

Research Article

Educating a Moderate Generation: The Role of Non-Religious Teachers in Instilling the Values of Religious Moderation at SMPN 1 Rengasdengklok

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the strategic role of non-religious subject teachers in promoting religious moderation values at SMPN 1 Rengasdengklok, a school with students from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds. Using a qualitative approach and case study method, the study investigates how these teachers integrate core values of moderation—national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence, and acceptance of local culture—into general subject instruction. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation, and analysed descriptively. The findings reveal that non-religious subject teachers successfully foster an inclusive and harmonious learning environment through contextual approaches, collaborative learning, and integration of local and national values. As a result, students show increased tolerance, a stronger sense of nationalism, and improved dialogical thinking. However, challenges remain, such as student intolerance, social media influence, and limited family support. Therefore, collaboration among schools, families, and communities, along with enhanced digital literacy and experiential learning, is essential to sustaining religious moderation practices. This study underscores the vital role of non-religious teachers as agents of moderation in shaping inclusive, peaceful, and patriotic student character.

Keywords: Religious Moderation; Non-Religious Teachers; Multicultural Education; Student Character

1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is the fourth most populous country in the world and is characterized by significant religious diversity. The state officially recognizes six religions: Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. This diversity reflects the richness of religious beliefs, teachings, and practices. However, it also presents challenges in maintaining interfaith harmony. Various religious conflicts have marked the nation's history, including the Poso conflict (December 25, 1998 – December 20, 2001), which originated from youth clashes and escalated into sectarian violence; the Bali Bombings I (October 12, 2002) and II (October 1, 2005), which killed numerous civilians and injured hundreds; and the Tolikara incident in Papua (July 17, 2015), involving members of the Evangelical Church of Indonesia that resulted in casualties, the destruction of a mosque, and damage to local homes. Other terrorist attacks include bombings and shootings near Plaza Sarinah, Jakarta (January 14, 2016); a bomb at the Oikumene Church, Samarinda (November 13, 2016); and a suicide bombing in front of the SPKT of the Solo Police Headquarters (July 5, 2016). Further bomb attacks were carried out at the Surabaya Police Headquarters on May 14, 2018, by the Tri Murtiono family. Additional incidents include the vandalism of a mosque in Tuban (February 13, 2018), the destruction of three statues in Lumajang (February 19, 2018), and a failed pressure-cooker bomb attack at the Indramayu Police Headquarters (March 13, 2018). Acts of terrorism continued in Sibolga, North Sumatra, and at the Makassar Cathedral Church (March 28, 2021). Religious leaders have also been targeted, such as the assault on KH. Umar Basri, caretaker of Al-Hidayah Islamic Boarding School, Cicalengka, Bandung (January 27, 2023). This series of events highlights that intolerance and radicalism remain serious threats, underscoring the importance of strengthening the values of religious moderation in an increasingly diverse society.

These various incidents are inseparable from attitudes of intolerance. Therefore, it is essential for society to understand and appreciate religious differences, as well as to embody mutual respect among adherents of different faiths. Schools, as educational institutions that play a crucial role in shaping students' positive character, also face challenges in maintaining harmony, fostering tolerance, and preventing potential conflicts that may arise due to differences in beliefs. Schools serve as meeting grounds for students from diverse religious, cultural, and traditional backgrounds. One of the main challenges is the emergence of exclusivist tendencies among students, where they feel more comfortable associating with peers who share the same religious background, potentially leading to the development of stereotypes and prejudices toward other

religious groups, which may evolve into intolerant attitudes if not properly addressed. Moreover, external influences such as social media and certain groups may shape students' religious understanding toward more radical or extreme interpretations. One solution that can be implemented is the instillation of religious moderation values. Religious moderation serves as a solution because it promotes balanced, fair, and non-partisan attitudes and behaviors, rejecting both extremism and liberalism in religious practices, thus becoming a key to maintaining peace and interfaith harmony (Adrian, 2024). Furthermore, through the application of religious moderation, a mindset, attitude, and practice of moderation or *wasathiyah* can be developed, namely, the practice of taking just and balanced middle paths in all aspects of life while avoiding extreme decisions (Parhan, 2022). By practicing religious moderation, students are taught to appreciate diversity, foster tolerance, and reject all forms of discrimination and extremism.

