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## Revitalizing Religious Moderation among Adolescent Santri: A Community Service Initiative Integrating Counseling and Psychological Communication for Inclusive Character Building

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Strengthening the value of religious moderation is a strategic agenda in Islamic boarding school education, especially among adolescent students who are vulnerable to the influence of extreme ideologies and the unfiltered flow of digital information.

**Purpose of the Study:** This Qaryah Thayyibah-based community service program aims to revitalize the value of religious moderation among adolescent students at the Nurul Muttaqin Islamic Boarding School in Malang through the integration of psychological counseling and communication.

**Methods:** The implementation method includes four stages: (1) assessing students' needs to identify challenges related to religious moderation; (2) psychologically based individual and group counseling focusing on emotional management, strengthening self-identity, and problem-solving skills; (3) focus group discussions (FGDs) emphasizing reflection on the values of tolerance, balance, justice, and deliberation; and (4) effective communication simulations that foster empathy, openness, and respect for differences.

**Results:** The results of the activity indicate a significant increase in students' understanding of the principles of religious moderation, healthy communication skills, and the ability to manage differences constructively. Counseling has proven effective in helping students reflect on their spiritual and social experiences, fostering a new awareness of the importance of living a moderate, peaceful, and inclusive life. These findings demonstrate the contribution of community service in building the character of adolescent students based on Islamic values of rahmatan lil 'alamin (blessing for the universe) while strengthening a harmonious pesantren culture.

### Keywords

Qaryah Thayyibah, Religious Moderation, Teenage Students, Counseling, Psychological Communication

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## Introduction

Religious moderation is a crucial agenda for character development in Indonesia's diverse nation. The Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs (2019) emphasizes that religious moderation is a perspective, attitude, and practice of religion that prioritizes balance, justice, tolerance, and respect for differences. This value is crucial to instill, especially in Islamic educational institutions such as Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), which serve as centers for the character formation of students (*santri*). Adolescent students (*santri*) are in a dynamic phase of psychological development, including the search for self-identity, strengthening moral values, and adapting to their social environment. During this phase, they are vulnerable to external influences, including extreme religious ideologies and the often-unfiltered flow of digital information. Several studies have shown that adolescents require guidance that is not only cognitive-intellectual, but also affective and psychological to enable them to internalize religious values in a healthy manner (Rofiqah et al., 2021; Neff & Germer, 2018). Therefore, revitalizing the value of religious moderation requires a more comprehensive and contextual approach.

As an Islamic educational institution, Nurul Muttaqin Islamic Boarding School in Malang is committed to equipping its students with the Islamic values of *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (blessing for the universe). However, preliminary observations and interviews conducted with the boarding school administrators and caregivers revealed several challenges. Based on an initial needs assessment involving 30 adolescent students, it was found that 70% of them had a limited understanding of the concept of religious moderation, often equating it only with inter-religious tolerance, while neglecting other core values such as balance (*tawazun*), justice (*'itidal*), and deliberation (*syura*). Furthermore, interviews with the *pesantren* caregivers indicated that students frequently faced difficulties in managing interpersonal conflicts, expressing opinions respectfully, and controlling emotions when confronted with differing views. These findings underscore the urgency of a structured intervention that not only introduces cognitive aspects of moderation but also strengthens students' psychological and social capacities.

Several community service initiatives and studies have sought to strengthen religious moderation in Islamic educational settings. For instance, Wardi et al. (2023) highlighted the role of teacher working groups in fostering tolerance in madrasahs through collaborative networks. Similarly, Muhsin et al. (2024) explored the implementation of moderation policies in Islamic universities through curriculum integration and institutional programs such as the Religious Moderation House. Nurhayati et al. (2025) also examined the integration of digital citizenship and religious moderation in distance education to reduce radicalization risks. However, these programs predominantly focus on formal educational institutions and cognitive-curricular approaches, with limited attention to the psychological and affective dimensions of students, particularly in *pesantren* environments. Moreover, few studies have explored the integration of psychological counseling and communication as a strategic approach to internalize religious moderation values among adolescent *santri*. This gap highlights the need for a more holistic model that addresses both the internal (personal-emotional) and external (social-communicative) aspects of students' lives. The novelty of this service lies in the integration of the value of religious moderation with a psychological counseling and communication approach based on *Qaryah Thayyibah*—a participatory, community-based model that emphasizes collaboration, local wisdom, and reflective learning. This model combines spiritual strengthening, psychological skills development, and participatory strategies within the Islamic boarding school environment. Thus, this program not only provides knowledge but also fosters reflective awareness and moderate character in adolescent students. Based on this background, this article aims to describe the process and results of a *Qaryah Thayyibah*-based community service program that revitalizes religious moderation values among adolescent students at the Nurul Muttaqin Islamic Boarding School in Malang through psychological counseling and communication. This program is expected to serve as a reference model for other Islamic boarding schools in internalizing religious moderation

