

Building Religious Moderation Through Faith Based Education: A Comparative Case Study of Islamic and Christian Secondary Schools in Jember, Indonesia

Imam Ahmad Aminul

Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang

Email: imamahmadaminul@webmail.umm.ac.id

Muh. Azhar Kholidi

National Sun-Yat Sen University, Kaohsiung, Taiwan

Email: azharkholidi.cendekiaedu@gmail.com

Abstract: Indonesia's religiously plural society faces growing challenges from religious conservatism and intolerance, making faith-based education a critical site for cultivating religious moderation. However, empirical comparative research examining how different faith traditions operationalize moderation in secondary schools remains scarce. This study aims to examine and compare the conceptualization and implementation of religious moderation in an Islamic and a Catholic secondary school in Jember, East Java, Indonesia, and to synthesize an integrated framework applicable across diverse religious educational contexts. This qualitative comparative case study employed semi-structured interviews with 31 participants, 160 hours of participant observation, and document analysis over six months (August 2024–January 2025) at SMA Muhammadiyah 3 Jember and SMAK Santo Paulus Jember. Findings reveal that both schools ground moderation in theologically authentic frameworks—the Islamic school through *wasatiyyah* and *ukhuwah* principles, the Catholic school through Catholic social teaching and MSC spirituality—while demonstrating convergent strategies of experiential interfaith learning, critical pedagogy, and community engagement. The study synthesizes a five-dimensional framework for religious moderation in faith-based education: theological grounding, curricular integration, pedagogical innovation, institutional culture, and community partnership. These findings demonstrate that strong confessional identity and genuine pluralistic engagement are compatible, offering practical guidance for educators and policymakers.

Keywords: Christian Education; Comparative Case Study; Faith-Based Education; Interfaith Dialogue; Religious Moderation

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15575/jipai.v6i1.54422>

Received: 02, 2026. Accepted: 05, 2026. Published: 06, 2026.

Copyright: © 2026. The Authors.

Licensee: JIPAI: Jurnal Inovasi Pendidikan Agama Islam is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is the world's largest Muslim-majority nation and officially recognizes six religions. It has long been celebrated as a model of interfaith harmony, grounded in the national philosophy of Pancasila and the motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, or Unity in Diversity. In recent years, however, this pluralistic foundation has come under pressure from rising religious conservatism, identity politics, and sporadic incidents of intolerance. In response, Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs has made religious moderation a strategic national priority, defining it as a balanced religious understanding that promotes national commitment, tolerance, nonviolence, and accommodation of local culture.

Faith-based schools occupy a paradoxical position within this national project. They exist to transmit specific religious traditions and to strengthen religious identity among their students, yet they are also expected to prepare young people to live wisely and empathetically in an increasingly pluralistic society. This tension between preserving confessional identity and cultivating openness toward religious others is especially acute during adolescence, when young people are actively forming their religious and civic identities.

The concept of religious moderation, or *moderasi beragama*, has been theorized primarily within Islamic discourse through the principle of *wasatiyyah* (the middle way), as articulated in Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs framework (Kemenag RI, 2019). Scholars such as Kamali (2015) and Hefner (2000) have examined how Islamic traditions construct theological resources for moderation and pluralistic coexistence. More recently, contact theory (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011) and critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2011) have been applied to interfaith education, demonstrating that structured dialogue and experiential learning reduce intergroup prejudice and cultivate civic values. However, the application of these frameworks to Christian educational institutions in Indonesia remains largely unexplored, and cross-tradition comparative studies applying a unified analytical lens are rare.

Several relevant studies have examined religious moderation in Indonesian educational settings. Azra (2019) traced the historical roots of Indonesian Islamic moderation, while Burhani (2016) explored Muhammadiyah's modernist tradition and its implications for education. Baidhawiy (2007) examined multicultural education in Islamic schools, and Halstead and McLaughlin (2005) provided theoretical grounding for faith-based schools in pluralistic democracies. Despite this growing body of work, three significant gaps remain. First, the literature has concentrated almost exclusively on Islamic institutions such as *madrasah* and *pesantren*, leaving Christian schools comparatively under-studied (Mursyid, 2016). Second, the limited comparative studies that do exist present parallel cases without a systematic framework that identifies convergent and divergent patterns across traditions (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017). Third, most research focuses on formal curricula and policy documents while neglecting the informal curriculum, school culture, and experiential learning through which moderation values are actually transmitted (Gay, 2018; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

To address these gaps, the present study undertakes a comparative case study of two faith-based secondary schools in Jember, East Java: SMA Muhammadiyah 3 Jember, representing Islamic education within the modernist Muhammadiyah tradition, and SMAK Santo Paulus Jember, representing Catholic education. The study is guided by three research questions: (1) How do Islamic and Christian secondary schools in Jember conceptualize and implement religious moderation within their respective theological frameworks and educational practices? (2) What are the significant similarities and differences in how these schools foster religious moderation, and what factors explain the convergence and divergence observed? (3) What integrated framework for religious moderation in faith-based education can be synthesized from a comparative analysis of these two complementary approaches? The corresponding objectives are to provide a thick description of how each school understands and enacts religious moderation, to identify patterns of similarity and difference across the two cases, to develop a synthesized conceptual framework applicable across diverse religious educational settings, and to generate actionable insights for educators, administrators, and policymakers.