Teachers play a crucial role in shaping students' character and mindset, including in instilling the values of religious moderation. As educators, teachers are not only responsible for delivering academic content but also serve as facilitators and role models in fostering tolerance, balance, and respect for religious diversity. As stated in Law No. 14 of 2005 on Teachers and Lecturers, a teacher is defined as a professional educator whose primary duties include educating, teaching, guiding, directing, training, assessing, and evaluating students in formal early childhood education, primary education, and secondary education. Furthermore, research by Parhan (2022) indicates that in disseminating information on religious moderation, social media is the most dominant source (55.9%), followed by lecturers, teachers, and religious leaders (25.3%). This presents an opportunity for the education sector to engage students and embed religious moderation values within schools. Teachers can utilize their roles as conservators, innovators, transmitters, transformers, and organizers in the effort to cultivate religious moderation within the school environment (Purbajati, 2020). Establishing religious moderation in schools requires the active participation of all teachers, meaning that the responsibility of instilling religious moderation values does not rest solely with religious education teachers; rather, all subject teachers play a critical role in fostering tolerance, respect for diversity, and inclusive understanding among students.

Most studies on religious moderation tend to focus on the role of religious teachers or religious figures, and are typically conducted in religious-based educational institutions. Meanwhile, the role of non-religious teachers is still rarely highlighted as the primary subject in the context of instilling religious moderation values. This can be seen from the following bibliometric map.

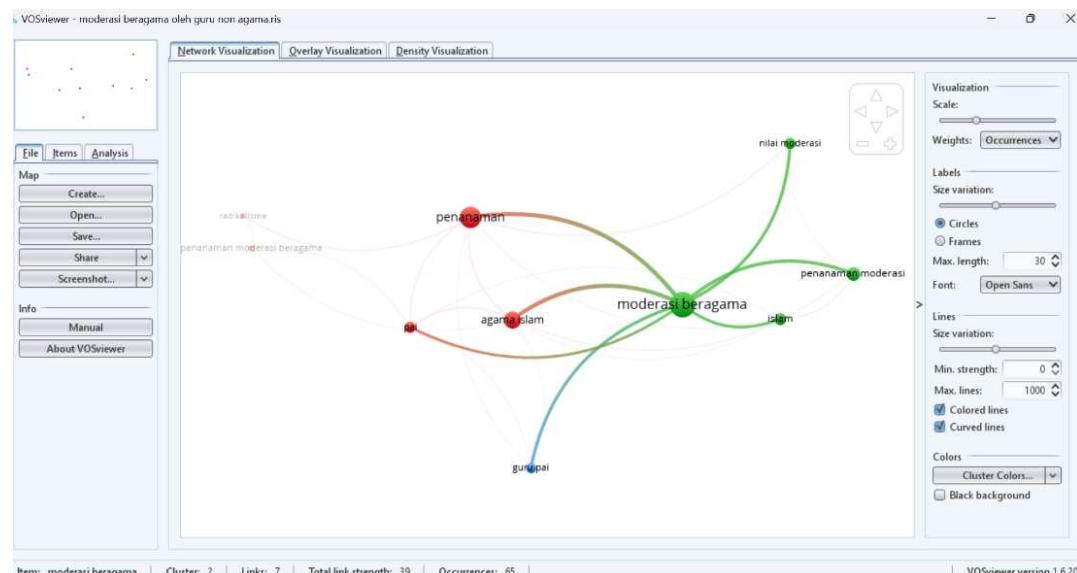


Figure 1. Map of the Bibliometrics

In fact, non-religious teachers have frequent interactions with students and can serve as key agents in shaping moderate attitudes through humanistic and contextual approaches in the learning process. SMPN 1 Rengasdengklok is a junior high school located in Rengasdengklok subdistrict, Karawang Regency. This school is characterized by its religious and cultural diversity, where students of various faiths—including Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism—can be found. Given such diversity, the school faces significant challenges in maintaining interfaith harmony. Therefore, this study focuses on the strategies employed by non-religious teachers at SMPN 1 Rengasdengklok in instilling religious moderation values. Using a qualitative approach, this research explores how non-religious teachers integrate moderation values into their teaching methods, the challenges they face in instilling religious moderation, and the impacts of these strategies on students. By delving deeper into the role of non-religious teachers in the context of religious moderation education, this study aims to fill gaps in the existing literature and highlight the importance of cross-disciplinary collaboration in shaping a moderate and tolerant generation. Furthermore, the findings are expected to contribute to

