



## The Role of Educational Leadership in Implementing Religious Moderation Policies: An Analysis of Dayahs in East Aceh

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigates the use of religious moderation in two traditional Islamic boarding schools (dayah), specifically Dayah Darul Muta'allimin Kruet Lintang and Dayah Asasul Islamiah Leuge in East Aceh, Indonesia. It especially examines institutional policies, educational practices, student character outcomes, and the problems encountered in advancing wasathiyah (moderate Islam). Utilizing a descriptive-analytical qualitative framework, data were gathered through comprehensive observations, semi-structured interviews with leaders and educators, and examination of institutional records. The results indicate that religious moderation is consistently internalized via three interconnected methods. The curricular approach incorporates the principles of tasamuh (tolerance), tawazun (balance), and i'tidal (justice and moderation) in the examination of traditional Islamic writings (kitab kuning). The cultural approach prioritizes moral exemplification by teachers and dayah leaders, so encouraging moderation through quotidian practices and institutional standards. The social approach implements moderation through joint community initiatives, practical da'wah (dakwah bil hal), and inter-dayah interactions. These strategies mutually foster the development of pupils' religious, tolerant, disciplined, and nationalistic character. However, obstacles remain, such as inconsistent student understanding, insufficient contextualized educational materials, and exposure to extremist ideologies on social media. This study highlights the strategic importance of dayah as essential institutions for fostering moderate, humanistic Islamic education and promoting Islam as rahmatan lil 'alamin.

### 1. Introduction

The role of educational institutions, particularly traditional Islamic educational institutions such as Dayahs, is highly crucial (Bernouilly et al., 2025). Historically, Dayah institutions in Aceh have played a strategic role in preserving religious values (Hutagaol et al., 2025). However, in contemporary contexts, students face new challenges, namely how to integrate traditional values with the more modern concept of Religious Moderation (Shalahuddin et al., 2024). Unfortunately, many students are still unable to fully comprehend this concept, resulting in various misinterpretations. These misunderstandings often stem from incorrect interpretations of religious teachings, which can generate suspicion toward government efforts in implementing religious

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moderation policies(Alfisyah et al., 2024). To achieve the intended objectives, active contributions from *teungku* (religious teachers) are required in providing a fundamental understanding of the concept of religious moderation. Constructive collaboration with the leadership and administrators of Dayahs is highly expected to achieve optimal results(Jiang et al., 2025). Exclusive attitudes instilled in students due to narrow religious understanding may hinder the formation of an inclusive and tolerant Islamic character(Wibowo et al., 2025).

As educational institutions that are closest to the community, Dayahs play a significant role in shaping the character of Acehese society(Liliana & Almuahjir, 2025). This raises the question of the extent to which Dayahs are able to integrate religious moderation values into curricula and learning practices, and how this integration impacts the attitudes of the Acehese toward diversity(Hasan & Juhannis, 2024). In an era of globalization, which presents numerous challenges, religious moderation becomes increasingly relevant(Mubarak et al., 2023). Dayahs, with their extensive alumni networks, possess significant potential to disseminate moderation values(Athoillah et al., 2024). Accordingly, religious moderation initiated by Dayahs can provide solutions to various social issues faced by Aceh(Zulkarnaen et al., 2022).

Furthermore, Dayahs (*pesantrens*) have become a focal point in discussions surrounding radicalism and terrorism, although such incidents have not occurred in Acehese Dayahs(Sulaiman et al., 2024). Western perspectives, as expressed by Hefner and Bruinessen, often label *pesantrens* as 'breeding grounds' for extremist movements (Nurdin & Fauziah, 2021). However, this perspective requires deeper analysis given the complexity of radicalism(Prasetyo & Zulkhairi, 2022). While not all perpetrators of terrorism originate from *pesantrens*, it is a fact that some terrorist figures have a *pesantren* education background. For example, Fathurrahman Al-Ghazi, who stored one ton of explosives and several long-range weapons, studied at Pondok Pesantren Al-Mukmin Ngruki; Amrozi, Imam Samudra, Ali Imran, and Ali Ghufron, who were involved in the Bali bombing case, were alumni of Pondok Pesantren Al-Islam Lamongan. This has led many, particularly those skeptical of traditional Islamic educational institutions, to associate these institutions with extremist activities(Basri et al., 2023).

This situation necessitates a deeper study to understand the root causes of radicalism in the context of *pesantrens*(Muhsin et al., 2024). As the frontline of education, Dayahs must play an active role in addressing this issue by designing effective programs to build students' immunity against the influences of radicalism and exclusivism(Masykura Setiadi et al., 2024). It is also essential for educators to enhance students' critical literacy so they can filter information and distinguish between authentic religious teachings and radical ideologies(Meriza et al., 2022). The implementation of religious moderation values through the development of Islamic education programs in Dayahs represents a strategic step in preventing extremism and radicalism. By positioning Dayahs as centers of inclusive and tolerant learning, we can cultivate a younger generation with correct, moderate religious understanding that also upholds national values. Through Dayahs, a harmonious, peaceful, and prosperous society, particularly in Aceh, can be nurtured(Nasir et al., 2024).