This study makes several contributions. Theoretically, it extends the concept of religious moderation beyond its Islamic origins into Christian educational contexts, demonstrating the value of comparative methodology in religious education scholarship. Practically, it offers concrete, theologically grounded strategies that faith-based schools can adapt regardless of tradition. For policymakers, the findings illustrate how the national priority of religious moderation can be implemented in ways that respect institutional autonomy and theological diversity, rather than imposing uniform programs that may feel culturally inappropriate. Contextually, the study enriches the understudied region of East Java, where Jember's diverse religious demographics offer a useful middle case between cosmopolitan metropolitan settings and religiously homogeneous rural areas.

Contextually, the research adds to scholarship on religious education in East Java, a region with deep Islamic educational traditions and a significant Christian institutional presence, but one that remains understudied relative to Jakarta or Yogyakarta. Jember itself, a mid-sized city with diverse religious demographics and generally harmonious interfaith relations, offers a useful middle case between cosmopolitan metropolitan settings and religiously homogeneous rural areas.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative comparative case study approach to examine religious moderation in faith based secondary education. Qualitative methodology was selected as most appropriate for investigating the complex, contextually embedded phenomena of how schools conceptualize and implement religious moderation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The case study design enabled intensive, holistic examination of religious moderation within bounded educational systems (Yin, 2018). The comparative dimension addresses the study's aim to identify both shared principles and tradition specific

approaches across Islamic and Christian educational contexts (Stake, 2006; Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017).

Research Settings

The research was conducted in Jember Regency, East Java, Indonesia, during the 2024/2025 academic year. Jember was selected as research site for several reasons: as a mid-sized regency with approximately 2.5 million population, it represents the scale where most Indonesians live; its religious demographics reflect Indonesia's Muslim majority character while including significant Christian minority communities; and it remains relatively understudied compared to Jakarta or Yogyakarta.

SMA Muhammadiyah 3 Jember is a private Islamic secondary school operated by Muhammadiyah, one of Indonesia's two largest Islamic organizations known for modernist Islamic thought and educational institutions. Established in 1985, the school serves approximately 450 students in grades 10-12, drawing primarily from middle class Muslim families. The school's mission emphasizes developing students who are both deeply rooted in Islamic faith and prepared to contribute to Indonesian national development and global society. The student body is approximately 98% Muslim, with Islamic education courses totaling eight hours weekly. Religious activities include daily congregational prayers, weekly mentoring sessions (halaqah), and participation in Muhammadiyah youth organization.

SMAK Santo Paulus Jember is a private Catholic secondary school operated by the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart (MSC), an international Catholic religious congregation. Founded in 1952, Santo Paulus currently serves approximately 380 students. Unlike Muhammadiyah's homogeneous enrollment, Santo Paulus enrolls a religiously diverse student body: approximately 55% Catholic, 30% Muslim, 12% Protestant, and 3% other faiths. The school's mission emphasizes integral human development in the Catholic tradition, forming students characterized by academic excellence, moral integrity, social responsibility, and respect for human dignity regardless of religious background. Religious education follows national curriculum requirements, with Catholic students receiving Pendidikan Agama Katolik and students of other faiths receiving instruction in their respective religions. The school principal is a Catholic priest, while the vice principal for student affairs is Muslim, reflecting commitment to religious diversity in leadership.

Participants

Participants were selected through purposive sampling to include multiple perspectives within each school. At SMA Muhammadiyah 3, participants included the school principal (1), vice principal for curriculum (1), Islamic education teachers (3), Pancasila and Civic Education teacher (1), homeroom teachers (2), student organization advisors (2), and students from grades 11-12 (6), totaling 16 participants. At SMAK Santo Paulus, participants included the school principal (1), vice principal for student affairs (1), Catholic religious education teacher (1), Islamic religious education teacher (1), Pancasila

and Civic Education teacher (1), homeroom teachers (2), student organization advisors (2), and students from grades 11 12 representing different religious backgrounds Catholic (3), Muslim (2), Protestant (1) totaling 15 participants. Total sample comprised 31 participants. All provided informed consent, and pseudonyms are used to protect confidentiality.

Data Collection Methods Data collection employed three primary methods over six months (August 2024 January 2025): semi structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Semi structured interviews served as the primary data collection method, enabling in depth exploration of participants' understandings, experiences, and perspectives (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Interview protocols were developed for each participant category (school leaders, teachers, students), lasting between 45 90 minutes. All interviews were conducted in Indonesian, audio recorded with permission, and transcribed verbatim. Interview data generated approximately 680 pages of single-spaced transcript.

Participant observation involved the researcher spending time in each school observing daily activities, religious programs, classroom instruction, and informal interactions. Observations at each school totaled approximately 80 hours distributed across different contexts: religious education classes (8 sessions each), civic education classes (6 sessions each), morning assemblies (10 occasions each), religious co-curricular activities (12 occasions each), school celebrations (5 occasions each), and informal time observing student interactions. Field notes documented detailed description and interpretive observations, generating approximately 240 pages across both schools.

Document analysis involved systematic examination of relevant texts: school mission statements and philosophical foundations, curriculum documents, lesson plans and teaching materials, school regulations, programs for religious activities, organizational structure documents, and school publications. Documents provided important context and baseline understanding of formal articulations of religious moderation.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed an iterative, multi stage process integrating both within case and cross case analysis (Miles et al., 2014). The approach combined deductive coding based on the theoretical framework with inductive coding allowing for emergence of themes not anticipated in advance (Saldaña, 2016). Analysis proceeded through: (1) data immersion through repeated reading; (2) initial coding applying both deductive codes from the framework and inductive codes emerging from data; (3) focused coding organizing codes into broader categories; (4) theme development synthesizing codes into coherent themes; (5) comparative analysis systematically comparing themes across cases using constant comparison method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967); and (6) theoretical interpretation relating empirical themes to literature. Analysis was supported by NVivo 14 software.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was enhanced through multiple strategies: prolonged engagement over six months; triangulation across multiple data sources and participant perspectives; member checking of interview transcripts and preliminary findings; peer debriefing with doctoral colleagues; thick description providing rich contextual detail; audit trail documentation of research decisions; and reflexive practice examining how the researcher's background as a Muslim researcher influenced the research process.

