informants participated in the study, consisting of six *ustadz* aged 30–55 with undergraduate and postgraduate educational backgrounds in Islamic studies and 5–20 years of teaching experience; three senior students aged 17–20 who were actively involved in student organizations; two pesantren administrators with managerial and administrative roles; and one community leader living near the pesantren. The criteria for selecting informants included direct involvement in educational activities, experience in religious moderation programs, and willingness to provide information openly.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews lasting 45–90 minutes, participatory observations of teaching–learning activities and social interactions within the pesantren, and document analysis, which included curricula, learning materials, activity archives, and internal reports (Sugiyono, 2020). The interviews were conducted in locations comfortable for the informants to minimize social pressure. Observations were carried out during

various formal and non-formal activities to obtain an authentic depiction of religious moderation practices. Document analysis served to complement and verify information obtained from interviews and observations. Data validity and reliability were ensured through source triangulation and methodological triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information from *ustadz*, students, administrators, and community leaders. Methodological triangulation integrated findings from interviews, observations, and documentation to ensure data consistency (Nafisatur, 2024). Triangulation was implemented by comparing *ustadz* perspectives on religious moderation strategies with field observations and student testimonies, as well as by cross-checking findings with official pesantren documents. Data analysis employed thematic analysis techniques, including interview transcription, repeated reading, coding, theme identification, and interpretation based on the theoretical framework of religious moderation (Rozali, 2022).

This study has limitations in terms of its scope, which cannot be broadly generalized due to its focus on a single pesantren with specific characteristics. Potential social bias in interviews may occur due to informants' tendency to provide "safe" responses or those perceived as acceptable to the researcher. To anticipate this, the researcher built trust-based relationships, used open-ended questions, and provided space for informants to share their views without intervention. Ethical considerations were maintained by explaining the purpose of the study, ensuring participants' right to refuse or withdraw from participation, and anonymizing identities to protect confidentiality.

## Result and Discussion

### Conceptual Understanding of Religious Moderation among Ustadz at MTA Karanganyar

The interview findings reveal that the conceptual understanding of religious moderation among *ustadz* at the Majelis Tafsir Al-Qur'an (MTA) Islamic Boarding School in Karanganyar is strongly influenced by their educational backgrounds and preaching experiences. *Ustadz* who pursued formal education in Islamic higher institutions tend to interpret religious moderation as a balance between text and context, referring to academic literature, contemporary Islamic thought, and the policies of the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs. They employ an academic framework that positions moderation as part of the Islamic intellectual renewal agenda, resulting in discussions that are systematic and reference-based (Nasri & Tabibuddin, 2023).

Meanwhile, *ustadz* who were educated through traditional nonformal pesantren systems perceive religious moderation as a lived practice rooted in moral exemplarity and simplicity. From this perspective, moderation is not merely an intellectual concept but also a behavioral attitude inherited through pesantren traditions (Muhaemin & Yunus, 2023). Their orientation prioritizes spiritual cultivation, habitual etiquette, and the internalization of balanced values through daily practices. These differing emphases produce two distinct patterns of understanding, yet both share the same objective: shaping students with *wasathiyah* character.

Variations in understanding are also reflected in how *ustadz* interpret the term "religious moderation." Some define it as an attitude of avoiding *ghuluw* (excessiveness) and *ifrath-tafrith* (going beyond or falling short of prescribed values), grounded in Qur'anic and Prophetic texts. This view places moderation within the framework of preserving the purity of Islamic teachings from extremism. In contrast, other *ustadz* see moderation as an adaptive strategy needed to respond to social diversity in modern society, including cultural pluralism and differences of opinion within the Muslim community.

These divergent orientations influence teaching methods. *Ustadz* with a normative theological approach focus on strengthening *aqidah* and scriptural evidence, while those with an adaptive social approach emphasize cross-group communication skills, dialogue, and inter-community collaboration. As a result, students experience different learning environments depending on the *ustadz* who teach them. Although varied, these approaches can complement one another when integrated within a comprehensive educational framework.