Dayahs play a vital role in shaping both the character and religious understanding of their students (Lismijar & Azhari, 2024). Therefore, the implementation of religious moderation policies within Dayahs is urgent to ensure that the existing Dayahs across Aceh, especially in East Aceh, are free from exposure to extremist influences and related accusations. The success of these policies is highly dependent on the educational leadership and management of Dayahs. As the oldest educational institutions, Dayahs have a crucial role in shaping a moderate younger generation. Curricula oriented toward religious moderation can serve as an effective solution to counter radicalism and extremism (Lismijar & Azhari, 2024).

The author selected Dayahs as the research site, not only because of their profound philosophical foundations, but also due to the meaning of the term itself. The word “Dayah” originates from the Arabic term *zawiyah*, literally meaning “corner” or “nook,” reflecting the study settings in the Prophet’s Mosque in Medina. In Aceh, traditional Islamic educational institutions are more commonly referred to as Dayahs, symbolizing a community of Islamic intellectuals committed to peace, respect for diversity, and tolerance (*tasamuh*) (Amin et al., 2022). Dayahs also uphold a motto indicating their commitment to moderation. Moderate Muslim A Muslim who acts flexibly, shows empathy, practices ethical and social solidarity, respects others, and avoids arrogance or selfishness. Democratic Believer (Mukmin Demokrat) A believer rooted in faith who, when in power, does not forget the people who nurtured them, and when leaving power, maintains spirit and hope alongside the community (Najmuddin et al., 2024). Diplomatic Virtuous Person (Muhsin Diplomat) A person who values honesty, justice, courage, virtue, beauty, courtesy, and noble character, prioritizing commendable traits in navigating life’s challenges (Mahmud, 2023). Dayahs continue to strengthen their position as centers of moderate Islamic education. This is reflected in a variety of learning programs offered, both in the formal curriculum and daily activities. One notable example is the in-depth study of various *kitab kuning* texts, covering not only jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and exegesis (*tafsir*), but also other disciplines. Uniquely, these studies adopt all valid scholarly opinions within the recognized schools of thought (*muktabar*), demonstrating an open and tolerant attitude toward differing perspectives in Islam.

## 2. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research method. Qualitative research emphasizes a deep understanding of a particular issue. This study adopts a qualitative approach with the aim of comprehensively understanding how the implementation of religious moderation policies occurs in Dayah educational institutions in East Aceh (Creswell et al., 2007). Accordingly, this research is expected to provide deeper insights into the practices, challenges, and opportunities in integrating religious moderation values within Dayah institutions that are the focus of this study.

The researcher decided to select Dayah institutions in East Aceh as the research sites. The focus points include Dayah Darul Muta’allimin Kruet Lintang, located in Kruet Lintang Village, Peureulak Timur District, East Aceh Regency, and Dayah Asasul Islamiah, located in Leuge Village, Peureulak District, East Aceh Regency. The decision to select these two Dayahs was based on initial observations and interviews with the Dayah *teungku* (teachers/leaders). Direct observations indicated significant efforts to create a learning environment that is inclusive and respects diversity.

The researcher conducted participant observation, in-depth interviews with *teungku*, Dayah leaders, and students, as well as document analysis. The findings of this study are expected to provide recommendations for developing a more inclusive Islamic curriculum and learning practices.

The data collection techniques in this study included observation, documentation, and interviews. Data analysis was carried out using data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusions. After completing the research and reaching conclusions, the researcher tested the validity of the data using triangulation techniques.

## 3. Results

### 3.1 Implementation of Religious Moderation in Dayah Darul Muta’allimin Kruet Lintang and Dayah Asasul Islamiah Leuge

The implementation of religious moderation in Dayah educational institutions represents a strategic effort to instill *wasathiyah* (balanced and moderate) Islamic values in students. As traditional Islamic educational institutions in Aceh, Dayahs play a central role in shaping a religious character

that is moderate, tolerant, and patriotic. This study found that both Dayah Darul Muta'allimin Kruet Lintang and Dayah Asasul Islamiah Leuge have internalized the principles of religious moderation through various educational activities, mentorship, and exemplary leadership.

Interviews with administrators and teachers revealed that Dayah Darul Muta'allimin Kruet Lintang applies the values of religious moderation through curricular, cultural, and social approaches. From a curricular perspective, the teaching materials not only focus on jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and theology (*tauhid*), but also emphasize the importance of proper conduct (*adab*) in responding to differing opinions across Islamic schools of thought. Students are taught to understand that differences of opinion among scholars are a blessing and part of the intellectual dynamism within Islam.