enriching the discourse on religious moderation education in schools and serve as a reference for developing more inclusive educational strategies that focus on nurturing students' character to become tolerant, just, and balanced in practicing their religious beliefs.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study method to explore the role of non-religious teachers in instilling religious moderation values at SMPN 1 Rengasdengklok. This approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon through direct interaction with the research subjects. The research site was established at SMPN 1 Rengasdengklok, with the subjects consisting of non-religious teachers, such as those teaching Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Indonesian Language, and other subjects not directly related to religious education. Data collection was conducted using three main techniques. First, in-depth interviews with non-religious teachers were conducted to explore their understanding of religious moderation and the strategies they apply in the learning process. Second, classroom observations were carried out to observe how religious moderation values were integrated into classroom interactions. Third, documentation was used to analyze teaching materials, school policies, and various academic records related to religious moderation education. The collected data were analyzed through several stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction involved sorting and filtering information relevant to the research focus. Subsequently, the reduced data were presented in a narrative description to facilitate understanding and further analysis. The final stage was conclusion drawing, in which findings from various data collection techniques were systematically reviewed to identify patterns related to the role of non-religious teachers in promoting religious moderation. To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, this study employed source and method triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information from various research subjects, such as teachers of different subjects. Method triangulation was carried out by combining the results of interviews, observations, and document analysis to obtain a more comprehensive understanding. Through the application of these techniques, the research findings are expected to achieve a high level of validity and make a meaningful contribution to the understanding of strategies for embedding religious moderation values in the school environment.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 An Overview of Religious Moderation

Religious moderation has become a strategic concept for maintaining religious harmony in Indonesia's multicultural and plural society. According to Lukman Hakim Saifuddin, religious moderation refers to a perspective, attitude, and practice of religion that is fair and balanced, avoiding extremes on either the right or the left (Syafuruddin, 2023). A similar view is expressed by Quraish Shihab, who emphasizes that Islam advocates for a middle path and rejects extremism. In his view, moderation means "practicing religion in a spirit of compassion, not hostility" (Shihab, 2019). This perspective is further supported by Abdul Mu'ti, who explains that religious moderation must be grounded in inclusive Islamic values, recognize pluralism, and reject all forms of violence (Mu'ti, 2021). Furthermore, Lukman highlights four key indicators that serve as benchmarks for understanding and practicing religion moderately: national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence, and accommodation of local culture (Nurhadi, 2023). First, national commitment refers to the extent to which one's religious practices strengthen or weaken national unity, ensuring that religion is not used as a tool to divide the nation. Second, tolerance reflects one's ability to respect and appreciate differences amidst diverse religious interpretations, thereby fostering mutual respect among religious communities. Third, anti-violence emphasizes that religious moderation rejects all forms of violence in religious practice and promotes peaceful and humane approaches to differences. Fourth, accommodation of local culture refers to the capacity to accept and respect local traditions and cultures as integral parts of national diversity. These four indicators serve as guidelines for practicing religion in a more inclusive, balanced, and socially relevant manner within a pluralistic society. Thus, religious moderation is not merely a normative concept but also a crucial social praxis for maintaining national integration. The views of Lukman Hakim Saifuddin and other scholars underscore that religious moderation is an urgent necessity in multicultural societies such as Indonesia. By prioritizing moderate attitudes, religious communities can uphold their beliefs while embracing values of tolerance and interfaith brotherhood.

3.2 Non-Religious Teachers' Strategies in Instilling Religious Moderation Values: National Commitment

Based on interviews with non-religious teachers at SMPN 1 Rengasdengklok, the strategy for instilling national commitment is carried out through contextual, reflective approaches tailored to the characteristics of each subject. Teachers foster an attitude of mutual respect for differences as the foundation of awareness of the nation's diversity, emphasizing the importance of empathy and tolerance as tangible forms of commitment to preserving national unity. In their teaching, nationalistic values are integrated by connecting local and national materials, such as incorporating the poetry of Apip