Some *ustadz* acknowledge that the term “religious moderation” is relatively new in the MTA pesantren context. Before the term became popular, its values had long been taught through the concept of *wasathiyah* embedded in pesantren traditions. The emergence of the new terminology is largely influenced by government policies and public discourse. Consequently, some *ustadz* understand moderation formally based on official definitions but have not fully elaborated its practical dimensions. This creates differences in mastery: some can relate moderation to contemporary issues such as digital radicalism and political polarization, while others remain limited to normative explanations without addressing the actual challenges faced by students.

In practice, notable contradictions arise. Some *ustadz* strongly emphasize the importance of religious moderation yet continue to apply exclusive approaches toward groups outside the MTA community. Certain *ustadz* discourage students from participating in interorganizational Islamic activities due to fears of “mixing teachings,” while others view such involvement as an opportunity to learn tolerance and develop intellectual maturity. These differing views produce variations in practice that sometimes do not align with the moderation concepts they teach.

This condition reveals a gap between conceptual understanding and practical implementation. In theory, all *ustadz* agree that religious moderation is a crucial value for students. However, in practice, personal experiences, educational backgrounds, and levels of trust toward external environments influence their actions. This gap may result in internal inconsistencies that weaken the effectiveness of moderation education.

The diversity of backgrounds, interpretations, levels of understanding, and practical contradictions forms a complex conceptual landscape within MTA Karanganyar. This complexity can be an asset, offering flexibility in addressing students’ diverse needs. Nevertheless, without a unified reference framework, this diversity may create confusion among students regarding the boundaries and essence of religious moderation.

To address these challenges, several *ustadz* propose the need for regular discussion forums and internal training sessions focused on harmonizing perspectives on religious moderation. Through these forums, differing viewpoints can be synergized, instructional strategies can be aligned, and indicators of successful moderation education can be formulated collectively. Harmonization does not mean standardizing all teaching methods but ensuring that educational direction remains consistent with the goal of shaping moderate students prepared to live in a plural society.

With improved internal coherence, the role of *ustadz* as agents of religious moderation can be carried out more effectively. Consistency between understanding, teaching methods, and daily behavior will strengthen the messages received by students. Furthermore, this coherence can serve as social capital for the pesantren in building its image as an educational institution capable of producing graduates who are inclusive, tolerant, and committed to the values of Islam *rahmatan lil ‘alamin*.

### **Strategies Used by Ustadz in Internalizing Moderation Values Among Santri**

The strategies employed by the *ustadz* at MTA Karanganyar to internalize religious moderation values among the santri demonstrate a diverse pattern based on teaching methods, instructional media, and interactions outside the classroom. *Ustadz* with formal

academic backgrounds tend to rely on structured teaching materials derived from official modules or reference books, whereas those trained through traditional pesantren education prefer storytelling, advice-giving, and exemplary behavior as their primary approaches. (Raya, 2017) These differences shape the santri's learning experience, as their understanding of religious moderation is influenced by each ustadz's instructional style.

The lecture method is the dominant strategy used to convey moderation concepts, particularly when explaining Qur'anic verses and hadith related to the principles of *wasathiyah*. Some ustadz combine lectures with group discussions to encourage critical thinking, while others remain focused on one-way instruction. Interview data indicate that santri who participate in discussions are more capable of relating moderation concepts to everyday life than those who only listen to lectures. This suggests that interactive methods have greater potential to foster deeper understanding.

Nonformal activities such as afternoon halaqah, public sermons, and communal work serve as strategic avenues for ustadz to inculcate moderation values through direct practice. In these activities, ustadz encourage santri to collaborate regardless of regional or social background. Some ustadz use these moments to introduce santri to the diversity of religious views within society, including differing worship traditions that still align with Islamic principles. This experiential approach is considered effective because it allows santri to apply moderation values outside the classroom. (Umam, 2021)

However, contradictions arise in the implementation of these strategies. Some ustadz avoid discussing sensitive issues such as differences between Islamic schools of thought or religious views outside MTA, arguing that such discussions may confuse santri who lack a strong foundational understanding. In contrast, other ustadz believe that openness is essential in moderation education to prepare santri for the diversity they will encounter in society. These differing perspectives have resulted in an inconsistency in the religious moderation curriculum at MTA Karanganyar.