Learning activities in this Dayah are accompanied by the habituation of *tasamuh* (tolerance) and *tawazun* (balance) values. For example, during *kitab* discussion forums, students are trained to express their opinions respectfully and to appreciate the perspectives of their peers.

### 3.2 Implementation of Religious Moderation at Dayah Darul Muta'allimin Kruet Lintang and Dayah Asasul Islamiah Leuge

Based on interviews and observations, Dayah Darul Muta'allimin Kruet Lintang has implemented several structured strategies rooted in Islamic values and the local wisdom of Acehnese society. These strategies include:

#### a. Integration of Moderation Values into the Curriculum

The first strategy involves integrating the principles of moderation into the *kitab kuning* learning system and daily religious study. Teachers not only focus on legal and ritual aspects but also connect them to the values of *tasamuh* (tolerance), *tawazun* (balance), and *i'tidal* (justice). During *kitab* discussions, differing scholarly opinions are addressed through a scientific and dialogical approach, enabling students to understand that differences are part of the blessing and intellectual dynamism within Islam. This strategy aligns with value-based education theory (Badrin, 2023), which emphasizes the importance of moral-value-based learning, ensuring that students not only know what is right but also are motivated to act accordingly. Teachers in the Dayah play an active role as facilitators, instilling moderate values through dialogue and concrete examples.

#### b. Exemplary Leadership of Teachers and Administrators

The second strategy is through exemplary behavior (*uswah hasanah*) demonstrated by Dayah leaders and teachers. They show openness to differences, politeness in dialogue, and rejection of excessive fanaticism toward any opinion or group. This exemplarity provides a concrete model for students to emulate moderation in their daily lives. As al-Ghazali stated in *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*, exemplary behavior is the most effective form of education, as humans tend to imitate the conduct of those they respect. Therefore, the success of moderation strategies at Dayah Darul Muta'allimin heavily depends on the moral and spiritual role of the teachers.

#### c. Social Habituation and Community Activities

The next strategy is to cultivate a moderate character through social activities. Students participate in cooperative work (*gotong royong*), communal service, public religious study sessions, and other social activities that strengthen social solidarity. This habituation broadens students' perspectives for inclusive interaction with communities of diverse backgrounds. These activities align with the Ministry of Religious Affairs (2019), which emphasizes the importance of direct experience as a medium for value-based learning. Through real social interaction, students learn to apply moderation values in practice.

#### d. Internalization of National Values and Patriotism

The fourth strategy is to strengthen national commitment through Islamic studies that emphasize loving one's homeland (*hubbul wathan*) as part of faith. In various lectures and Islamic

holiday commemorations, teachers stress the importance of maintaining national unity as an expression of practicing moderate Islam.

Through these strategies, Dayah Darul Muta'allimin Kruet Lintang has successfully created an educational environment that fosters students' character as tolerant, respectful, and capable of becoming agents of peace within the community.

In contrast to the previous Dayah, Dayah Asasul Islamiah Leuge develops strategies for implementing religious moderation that emphasize cultural, participatory, and dialogical approaches. Based on field findings, these strategies include:

a. Strengthening a Contextual Curriculum

The Dayah curriculum is developed by linking classical studies with contemporary social realities. Teachers explain the relevance of Islamic values to modern social issues such as interfaith tolerance, communal harmony, and social responsibility. This approach aims to ensure that students understand religion not only textually but also contextually. This aligns with Fauzan's (2018) view that Islamic education ideally integrates intellectual, spiritual, and social dimensions to produce individuals who are knowledgeable and possess noble character.

b. Inclusive Dialogue and Deliberation

The second strategy involves fostering a culture of dialogue (*musyawarah*) to address differing opinions among students. Differences are addressed through scholarly discussion grounded in *adab* (proper conduct) and mutual respect, rather than confrontation. This approach prevents the emergence of fanaticism and exclusivism in religious practice. This practice reflects the values of *tawasuth* (moderation) and *tasamuh* (tolerance), as highlighted by Ulinnuha (2020), wherein a moderate Muslim balances textual understanding (*nash*) with social context without compromising religious principles.

c. Socio-Religious and Collaborative Activities

The Dayah also implements social collaboration with the surrounding community. Students participate in activities such as *dakwah bil hal*, communal service (*gotong royong*), and inter-Dayah social service programs. Through these activities, humanitarian and solidarity values are instilled directly. This strategy reinforces students' understanding that Islam is a religion of mercy for all creation (*rahmatan lil 'alamin*).

d. Exemplary Behavior of Teachers in Moderation

Teachers at Dayah Asasul Islamiah Leuge play a crucial role in instilling moderation values through daily behavior. They demonstrate patience, openness, and politeness toward students and the community. Teachers not only convey knowledge but also serve as moral exemplars who practice Islamic values in a moderate manner.

e. Participatory and Collaborative Approach

The final strategy involves actively engaging students in the planning and organization of Dayah activities. Both religious and social programs are designed collaboratively between teachers and students, fostering a sense of responsibility and ownership over the moderation values being taught.