Ethical Considerations

The research received ethics committee approval and adhered to principles for educational research with human participants. Informed consent was obtained from all participants following full explanation of research purposes and procedures. For student participants under 18, parental consent was obtained. Confidentiality was protected through pseudonyms and masked identifying details. Particular sensitivity was exercised regarding the religiously sensitive nature of the research topic, approaching all traditions with respect.

RESEARCH RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Research Result

This section presents findings from the comparative case study, organized in three parts: the religious moderation model at SMA Muhammadiyah 3, the approach at SMAK Santo Paulus, and comparative analysis identifying key themes and differences.

Religious Moderation Model in SMA Muhammadiyah 3 Jember

Conceptualization: Islamic Wasatiyyah Framework

SMA Muhammadiyah 3 grounds its understanding of religious moderation firmly within Islamic theological frameworks, particularly wasatiyyah (the middle way) and rahmatan lil'alam (mercy for all creation). Haji Sudahri, the Islamic education teacher, articulated this foundation: "Religious moderation is the concept of wasatiyyah or tawassut, which in Arabic means 'in the middle.' Not to the right, not to the left. So we are truly a community that is rahmatan lil'alam, mercy for all the worlds."

The school's conceptualization emphasizes that Islam is inherently moderate, and the challenge lies in human interpretation. As Sudahri explained: "Actually, Islam is already moderate. The Messenger of Allah was not sent to this world except as mercy for all the worlds. not to choose and select which group is mine, which is not. but how the presence of the Prophet SAW is mercy for all the worlds, not only for humans but also for other creatures."

A distinctive feature is the articulation of three levels of brotherhood structuring relationships with others. Sudahri described this framework: "I convey to students that humans have variations of brotherhood. First, we are siblings because of one faith, which is called Ukhuwah Islamiyah. Above that,

we are also siblings because we share the same homeland, so Ukhuwah Wathaniyah. We are also siblings not only that, but precisely because we feel fellow human beings, which is Ukhuwah Bashariyah." This tripartite framework provides students with sophisticated theological rationale for multiple forms of solidarity, recognizing religious bonds while situating them within broader national and universal human relationships.

Curricular and Pedagogical Approach

The formal curriculum addresses religious moderation primarily through Islamic education courses (eight hours weekly), which include dedicated chapters on tolerance, pluralism, and understanding other religious traditions. Sudahri described the pedagogical approach: "Actually, speaking about the truth, if we return it to the teachings of each religion, each has its own reference book. So when our references are different, then of course understanding reality will also be different. But once again I convey that universal teachings are not much different."

The pedagogical approach emphasizes returning to authoritative sources rather than relying on social media. When students raise questions influenced by problematic online content, Sudahri's response guides them: "Where did you get that from? From TikTok, for example. Rather than asking there, why don't you directly ask the appropriate source, for example to the teacher."

Central pedagogical strategies involve structured small group discussions where students explore how different religious traditions approach common concerns. Sudahri described: "I can create discussion groups, small groups. So there are those who position people who have certain beliefs. How does each religion's view see a problem." These discussions require students to articulate perspectives from traditions other than their own, building empathy through imaginative engagement.

Co-Curricular Programs and Institutional Culture

Beyond formal curriculum, the school cultivates moderation through co-curricular activities providing experiential opportunities for service and interfaith cooperation. Nur Zaidatul Hikmah, the vice principal, described partnerships with Catholic schools: "Collaboration activities for cleaning the environment together with non-Islamic schools. Then social service activities are carried out together." These collaborative activities create contexts where students work alongside peers from different faith traditions toward shared goals of community benefit.

Environmental service projects represent particularly significant sites for interfaith cooperation. Students from Muhammadiyah and Catholic schools participate together in neighborhood cleaning campaigns and park maintenance.

However, the school maintains boundaries regarding participation in explicitly religious activities of other traditions. Hikmah confirmed: "If visits to schools have been, if to worship places of non-Muslims no." This asymmetry reflects Islamic theological concerns about avoiding syncretism while engaging in civic and humanitarian cooperation.

The homogeneous Muslim composition shapes the approach significantly. Sudahri acknowledged: "At Muhammadiyah schools, the requirement to enter is to be Muslim. So automatically there are no students whose religion is different, all are Muslim." This creates both advantages (ability to develop deep Islamic theological foundations without risking alienating non-Muslim students) and limitations (lack of experiential learning through sustained interfaith relationships). However, teachers work to compensate by utilizing students' connections outside school, as Sudahri shared: "Children outside have wide friends. at state high schools and various, and those friends can have beliefs that can be Christian, Buddhist, and others."

Religious Moderation Model in SMAK Santo Paulus Jember

Conceptualization: Catholic Social Teaching and MSC Spirituality

SMAK Santo Paulus grounds its approach in Catholic social teaching and in the distinctive spirituality of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, organized around three pillars: prayer, brotherhood, and service. According to the school principal, the school does not distinguish among Catholics, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Confucians, or followers of indigenous beliefs; everyone is treated and regarded as a sibling. The Indonesian concept of *persaudaraan*, or brotherhood and fraternity, functions as the school's central organizing principle, paralleling the Islamic concept of *ukhuwah* but rooted in distinctly Catholic theological foundations.