Mustopa with the struggle of Otto Iskandardinata in Indonesian language lessons. Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution also serve as both moral foundations and reinforcements of national identity. In science lessons, teachers utilize themes related to nature to encourage students to reflect on God's creation, particularly Indonesia's natural environment, thereby nurturing gratitude and love for the homeland. Additionally, teachers serve as role models by demonstrating fairness, openness to cross-background discussions, and involving students in collaborative projects that further strengthen the spirit of unity. Art teachers also utilize creative expression as an effective medium for celebrating diversity and reinforcing national solidarity. These findings demonstrate that non-religious teachers at SMPN 1 Rengasdengklok are able to creatively and strategically integrate national commitment values. All of these strategies reflect the integration of national and religious moderation values that emphasize balance and inclusivity, making the school an environment that fosters the development of tolerant, nationalist, and peace-loving generations. This approach aligns with the concept of religious moderation, which emphasizes the principles of balance (*at-tawazun*) and inclusive diversity (*syumuliyyah*) as articulated by Saifuddin (in Parhan, Nugraha, & Islamy, 2022). Instilling inclusive values strengthens national nationalism. Parhan et al. (2021) state that education that emphasizes spirituality and human values is an effective strategy for forming a generation capable of building social harmony through the principles of *ukhuwah Islamiyyah*, *wathaniyyah*, and *basyariyyah*. In the context of secondary education, non-religious teachers' strategies that integrate religious and national values through collaborative and contextual learning activities represent a concrete model of religious moderation.

3.3 Tolerance

The interview results show that non-religious teachers at SMPN 1 Rengasdengklok instill the value of tolerance through inclusive and contextual approaches. Routine practices such as allowing students to pray according to their respective religions before lessons serve as a symbol of respect for diversity, without imposing the majority religion on others. This practice creates a safe and inclusive spiritual space, in line with Carl Rogers' (1983) humanistic approach, which emphasizes the importance of individual freedom and psychological safety in the learning process. Another strategy applied is the formation of heterogeneous study groups. Interactions among students from diverse backgrounds not only strengthen academic understanding but also foster social skills such as tolerance, democracy, and collective responsibility. This approach aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which stresses that learning and value formation occur in social contexts through interaction among individuals. In history lessons, teachers relate the struggles of national heroes from various backgrounds as symbols of the nation's strength in diversity. In art classes, students from different religions and cultures collaborate on joint projects, creating opportunities to express their identities while respecting differences.

This contextual approach has proven effective in internalizing values through direct learning experiences, as emphasized by Parhan (2016) in the development of contextual learning models, which highlight the importance of connecting subject matter to students' real-life experiences. Furthermore, the inclusive teaching strategies employed by these teachers align with James Banks' (2015) multicultural education perspective, which stresses the need to integrate diversity values into the curriculum to foster cross-cultural understanding. Additionally, approaches that provide space for dialogue, such as reflective discussions among students from different backgrounds, also strengthen the practices of moderation and inclusion (Rahmawati & Santoso, 2022). Moreover, Parhan et al. (2022) emphasize that religious moderation offers an alternative solution to the extremes of liberalism and literalism in religious understanding, which if left unchecked, may give rise to radicalism. Although their research focuses on higher education contexts, the fundamental principles of religious moderation remain highly relevant at the secondary education level. One such principle is the importance of fostering a balanced religious attitude—between personal faith and respect for the beliefs of others—a method also implemented by non-religious teachers at SMPN 1 Rengasdengklok.

3.4 Anti-Violence

Based on interviews with non-religious teachers at SMPN 1 Rengasdengklok, no cases of religion-based violence were found. The issues identified included several incidents where students made remarks that offended their peers' beliefs. The teachers' strategy was to respond promptly with an educational approach, such as calming the class, providing clarification, and engaging in private dialogues with the involved students. Other strategies implemented include diversity discussions, educational sanctions, and collaborative activities among students of various backgrounds. This approach reflects a constructive conflict resolution model based on dialogue and cooperation (Deutsch, 2006), as well as the practical application of religious moderation values (Ardian et al., 2024). Teachers serve as mediators who instill tolerance through a humanistic approach. This practice is supported by Rahmawati and Santoso (2022), who argue that reflective dialogue is effective in addressing diversity-related conflicts in schools. From a broader perspective, the approach taken by non-religious teachers in resolving intolerance issues at this school also aligns with the religious moderation model proposed by Parhan, Nugraha, and Islamy (2022). They emphasize the importance of systematic efforts to counter two extremes in religious understanding—liberalism and literalism—that, if left unchecked, may evolve into radicalism. Although their research is situated within higher education contexts, the core principles of moderation, such as balance (*at-tawazun*) and inclusivity (*syumuliyyah*), remain highly relevant for secondary education, particularly in shaping a healthy and constructive religious

awareness. While incidents of intolerance or violence are rare, the active involvement of non-religious teachers in addressing potential conflicts demonstrates their significant contribution to shaping students' moderate character and fostering peaceful coexistence within a multicultural society.