### *3.3 The Impact of Religious Moderation Implementation on Students at Dayah Darul Muta'allimin Kruet Lintang and Dayah Asasul Islamiah Leuge*

Interviews with administrators and teachers indicate that the implementation of religious moderation at Dayah Darul Muta'allimin Kruet Lintang has a direct impact on students' attitudes and behaviors in daily life. These impacts can be described across several aspects:

**a. Development of Tolerance and Appreciation for Differences**

Through *kitab* study and scholarly discussions, students are habituated to respect differing opinions among scholars and peers. They no longer perceive differences of opinion as conflicts, but as an intellectual richness within Islam. This attitude reflects the internalization of *tasamuh* (tolerance) and *tawasuth* (moderation), which form the core of religious moderation. One teacher explained, "Students are now more open in responding to differences, whether in practice (*amaliyah*) or jurisprudential (*fiqh*) views. They learn not to judge hastily." This aligns with Quraish Shihab's (2019) view that a moderate attitude fosters awareness to understand truth proportionally while respecting others' perspectives.

**b. Strengthening Discipline, Adab, and Responsibility**

Moderation values are also reflected in the cultivation of discipline and responsibility. Through social activities and habituation of proper conduct (*adab*), students are trained to respect time, maintain cleanliness, and adhere to Dayah regulations with self-awareness. This character development aligns with the principle of *i'tidal* (justice and proportionality), which emphasizes balance between rights and obligations.

**c. Formation of Social Awareness and Communal Spirit**

The implementation of religious moderation reinforces students' social awareness. In cooperative work (*gotong royong*), community religious study sessions, and social service activities, students learn to apply *ukhuwah islamiyah* (Islamic brotherhood) and *ukhuwah wathaniyah* (national solidarity). They understand that religion is not only about ritual worship but also about social responsibility.

Thus, Dayah Darul Muta'allimin Kruet Lintang successfully cultivates students' character to be religious, well-mannered, and socially conscious, in line with the Dayah's vision as an institution that shapes knowledgeable and morally upright individuals.

Findings at Dayah Asasul Islamiah Leuge indicate that religious moderation values significantly strengthen students' character in moral, spiritual, and social dimensions. The observed impacts include:

**a. Development of Humanistic Religious Character**

Through the integration of moderation values into learning, students not only understand Islam textually but also develop an inclusive spiritual awareness that respects humanity. Teachers act as role models, demonstrating that true religiosity promotes peace rather than division. This aligns with the concept of *rahmatan lil 'alamin*, which positions Islam as a religion that brings benefit and compassion to all creatures.

**b. Enhancement of Dialogue Skills and Critical Thinking**

Students at Dayah Asasul Islamiah Leuge are accustomed to discussion, argumentation with proper conduct, and seeking truth through scholarly dialogue. This demonstrates an increase in critical thinking skills, a hallmark of a moderate character. They do not accept information dogmatically but evaluate it rationally and based on strong evidence.

**c. Increased Solidarity and Social Engagement**

Students participating in social activities such as *dakwah bil hal* and community service show increased empathy and concern for others.

#### 4. Conclusions

Based on the research findings and discussion regarding the implementation of religious moderation at Dayah Darul Muta'allimin Kruet Lintang and Dayah Asasul Islamiah Leuge, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. Systematic internalization of religious moderation values Dayah Darul Muta'allimin and Dayah Asasul Islamiah have successfully internalized the values of religious moderation systematically and contextually across all aspects of Dayah life. Religious moderation in these institutions is not merely a normative concept but has become a living educational culture, manifested through learning, habituation, and exemplary leadership.
2. Three main approaches to implementation the implementation of religious moderation in both Dayahs is realized through three primary approaches: curricular, cultural, and social. In the curricular aspect, *wasathiyah* (centrism), *tasamuh* (tolerance), *tawazun* (balance), and *i'tidal* (justice) are integrated into the learning process of *kitab kuning* and daily religious studies. Teachers not only emphasize scholarly knowledge but also cultivate wise attitudes in responding to differences across schools of thought and scholarly opinions.
3. Cultural and social dimensions of moderation in the cultural dimension, moderation values are instilled through the exemplary behavior (*uswah hasanah*) of leaders and teachers, who demonstrate openness, politeness, and rejection of excessive fanaticism. This exemplarity shapes students' rational and balanced mindset in understanding Islam. In the social dimension, religious moderation is applied through community-oriented activities such as cooperative work (*gotong royong*), social service, *dakwah bil hal*, and inter-Dayah study sessions, which strengthen the relationship between the Dayah and the surrounding community.

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