Daily institutional practices create regular, structured interfaith interaction. Morning assemblies feature prayers led on a rotating basis by students from different religious backgrounds, so that Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Confucian, and Catholic students each lead prayer according to their own tradition's practice on different days. This is reinforced by a comparative religions curriculum in which all students learn about all of the represented traditions, partly from practitioners' own first-person accounts, alongside confessional instruction within each student's own faith.

The institutional culture carefully balances maintaining a clear Catholic identity with genuinely welcoming students of other faiths. The chapel serves Catholic liturgical functions, while other spaces are designated for different traditions; notably, a room once used for gamelan music was converted into a prayer space for Muslim students, complete with prayer mats and ablution facilities. Leadership itself models this pluralism: although the principal is a

Catholic priest, the vice principal for student affairs is Muslim, and the teaching staff includes a substantial mix of Catholic, Muslim, and Protestant teachers, roughly 60, 30, and 10 percent respectively.

Accounts from students suggest this model succeeds in creating an inclusive environment. One Catholic student who had previously attended a state junior high school described feeling like a minority there, with worship-related absences feeling uncomfortable to request, whereas at Santo Paulus the Catholic majority makes such accommodations straightforward. Conversely, Muslim students report feeling comfortable despite their minority status; one Catholic priest at the school recalled being struck that Catholic dormmates would remind Muslim students about their Friday prayer obligations, an example of interfaith solidarity that goes well beyond mere tolerance into active mutual support.

The school's leadership frames education explicitly as a religious vocation, with the principal describing the school's mission in terms of religious calling and the conviction that genuine success means helping students become disciplined in prayer, capable of treating one another as siblings, and able to serve others sincerely".

Comparative Analysis: Convergence and Divergence

Convergence: Shared Commitments

Despite different theological traditions and institutional contexts, both schools demonstrate remarkable convergence on several dimensions. Both ground commitment to religious moderation in core theological convictions rather than treating it as externally imposed requirement. For Muhammadiyah, moderation flows from *wasatiyyah*, *rahmatan lil'alam*, and the tripartite *ukhuwah* framework. For Santo Paulus, it derives from Catholic social teaching, MSC spirituality of brotherhood, and post Vatican II theology.

Both schools emphasize compatibility of religious commitment and national citizenship, teaching students to integrate religious identity with Indonesian civic identity. The Muhammadiyah school's articulation of *ukhuwah wathaniyah* positions love of country as a religious value, while Santo Paulus emphasizes that Catholic formation includes preparation for democratic citizenship.

Character formation focused on universal ethical values receives priority in both institutions alongside religious instruction. While specific language differs Muhammadiyah emphasizes *akhlakul karimah* (noble character) while Santo Paulus references human dignity and solidarity both schools identify similar virtues: honesty, compassion, responsibility, discipline, and service to others.

Community service provides practical contexts in both schools for interfaith cooperation through action. Muhammadiyah students participate in collaborative service with Catholic schools, while Santo Paulus students engage in programs serving Muslim communities, particularly through Idul Fitri parcel distribution.

Paradoxical Pattern: Majority Minority Dynamics

A striking paradox emerges when examining majority minority dynamics. SMAK Santo Paulus, representing a religious minority tradition (Catholicism) in Muslim majority Indonesia, creates an internally diverse environment where multiple religious identities coexist with Catholics as the largest group but not overwhelming majority. This internal diversity enables experiential learning about pluralism through daily peer relationships and institutional practices accommodating multiple religious needs.

This paradox suggests religious minority institutions like Santo Paulus may face particular pressure to demonstrate openness and equip students for navigating majority contexts, creating strong motivation for interfaith programming. Religious majority institutions like Muhammadiyah can maintain more homogeneous internal environments without institutional survival pressures requiring diversity accommodation, but bear responsibility as majority community members to model respect for minorities.

Complementary Models

The comparison reveals that rather than one school exemplifying superior approach, the two schools represent complementary models addressing different aspects of religious moderation challenge. The Muhammadiyah model emphasizes "moderation through faith based ethical formation" theological depth and moral development within one tradition as foundation for respectful engagement with others. This model recognizes that many contexts cannot easily create sustained interfaith contact but can still cultivate dispositions of respect through curriculum, critical pedagogy, and cultivation of theological resources.

The Santo Paulus model emphasizes "moderation through lived diversity" experiential learning through sustained interfaith contact and relationship building within religiously diverse institutional community. This model demonstrates that religious schools need not be homogeneous and that intentional cultivation of diversity can strengthen rather than weaken religious formation when coupled with appropriate pedagogical approaches.

Discussion

This section interprets the findings in relation to existing literature, synthesizes an integrated model of religious moderation, and explores theoretical and practical implications.

Interpretation of Findings

Religious Moderation as Contextual Theology and Practice

A central finding is that religious moderation in both schools is grounded in theological frameworks specific to each tradition rather than emerging from secular educational philosophy or externally imposed policy. This theological grounding has profound implications for how moderation is conceptualized, taught, and sustained. At Muhammadiyah, Islamic concepts of *wasatiyyah*, *rahmatan lil'alam*, and the tripartite *ukhuwah* framework provide robust Islamic rationales for respecting diversity while maintaining Islamic identity. At Santo Paulus, Catholic social teaching emphasizing human dignity and solidarity, MSC spirituality centered on brotherhood, and post Vatican II theology of religious freedom ground moderation in Catholic theological commitments.