3.5 Accommodation of Local Culture

This study reveals that non-religious teachers at SMPN 1 Rengasdengklok play a significant role in instilling appreciation for local traditions through educational, contextual, and dialogical approaches. They perceive tradition as part of the nation's cultural richness, not as a threat to students' religious beliefs. Traditions such as *seren taun* are understood as expressions of gratitude to God, while media like *wayang golek* are used to introduce moral and spiritual values in a contextual manner. Local cultural values such as *someah ka semah* and *silih asih, silih asah, silih asuh* are integrated into lessons to strengthen local character that reflects moderation, mutual respect, and compassion. The utilization of local wisdom in education reflects the principle of "educational glocalization," which emphasizes the integration of local values to cultivate universal virtues such as respect and cooperation (Susanto, 2021). This approach embodies the spirit of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, where cultural diversity is seen as an identity to be preserved rather than erased. Learning materials such as "Indonesia's Socio-Cultural Diversity" serve as platforms to instill tolerance, mutual cooperation, and pride in local cultural identities. Furthermore, teachers emphasize that understanding local traditions does not necessarily require religious practice but rather serves as knowledge that students may reflect upon according to their respective beliefs.

These findings are consistent with Syarifudin's (2020) view on the importance of multicultural education in fostering mutual respect among local cultures as part of strengthening national identity. The dialogical approach adopted by teachers aligns with Banks' (2006) theory of intercultural education, which emphasizes the importance of dialogue in enabling students to understand and appreciate differences with empathy. Moreover, the introduction of traditional arts as a learning medium supports Putri & Handayani (2021), who suggest that active and enjoyable methods through arts reinforce cultural identity and students' nationalistic attitudes. The teaching strategies employed also reflect a contextual learning approach as described by Parhan (2016), where effective learning connects subject matter to students' real-life experiences, allowing local cultural values to be internalized not only cognitively but also in students' attitudes and actions. Ultimately, the educational model implemented by these teachers aligns with the concept of religious moderation as formulated by Parhan et al. (2022), which emphasizes a balanced position in understanding religion and culture—neither excessively liberal nor literal. This approach supports the formation of tolerant, inclusive students with a strong sense of national identity.

Most teachers at SMPN 1 Rengasdengklok report receiving strong support from the school and colleagues in promoting religious moderation values. This support is reflected in the school's vision, mission, and programs aligned with the four indicators of moderation: national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence, and accommodation of local traditions. One key program is the *Spiritual Friday Program*, where students engage in religious activities according to their respective beliefs. Muslim students participate in Qur'an recitations, sermons, and thematic discussions linking current issues to religious values, while non-Muslim students are facilitated in similar activities in separate spaces. This program reflects an inclusive religious education model (Huda, 2020) and supports Suyatno et al. (2021), who found that providing prayer spaces for each religion enhances interfaith harmony. Additionally, moderation is reinforced through curriculum integration, particularly within the *Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project* (P5), which addresses themes such as nationalism, tolerance, peaceful conflict resolution, and the preservation of local culture. This policy enables teachers to incorporate moderation values into non-religious subjects, while strengthening students' character to appreciate diversity and live harmoniously. The integration of moderation values through P5 is consistent with Rahmawati (2022), who emphasizes the effectiveness of project-based education in fostering tolerance and national awareness.

3.6 Challenges Faced by Non-Religious Teachers

Teachers encounter various real challenges in instilling religious moderation values within the school environment. One of the main challenges is the persistent existence of exclusivist attitudes among students, where they tend to associate only with peers who share the same religious or belief background. Such attitudes can limit social interaction and hinder the development of interfaith understanding. In addition, stereotypes and prejudices against other religious groups frequently arise, which, if not addressed through educational approaches, may develop into intolerant behaviors. Another challenge stems from external influences, particularly social media and the wider environment outside of school, which often disseminate radical or extremist ideologies. Generation Z, which is highly active in the digital sphere, becomes an easy target for such content. Yusuf and Nasution (2022) note that social media has a substantial influence on shaping students' religious thinking, where exclusive and intolerant content often dominates over moderate narratives. The lack of family support in reinforcing tolerance values also presents a challenge for teachers. This is supported by Hidayat and Rahman (2021), who state that the family is the primary institution for character education. If inclusive values are not instilled early within the family setting, schools must work even harder to shape students' tolerant and moderate characters. Teachers also often face a shortage of adequate training or learning resources to systematically integrate religious moderation into their teaching. On the other hand, the diversity of students' backgrounds requires pedagogical approaches that are flexible and

sensitive, ensuring that moderation values are not only taught theoretically but also modeled practically in the daily school environment. Finally, the diversity of students' cultural backgrounds and parenting patterns affects the variation in understanding and acceptance of tolerance values. Teachers must be able to adapt teaching approaches that are not uniform but responsive to students' social and cultural contexts. As emphasized by Parhan et al. (2022), an effective religious moderation learning model must be designed systematically and contextually, taking into account students' cultural backgrounds to ensure greater relevance and applicability in developing moderate character. These challenges underscore the importance of collaboration among schools, families, and communities, as well as the need for educational policies that sustainably support the strengthening of religious moderation.