Observational data show that some ustadz use digital technology as a supplementary medium for teaching moderation, such as showing videos of interfaith dialogues or moderation materials published by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. This approach offers concrete examples of real-world moderation practices, although concerns remain that exposure to external content may introduce perspectives that do not align with MTA's principles. Consequently, some ustadz choose to limit the use of digital media and rely more heavily on face-to-face interactions to avoid informational bias.

A deeper analysis of these strategic patterns reveals that the effectiveness of internalizing moderation values is strongly influenced by the consistency of the ustadz's approaches and the level of student engagement. Ustadz who combine cognitive methods (structured learning materials), affective methods (role modeling), and psychomotor methods (field-based practices) tend to produce more tangible changes in the santri's attitudes. Conversely, strategies that rely too heavily on lectures without practical engagement risk reducing moderation to theoretical knowledge with limited impact on behavior.

These findings highlight the need for an integrated strategic design that bridges the differences in methods among ustadz. Developing internal guidelines that outline competency standards and indicators for achieving moderation internalization can help create greater consistency in educational direction. Such measures are expected to minimize contradictory practices, strengthen the relevance of strategies to the santri's needs, and ensure that ustadz consistently fulfill their role as agents of religious moderation at MTA Karanganyar.

**The Role of Ustadz in Fostering a Climate of Tolerance and Social Harmony in the Pesantren**

The role of the *ustadz* in shaping a climate of tolerance at Pondok Pesantren MTA Karanganyar is reflected in their approach, which emphasizes the importance of *adab* (proper conduct) in interactions among students. Observational data show that the *ustadz* consistently deliver advice at the beginning and end of lessons about respecting differences. These messages are conveyed not only through lectures but also through concrete actions, such as reconciling students involved in disagreements. Such practices build an awareness that harmony begins with everyday behavior.

Students who frequently receive direct guidance from the *ustadz* tend to be better at controlling their emotions when encountering differing viewpoints. During group discussions, these students often attempt to find common ground rather than rigidly defending their own positions. Interviews reveal that the exemplary behavior of the *ustadz* is the main factor encouraging students to be more patient and wise in dealing with differences. This model of behavior has a stronger impact than merely receiving theoretical explanations.

A climate of social harmony in the pesantren is created through communal activities involving all students regardless of background. The *ustadz* act as facilitators in activities such as communal work (*kerja bakti*), sports, and deliberation forums. These activities provide opportunities to strengthen personal relationships and reduce potential friction. Observations show that frequent interactions outside the classroom help build mutual trust—an essential foundation for tolerance.

However, contradictions arise when some students feel that the tolerant attitudes promoted by the *ustadz* may weaken the firmness of religious principles. Some believe that excessive openness could expose them to external influences inconsistent with the pesantren's vision. This perspective creates tension between efforts to maintain harmony and the obligation to safeguard the purity of religious teachings. This phenomenon shows that not all students interpret tolerance from the same standpoint.

To address these differing perceptions, the *ustadz* provide explanations about the boundaries of tolerance that do not contradict fundamental religious principles. Students are guided to understand that social harmony does not mean abandoning one's beliefs, but rather managing differences wisely. This strategy is delivered through classical text studies and open dialogues, allowing students to ask critical questions without fear. Interview data suggest that this approach is effective in reducing concerns among some students.

A deeper analysis of daily interactions shows that *ustadz* who actively participate in informal activities with the students have greater influence in shaping tolerant attitudes. This personal closeness enables *ustadz* to understand the character of each student, making their messages more targeted. Such involvement creates a sense of togetherness that encourages students to emulate positive behavior without feeling forced.