This finding challenges assumptions in secularization theory that religious commitment inherently conflicts with pluralistic values or that moderation requires weakening religious identity (Berger, 1967). Instead, both schools demonstrate what Casanova (1994) terms "public religion" religious traditions engaging the public square and contributing to democratic pluralism from their own theological resources. The schools show that Christian and Islamic traditions, when interpreted by educators committed to moderate readings, contain rich resources supporting interfaith respect. This aligns with scholarship on "civil Islam" in Indonesia (Hefner, 2000) and global research on religious contributions to peacebuilding (Abu Nimer, 2001; Appleby, 2000).

Catholic theology at Santo Paulus, influenced by Vatican II's inclusivist turn, emphasizes encounter and dialogue across difference, participation in others' religious contexts while maintaining Catholic identity, and recognition of God's presence beyond Catholic boundaries. *Nostra Aetate* (1965) affirmed that the Church "rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions," creating space for more extensive interfaith engagement than traditional Catholic exclusivism permitted (D'Costa, 2009; Dupuis, 2001). The difference between Islamic and Catholic theological frameworks helps explain divergent practices such as Santo Paulus students visiting mosques and participating in Muslim led prayers versus Muhammadiyah's more cautious approach.

This finding contributes to scholarly discussions by demonstrating that faith-based schools can pursue moderation through "faithful pluralism" (Miedema & Bertram Troost, 2008) rather than requiring religious minimalism or secular neutrality. The schools show that strong confessional identity and genuine openness to religious difference are compatible when traditions are

interpreted through moderate hermeneutics. This has important implications for debates about religious schools' place in pluralistic democracies (Halstead & McLaughlin, 2005; Waddington, 2020).

The Dual Role: Particularity and Universality

The comparative analysis reveals both schools navigating tension between religious particularity (transmitting specific faith traditions and forming distinctive religious identities) and universality (preparing students for engagement with diverse others and contribution to common good). This dual role reflects what Grace (2002) identifies as the challenge of maintaining "spiritual capital" while avoiding insularity and promoting engagement with diverse others.

The Muhammadiyah school's approach emphasizes that being authentically Muslim in the modernist tradition includes commitment to Indonesian nationalism, engagement with modernity, and respectful coexistence with religious others. The curriculum strengthens Islamic knowledge through substantial religious instruction while teaching Islamic resources for moderation and exposing students to other traditions' perspectives. This reflects Muhammadiyah's historical identity as modernist Islamic organization rejecting both uncritical traditionalism and wholesale Westernization (Burhani, 2016).

Santo Paulus similarly emphasizes that being authentically Catholic in the MSC tradition includes commitment to brotherhood across all boundaries and service to society beyond Catholic community. The school provides deep Catholic formation through weekly katolisitas instruction, regular liturgy, and spiritual retreats, while requiring all students to participate in comparative religiositas courses and interfaith activities. This reflects both the MSC congregation's particular charism and broader Catholic developments since Vatican II (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988; Grace & O'Keefe, 2007).

The comparison reveals important differences in how schools balance particularity and universality, related significantly to student composition. Muhammadiyah, with exclusively Muslim enrollment, can provide deep Islamic formation without needing to accommodate religious minorities, allowing frank discussion of Islamic theological claims. The challenge becomes ensuring students develop genuine respect for religious others encountered primarily outside school rather than as daily peers.

Santo Paulus, with diverse religious composition including 30% Muslim students, must carefully navigate maintaining Catholic identity while genuinely honoring non-Catholic students' full belonging. The school addresses this through differentiated programming comprehensive comparative education for all plus confessional instruction for each tradition separately and through creating institutional culture emphasizing shared humanity alongside particular

religious commitments. The presence of religious minorities creates ongoing pedagogical challenges but also unique learning opportunities through sustained interfaith contact that research demonstrates powerfully shapes attitudes (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

These different approaches reflect what Sacks (2015) describes as the challenge of maintaining religious identity while engaging religious difference. Sacks argues that "the supreme religious challenge" is "to see God's image in one who is not in our image." Both schools work to cultivate what Rosenblith and Bailey (2008) term "generous orthodoxy" firm grounding in one's own tradition combined with generous appreciation for others.

The findings challenge critiques arguing that religious schools inherently conflict with democratic education by promoting particularistic identities and reducing cross group contact (Macedo & Tamir, 2002). Both schools intentionally integrate religious formation with citizenship education, teaching students that religious commitments support rather than conflict with democratic participation and interfaith cooperation. This aligns with research finding that faith-based schools can successfully cultivate civic engagement when they explicitly connect religious values to democratic citizenship (Campbell, 2001; Cohen Zada & Sander, 2008).

Pedagogical Approaches: Contact, Dialogue, and Critical Thinking

Both schools employ pedagogical approaches consistent with established research on intergroup contact, dialogue across difference, and critical thinking, though with different emphases. Classic intergroup contact theory holds that prejudice between groups can be reduced through contact characterized by equal status, common goals, intergroup cooperation, and institutional support, and a large body of meta-analytic research confirms these contact effects across many contexts.

Santo Paulus's institutional structure creates close to optimal conditions for contact-based reduction of prejudice: students from different backgrounds interact daily as equals, cooperate toward shared goals, and experience institutional support through policy, teacher modeling, and explicit curriculum content, reinforced by structured interfaith activities such as exchange visits with Islamic boarding schools and joint service projects. Student outcomes appear to bear this out, with Muslim students reporting comfort and high initiative despite their minority status, and with reports of Catholic students actively reminding Muslim peers of their prayer obligations, evidence of solidarity that goes beyond simple tolerance and is consistent with research on how cross-group friendships reduce prejudice by building affective bonds and empathy.