3.7 The Impact of Non-Religious Teachers' Strategies on Students

Interview findings indicate that after students received instruction integrating religious moderation values, significant and positive changes in their attitudes occurred. Teachers observed that students demonstrated improvements in tolerance and respect toward differences—whether religious, ethnic, or cultural. Students' previous exclusivist tendencies began to diminish, and relationships between Muslim and non-Muslim students became closer and more harmonious, with discriminatory behavior based on religion disappearing. Students began to understand that all religions teach goodness, fostering a positive curiosity toward diversity. These findings are in line with Wahyudi (2021), who asserts that religious moderation education can enhance tolerance and strengthen harmonious relationships among students of different religions. Students' national awareness also improved. They showed greater appreciation for national symbols such as the flag, the national anthem, and the motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*. This sense of nationalism was not merely symbolic but was reflected in a genuine pride in being part of a pluralistic nation. This aligns with the findings of Putri & Suryani (2019), who emphasize that such education fosters nationalism, as evidenced by students' growing respect for cultural diversity and national symbols. Another significant change was the enhancement of students' dialogical thinking skills. In situations of differing opinions, students were more inclined to engage in respectful discussions, appreciate others' viewpoints, and avoid violent actions. As Fauzan (2022) observes, students who receive religious moderation education tend to resolve conflicts peacefully due to the development of critical and dialogical thinking skills.

From a broader perspective, these student attitude changes validate Banks' (2006) multicultural education theory, which highlights the importance of teaching that respects diversity and encourages conflict resolution through dialogue. Effective learning not only conveys the cognitive aspects of moderation but must also integrate contextual approaches that address attitudes and behaviors. In the Indonesian context, these findings are consistent with the religious moderation education model developed by Parhan et al. (2021), which emphasizes the strengthening of inclusivity values through moral, spiritual, and nationalistic education. Education that emphasizes Sufi approaches and the principles of *ukhuwah Islamiyah* (Islamic brotherhood), *ukhuwah wathaniyah* (national brotherhood), and *ukhuwah basyariyah* (human brotherhood) has proven effective in shaping peaceful and humanistic student character. Furthermore, in another study, Parhan (2022) affirms that the integration of religious and general education is a strategic step in developing students who are not only intellectually capable but also morally upright and socially responsible.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that non-religious teachers at SMPN 1 Rengasdengklok play a strategic role in instilling the values of religious moderation among students. Through educational, contextual, and inclusive teaching approaches, they successfully integrate the values of national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence, and appreciation of local culture into various subjects. Teachers employ a variety of strategies, such as reflective learning based on history and culture, inclusive spiritual practices, cross-identity collaborative projects, and the use of traditional arts to reinforce the understanding of diversity values. Furthermore, they are able to bridge religious and national concepts without creating a dichotomy, as emphasized by Parhan et al. (2022) in the integrative education model based on moderation. The impact of these strategies is evident in students' attitudinal changes toward greater tolerance, inclusivity, and patriotism. Students show increased respect for differences, reduced interreligious prejudice, and a stronger tendency to resolve conflicts peacefully and dialogically. The moderation education implemented by the teachers also enhances students' sense of nationalism and active involvement in activities that celebrate diversity. Nevertheless, teachers continue to face several challenges, such as students' lingering intolerant attitudes, negative influences from social media, limited support from families, and students' understanding that often remains theoretical. Therefore, there is a need to strengthen digital literacy, develop experiential learning models, and foster collaboration between schools, families, and communities to support the practice of religious moderation. Overall, these findings underscore the importance of non-religious teachers as moderation agents who shape students' character to become moderate, tolerant individuals ready to live harmoniously in a pluralistic society. Moderation-based education is not only relevant but also urgently needs to be reinforced within the national education system as part of efforts to build social harmony and strengthen national unity.

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