Observations of inter-grade activities reveal that the role of the *ustadz* as mediators helps reduce conflicts between groups. For example, during disagreements in the selection of the student organization leadership, the *ustadz* successfully calmed the situation and directed the discussion toward a mutually agreed solution. These findings reinforce the notion that the presence of the *ustadz* during critical moments is key to maintaining social harmony in the pesantren.

Students who have become accustomed to tolerant interactions within the pesantren tend to carry this attitude into their communities. In interviews, several students stated that they are now better able to get along with peers or neighbors who hold different views after receiving guidance and role modeling from the *ustadz*. This indicates that tolerance-building efforts not only have an internal impact but also contribute positively to broader social relations.

The findings of this study suggest that the role of the *ustadz* in fostering a climate of tolerance and social harmony in the pesantren requires a combination of formal and informal approaches. Success depends not only on the content delivered but also on the consistency of the *ustadz's* behavior in daily life. Alignment between words and actions becomes the determining factor separating meaningful character formation from superficial efforts.

### **The Impact of Religious Moderation on Students' Mindset and Behavior**

The implementation of religious moderation values at Pondok Pesantren MTA Karanganyar has resulted in significant changes in the mindset of most students. Interview data reveal that students have become more accustomed to considering multiple perspectives before drawing conclusions. This shift is evident in classroom discussions, where they no longer rush to make judgments without examining various arguments. Such critical thinking processes reduce narrow fanaticism and encourage the development of broader, more balanced understanding.

Field observations show that students' behavior has become more inclusive in their interactions. They no longer socialize exclusively with peers who share similar backgrounds but instead build harmonious relationships with students from different regions. Friendship patterns that were previously confined to specific groups have expanded into cross-community connections. This condition demonstrates that religious moderation has a tangible impact on shaping broader social networks.

Although the majority of students show positive development, a small segment perceives religious moderation as a relaxation of principles. Some express concerns that openness to differences may blur the boundaries between truth and error. This perspective creates ideological tension with students who view moderation as a strategy to strengthen unity. Such contradictions indicate differing emphases in their understanding of moderation values.

To address these differing viewpoints, the *ustadz* actively provide explanations about the concept of moderation grounded firmly in Islamic teachings. Interactive discussions are used as a medium for clarification, helping students recognize that moderation does not mean equating all viewpoints, but rather managing differences without losing religious identity. Interviews show that such explanations help reduce worries and foster broader acceptance of the concept.

In-depth analysis of students' activity records reveals that religious moderation strengthens their ability to handle conflict. When disagreements occur within student organizations, a deliberative approach prioritizing mutual respect becomes the preferred method. Decisions reached through this process tend to be more willingly accepted because they involve participation from all parties. This demonstrates that religious moderation influences not only cognitive aspects but also transforms collective decision-making patterns.

Students accustomed to moderate thinking tend to avoid confrontational behavior. In daily interactions, they prefer seeking common ground rather than sharpening differences. This attitude not only reduces the potential for conflict but also creates a sense of security within the pesantren environment. Observational data show that mutual respect among community members has strengthened since moderation programs have been implemented consistently.

The influence of moderation values on students' thinking is also evident in their increased tolerance toward diverse opinions during classical text discussions. Students are more open to acknowledging varying interpretations among scholars and then comparing them with explanations from the *ustadz* to obtain a more comprehensive understanding.



This habit sharpens their analytical skills and cultivates humility in expressing opinions, contributing to a conducive and productive learning atmosphere.

In the realm of social behavior, the impact of religious moderation is reflected in various cooperative activities involving all students. Differences in regional and cultural backgrounds no longer hinder collaboration. Activities such as cleaning the mosque, preparing pesantren events, or assisting new students in adjusting to the environment demonstrate that religious moderation fosters a collective sense of responsibility toward the pesantren community.

The findings indicate that religious moderation has a profound impact on changes in students' mindset and behavior, both academically and socially. These changes occur gradually, beginning with the development of conceptual understanding, reinforced through the *ustadz's* role modeling, and ultimately manifested in daily interactions. The success of this process depends on consistent guidance and the alignment between the values taught and the actual behavior practiced within the pesantren environment.