At the same time, the study highlights a limitation of relying primarily on contact-based approaches: contact requires actual diversity, which many

educational contexts, including Muhammadiyah's homogeneous enrollment, simply do not have. Even where contact occurs, it can reduce prejudice toward known individuals while leaving broader category-level stereotypes intact unless deliberate effort is made to generalize from individual relationships to the wider group.

Critical thinking development is a crucial shared pedagogy at both schools, particularly given the challenge posed by online religious content. Both works to build students' capacity to evaluate religious claims against authoritative sources, to recognize how social context and political agendas shape interpretation, and to distinguish between a tradition's core teachings and its culturally specific applications, consistent with scholarship on critical religious literacy that argues effective religious education must move beyond transmitting information toward developing interpretive and evaluative capacities. Taken together, the pedagogical findings show that contact, dialogue, critical inquiry, and experiential learning can be combined effectively within a single comprehensive program, but also that pedagogy must be adapted to institutional context, with homogeneous schools relying more on curricular and imaginative approaches and diverse schools able to draw more extensively on relationship-based learning.

Synthesis: An Integrated Framework

Drawing on the comparative analysis, this study synthesizes a five-dimensional framework for religious moderation in faith based education that honors theological particularity while articulating principles applicable across diverse contexts.

Dimension 1: Theological Foundation

Schools should articulate robust theological rationales for moderation rooted in each tradition's own scriptures, authoritative teachings, and interpretive traditions, developed through each tradition's own hermeneutical processes so that the rationale carries genuine religious authenticity and authority rather than being imported from outside the tradition.

Dimension 2: Curricular Integration

Content about religious diversity should be integrated systematically throughout the curriculum, moving beyond superficial coverage toward genuine engagement with other traditions' worldviews, ethical frameworks, and lived experience, and extending beyond religious studies into subjects such as history, literature, and social studies where religious dimensions are relevant, alongside explicit attention to critical thinking about religious knowledge and interpretation.

Dimension 3: Pedagogical Innovation

Schools should use active learning that engages students intellectually, emotionally, and relationally, including dialogical pedagogy such as small-group discussions and interfaith panels, experiential learning such as visits to worship spaces and interviews with practitioners, service learning that pairs community service with structured reflection, critical pedagogy that examines power dynamics in religious discourse, and technology-enhanced learning such as virtual exchanges.

Dimension 4: Institutional Culture

Moderation should be embedded in daily practices, policies, and relationships through diverse representation in leadership where possible, faculty development in moderation pedagogy, inclusive daily rituals such as rotating prayer leadership, clear and consistently applied policies on religious expression and dress, a physical environment that uses religious symbols thoughtfully, and intentional cultivation of an inclusive student peer culture.

Dimension 5: Community Partnership

Schools should build relationships beyond their own walls through clear communication with families about moderation goals, partnerships with diverse religious institutions for guest speakers and joint service projects, engagement with civil society organizations working on interfaith relations and peacebuilding, collaboration with government education departments, and public communication that shares the school's work as a model for others.

These five dimensions function as integrated system, with each dimension reinforcing others. Theological foundation provides motivation for the other dimensions. Curricular integration translates theological commitments into educational content. Pedagogical innovation determines how content is taught and experienced. Institutional culture creates environments where moderation is normative. Community partnership extends and sustains moderation work beyond school boundaries. Comprehensive implementation requires attention to all five dimensions in coordinated fashion, though the framework allows contextual adaptation recognizing that different schools operate in different contexts requiring different specific approaches while pursuing shared goals.

Implications and Limitations

Theoretical Implications

The study extends multicultural education theory to faith-based settings in Muslim majority societies, demonstrating both applicability and limitations of

existing frameworks. It contributes to understanding religious moderation by examining educational operationalization across different faith traditions, showing how moderation can be grounded in diverse theological frameworks sharing family resemblances while emerging from distinct foundations. It refines contact and dialogue theories by examining their application to religious intergroup relations in educational institutions.

Practical Implications

The study provides evidence-based models that schools can learn from and adapt. The five-dimensional framework provides structure for self-assessment and strategic planning. The findings highlight the importance of teacher capacity and need for robust professional development. They demonstrate the value of interfaith partnerships as educational resources and the necessity of engaging families and communities in moderation work.

Policy Implications

The findings demonstrate that effective moderation implementation requires substantial support and resources beyond mandate. Policy should encourage diverse approaches adapted to different contexts rather than imposing uniform programs. Significant attention should focus on teacher preparation and professional development. Policy should facilitate interfaith partnerships among schools and support research building evidence base about effective practices.

Limitations

The study examines only two schools in one city, limiting generalizability. It relies primarily on adult participants with limited direct student voice. It provides snapshot of current practices without examining historical development. It examines relatively successful schools, leaving unexplored schools struggling with implementation. It focuses on formal education, leaving unexplored informal education through families, religious communities, and media. Future research should address these limitations through larger samples across diverse regions, longitudinal studies following students over time, process focused research on program development, examination of struggling schools, and ecological research examining multiple nested contexts.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

Conclusion

This comparative case study set out to address three interconnected objectives: to describe how Islamic and Catholic secondary schools in Jember conceptualize and implement religious moderation within their respective theological frameworks; to identify significant similarities and differences

between the two schools and explain their causes; and to synthesize an integrated framework from their complementary approaches. The findings address each objective in turn. With respect to the first objective, SMA Muhammadiyah 3 Jember grounds moderation in the *wasatiyyah* (middle way) and *ukhuwah* (brotherhood) principles of Muhammadiyah's modernist tradition, integrating them with national values. SMAK Santo Paulus operationalizes moderation through Catholic social teaching—emphasizing human dignity, the common good, and solidarity—and MSC spirituality. Despite distinct theological languages, both schools implement moderation through parallel institutional strategies: integrating values across formal and co-curricular programmes, employing dialogical and experiential pedagogies, cultivating a school culture of mutual respect, and engaging the community as an extension of the learning environment. With respect to the second objective, the most significant convergence lies in both schools' conviction that theological depth and genuine openness to religious others are mutually reinforcing. The key divergence reflects contextual difference: the Islamic school's homogeneous enrolment orients moderation inward toward theological formation, while the Catholic school's religiously diverse community (55% Catholic, 30% Muslim, 15% other faiths) enables daily contact-based interfaith learning.