### **Challenges and Opportunities in Strengthening Religious Moderation at Pesantren MTA Karanganyar**

The strengthening of religious moderation at Pesantren MTA Karanganyar faces a complex set of realities. Preliminary data indicate the presence of resistance among a small group of students who perceive moderation as potentially weakening firmness in upholding core *aqidah* principles. This perception stems from their previous educational backgrounds and religious experiences that emphasized exclusivism. Such challenges require a multi-layered approach to prevent polarization within the pesantren environment.

Another obstacle lies in the limited number of *ustadz* who possess the capacity to deliver moderation materials comprehensively. Some *ustadz* continue to focus predominantly on classical *fiqh* and *tafsir* without connecting them to the pluralistic context of contemporary religious life. This makes it difficult for some students to grasp the relevance of moderation in everyday situations. In-depth interviews suggest the need for specialized training for teaching staff to strengthen their capacity to integrate moderation values into the curriculum.

Students' use of social media presents its own challenge due to the uncontrolled flow of information. Some students are exposed to religious narratives that lean toward rigidity, influencing their perspectives on difference. Field observations reveal that the pesantren lacks an adequate system for monitoring and guiding digital literacy. This condition has the potential to hinder the internalization of moderation values currently being cultivated.

However, this situation also presents opportunities to develop pesantren-based media literacy programs. These programs can utilize technology to disseminate positive content that reinforces tolerant attitudes. Trial data conducted with a small group of students show positive responses to moderation materials presented through videos, infographics, and online discussions. This strategy has the potential to serve as an effective and sustainable medium for reaching a wider range of students.

Contradictions arise as the pesantren attempts to balance firm religious preaching with openness toward diversity. Some stakeholders believe that adopting an open stance may diminish the institution's identity as a guardian of doctrinal purity. Conversely, others argue that openness enhances the pesantren's image as an Islamic educational institution relevant to contemporary developments. Tension between these two perspectives requires careful communication strategies by the pesantren leadership.

In-depth analysis of social interactions within the pesantren shows that the success of religious moderation is strongly influenced by the exemplary behavior of the *ustadz*. Students who witness inclusive conduct from their teachers tend to accept moderation

values more readily than those who only receive theoretical explanations. This finding reinforces the argument that value formation cannot rely on lectures alone but must be manifested through consistent daily interactions.

Cross-community activities serve as strategic opportunities to strengthen moderation. Visits to other pesantren, joint social activities with local communities, and collaborations among student organizations have proven effective in fostering mutual respect. Documentation shows increasing student participation in collaborative programs after being introduced to the concept of moderation. These activities function as practical training for managing differences beyond the classroom.

The consolidation of religious moderation programs at Pesantren MTA Karanganyar requires internal policy support, continuous guidance, and measurable evaluation. Existing challenges can be transformed into opportunities if managed through participatory and adaptive approaches aligned with student dynamics. The integration of formal curriculum, *ustadz* role modeling, and social activities will form a strong foundation for cultivating students who are open-minded, morally upright, and committed to the peaceful teachings of Islam.

## Conclusion

This study demonstrates that *ustadz* at Pondok Pesantren Majelis Tafsir Al-Qur'an (MTA) Karanganyar play a strategic role as agents of religious moderation through their teaching practices, moral guidance, and social mediation. Their understanding of religious moderation is shaped by their educational backgrounds and preaching experiences, resulting in variations in interpretation and strategies for internalizing moderation values among students. These strategies—ranging from lectures, group discussions, and role modeling to nonformal activities—generally have a positive impact on students' mindsets, encouraging more critical, inclusive, and tolerant attitudes, although a small segment of students still perceives moderation as a weakening of religious principles.

The main challenges identified include resistance from some students, limited capacity among *ustadz*, and the influence of digital media. However, these challenges also present opportunities through the development of media literacy, cross-community collaboration, and the strengthening of internal pesantren policies.

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