Implication

Addressing the third objective, this study synthesizes a five-dimensional Integrated Framework for Religious Moderation in Faith-Based Education (IFRMFBFE): (1) theological grounding—articulating moderation from within each tradition's own sources; (2) curricular integration—embedding moderation values across subjects and co-curricular activities; (3) pedagogical innovation—prioritizing dialogue, experiential encounter, and critical reflection over rote instruction; (4) institutional culture—embedding moderation in leadership, daily norms, and school ethos; and (5) community partnership—extending learning beyond the school through family and interfaith community engagement. This framework is designed to travel across religious traditions while remaining sensitive to each institution's theological particularity and contextual circumstances.

The research demonstrates that faith-based schools can be sites of progressive interfaith education rather than necessarily insular institutions, and that religious commitment properly understood can support rather than conflict with pluralistic engagement. Both schools show how educators grounded in their traditions can teach students to maintain strong religious identities while developing knowledge, dispositions, and competencies for respectful engagement with religious others.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors close by situating the study within the broader and urgent task of religious moderation education, noting that Indonesia and the wider global community continue to face persistent religious extremism and intolerance alongside genuinely inspiring examples of interfaith cooperation. Faith-based schools, which shape the religious identities of millions of young people, play a decisive role in determining whether future generations move toward conflict and division or toward solidarity and harmony. The two schools examined here demonstrate that comprehensive, theologically grounded, and pedagogically sophisticated approaches to moderation are achievable even amid resource constraints, offering grounds for hope that young people can learn to honor their own traditions while genuinely respecting others, and that education can help build more just, compassionate, and harmonious societies.

REFERENCES

- Abou El Fadl, K. (2001). *Speaking in God's name: Islamic law, authority and women*. Oneworld Publications.
- Abu-Nimer, M., & Smith, R. K. (2016). Interreligious and intercultural education for dialogue, peace and social cohesion. *International Review of Education*, 62(4), 393-405. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-016-9547-9>
- Allport, G. W. (1954). *The nature of prejudice*. Addison-Wesley.
- Azra, A. (2019). Berjuang menegakkan moderasi Islam di Indonesia. *Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Agama Islam*, 11(1), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.14421/jipai.2019.111-01>
- Baidhaw, Z. (2007). Building harmony and peace through multiculturalist theology-based religious education: An alternative for contemporary Indonesia. *British Journal of Religious Education*, 29(1), 15–30. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200601037478>
- Burhani, A. N. (2016). Muhammadiyah berkemajuan: Pergeseran dari puritanisme ke kosmopolitanisme. *Mizan Pustaka*.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Herder and Herder.
- Gay, G. (2018). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice* (3rd ed.). Teachers College Press.
- Giroux, H. A. (2011). *On critical pedagogy*. Continuum.
- Halstead, J. M., & McLaughlin, T. H. (2005). Are faith schools divisive? In R. Gardner, J. Cairns, & D. Lawton (Eds.), *Faith schools: Consensus or conflict?* (pp. 61–73). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203415498>
- Hargreaves, A., & Fullan, M. (2012). *Professional capital: Transforming teaching in every school*. Teachers College Press.
- Kamali, M. H. (2015). *The middle path of moderation in Islam: The Qur'anic principle of wasatiyyah*. Oxford University Press.

- Kementerian Agama RI. (2019). *Moderasi beragama*. Badan Litbang dan Diklat Kemenag RI.
- Mursyid, S. (2016). Konsep toleransi (al-samahah) antar umat beragama perspektif Islam. *Aqlam: Journal of Islam and Plurality*, 1(1), 35–50. <https://doi.org/10.30984/aqlam.v1i1.505>
- Pettigrew, T. F., & Tropp, L. R. (2011). *When groups meet: The dynamics of intergroup contact*. Psychology Press. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203826461>
- Wahid, A. (2022). Moderasi beragama dalam pendidikan Islam di Indonesia. *Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Agama Islam*, 14(2), 112–128. <https://doi.org/10.14421/jipai.2022.142-03>
- Angrosino, M. (2016). *Doing ethnographic and observational research* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Appleby, R. S. (2000). *The ambivalence of the sacred: Religion, violence, and reconciliation*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Badan Pusat Statistik Jember. (2023). *Kabupaten Jember dalam angka 2023*. BPS Kabupaten Jember.
- Banks, J. A., & Banks, C. A. M. (Eds.). (2019). *Multicultural education: Issues and perspectives* (10th ed.). Wiley.
- Bartlett, L., & Vavrus, F. (2017). *Rethinking case study research: A comparative approach*. Routledge.
- Bazeley, P., & Jackson, K. (2019). *Qualitative data analysis with NVivo* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Berger, R. (2015). Now I see it, now I don't: Researcher's position and reflexivity in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research*, 15(2), 219–234.
- Birt, L., Scott, S., Cavers, D., Campbell, C., & Walter, F. (2016). Member checking: A tool to enhance trustworthiness or merely a nod to validation? *Qualitative Health Research*, 26(13), 1802–1811.
- Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 9(2), 27–40.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 11(4), 589–597.
- Bray, M., Adamson, B., & Mason, M. (Eds.). (2014). *Comparative education research: Approaches and methods* (2nd ed.). Springer.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (2005). *Making human beings human: Bioecological perspectives on human development*. Sage Publications.
- Brown, R., & Hewstone, M. (2005). An integrative theory of intergroup contact. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 37, 255–343.
- Burhani, A. N. (2016). Muhammadiyah's intellectual network: Religious moderation and innovation in a Muslim organization. *Studia Islamika*, 23(3), 421–451.

- Casanova, J. (1994). *Public religions in the modern world*. University of Chicago Press.
- Christians, C. G. (2018). Ethics and politics in qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (5th ed., pp. 66-82). Sage Publications.
- Cohen-Zada, D., & Sander, W. (2018). Religious education and religious schools. In S. O. Becker, L. Woessmann, & L. Pieroni (Eds.), *The economics of education* (2nd ed., pp. 345-362). Academic Press.
- Cooling, T. (2010). *Doing God in education*. Theos.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Davies, K., Tropp, L. R., Aron, A., Pettigrew, T. F., & Wright, S. C. (2011). Cross-group friendships and intergroup attitudes: A meta-analytic review. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 15(4), 332-351.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2018). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (5th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Dinham, A., & Shaw, M. (2015). *RE for real: The future of teaching and learning about religion and belief*. Goldsmiths, University of London.
- Dupuis, J. (2001). *Toward a Christian theology of religious pluralism*. Orbis Books.
- Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R. I., & Shaw, L. L. (2011). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes* (2nd ed.). University of Chicago Press.
- Freire, P. (2018). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (50th anniversary ed.). Bloomsbury.
- Fullan, M. (2016). *The new meaning of educational change* (5th ed.). Teachers College Press.
- Gay, G. (2018). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice* (3rd ed.). Teachers College Press.
- Giroux, H. A. (2020). *On critical pedagogy* (2nd ed.). Bloomsbury.
- Gorski, P. C. (2016). Rethinking the role of "culture" in educational equity: From cultural competence to equity literacy. *Multicultural Perspectives*, 18(4), 221-226.
- Grace, G. (2002). *Catholic schools: Mission, markets and morality*. RoutledgeFalmer.
- Grace, G., & O'Keefe, J. (Eds.). (2015). *International perspectives on Catholic education: A capabilities approach*. Routledge.
- Guest, G., Namey, E., & McKenna, K. (2017). How many focus groups are enough? Building an evidence base for nonprobability sample sizes. *Field Methods*, 29(1), 3-22.
- Halstead, J. M., & McLaughlin, T. H. (2005). Are faith schools divisive? In R. Gardner, J. Cairns, & D. Lawton (Eds.), *Faith schools: Consensus or conflict?* (pp. 61-73). RoutledgeFalmer.
- Hargreaves, A., & Fullan, M. (2012). *Professional capital: Transforming teaching in every school*. Teachers College Press.

- Hefner, R. W. (2019). *Routledge handbook of contemporary Indonesia*. Routledge.
- Ipgrave, J. (2016). Including the study of religions other than Christianity within English religious education: A policy commitment in practice. In K. Engebretson, M. de Souza, G. Durka, & L. Gearon (Eds.), *International handbook of inter-religious education* (pp. 127-142). Springer.
- Jackson, R. (2014). *Signposts: Policy and practice for teaching about religions and non-religious world views in intercultural education*. Council of Europe Publishing.
- Jackson, R. (2019). *Religious education for plural societies: The selected works of Robert Jackson*. Routledge.
- Kamali, M. H. (2015). *The middle path of moderation in Islam: The Qur'anic principle of wasatiyyah*. Oxford University Press.
- Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia. (2019). *Moderasi beragama*. Badan Litbang dan Diklat Kementerian Agama RI.
- Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2015). *InterViews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Lickona, T., & Davidson, M. (2005). *Smart and good high schools: Integrating excellence and ethics for success in school, work, and beyond*. Center for the 4th and 5th Rs.
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Moore, D. L. (2015). Diminishing religious literacy: Methodological assumptions and analytical frameworks for promoting the public understanding of religion. *Religion & Education*, 42(4), 384-397.
- Parker, L. (2014). Religious education for peaceful coexistence in Indonesia? *South East Asia Research*, 22(4), 487-504.
- Parker, L., & Nilan, P. (2013). *Adolescents in contemporary Indonesia*. Routledge.
- Patel, E., & Meyer, C. (2017). The civic relevance of interfaith cooperation in a pluralistic democracy. *Journal of Interreligious Studies*, 21, 37-48.
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Pettigrew, T. F., Tropp, L. R., Wagner, U., & Christ, O. (2011). Recent advances in intergroup contact theory. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 35(3), 271-280.
- Phillips, D., & Schweisfurth, M. (2014). *Comparative and international education: An introduction to theory, method, and practice* (2nd ed.). Bloomsbury.
- Raihani. (2014). *Creating multicultural citizens: A portrayal of contemporary Indonesian education*. Routledge.
- Rosenblith, S., & Bindewald, B. (2019). Worldview diversity, epistemic justice, and the public good: Teaching children to live and learn together despite their worldview differences. *Theory and Research in Education*, 17(1), 85-103.
- Sacks, J. (2015). *Not in God's name: Confronting religious violence*. Schocken Books.

- Saldaña, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Sleeter, C. E., & Grant, C. A. (2022). *Making choices for multicultural education: Five approaches to race, class, and gender* (8th ed.). Wiley.