contextually and practically.

## Method

This community service program adopted a participatory and collaborative approach known as Qaryah Thayyibah, which emphasizes active involvement from all stakeholders, including students, religious teachers, and Islamic boarding school administrators, throughout every stage of the activity. This approach was designed to ensure that the values of religious moderation were not only cognitively understood but also deeply internalized through psychologically grounded counseling and communication strategies. The program was conducted at the Nurul Muttaqin Islamic Boarding School in Malang and involved The community service program was implemented over a period of three months at the Nurul Muttaqin Islamic Boarding School in Malang, involving 147 adolescent students (72 male and 75 female) aged 13 to 18 years, five religious teachers, and three boarding school administrators. Selected purposively based on their involvement in boarding school activities and recommendations from caregivers. In addition, five religious teachers and three boarding school administrators participated in the focus group discussions and reflective sessions.

The implementation of the program was carried out through several integrated stages. In the preparation stage, the team conducted initial coordination with the boarding school leadership to explain the objectives, benefits, and flow of the program. A needs assessment was then carried out using observation, in-depth interviews with administrators and caregivers, and a simple questionnaire distributed to the 147 students. The questionnaire aimed to measure students' initial understanding of religious moderation, their communication patterns, and the psychological challenges they frequently encountered, such as anxiety, peer conflict, or identity-related concerns. The results of this assessment informed the development of a module that integrated religious moderation values with counseling and psychological communication techniques tailored to the pesantren context.

The implementation stage consisted of three main activities. First, counseling sessions were conducted in both individual and group formats. Individual counseling focused on helping students address personal issues such as academic anxiety, social pressure within the boarding school environment, and internal conflicts related to religious identity. Group counseling, on the other hand, encouraged students to share experiences, develop emotional resilience, and learn to appreciate differing perspectives through guided discussions. Second, psychological communication training was provided to enhance students' empathetic communication skills, active listening, and ability to express themselves assertively yet respectfully. Conflict resolution simulations were also conducted through role-playing exercises, enabling students to practice deliberation and consensus-building in situations involving differing opinions. Third, focus group discussions involving students, teachers, and administrators were held to reflect on the practice of religious moderation in daily life at the boarding school. These discussions explored how values such as tolerance, balance, justice, and deliberation could be manifested in interactions within the dormitory, mosque, and classroom settings. The focus group discussions also served as a platform for identifying joint strategies to strengthen a moderate and inclusive pesantren culture.

Throughout the implementation, formative evaluation was conducted through participatory observation and real-time feedback from participants to ensure the activities remained responsive to their needs. At the conclusion of the program, a summative evaluation was carried out using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative data were collected through pre-test and post-test questionnaires designed to measure changes in students' understanding of religious moderation concepts, as well as their self-reported communication and conflict resolution skills. The questionnaire consisted of 20 items using a Likert scale and had been

pilot-tested prior to the program to ensure its validity and reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.82. Qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with selected students and caregivers, as well as reflective group discussions that allowed participants to express their experiences and perceived changes in attitudes and behaviors. All interviews and discussions were audio-recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim.

The data analysis process involved both descriptive statistical analysis for the quantitative data and thematic analysis for the qualitative data. Descriptive statistics, including mean scores and percentages, were used to compare pre-test and post-test results. The qualitative data were analyzed using an inductive thematic approach, where transcripts were coded and categorized to identify recurring themes related to emotional awareness, tolerance, empathy, and conflict resolution. To ensure the trustworthiness of the qualitative findings, source triangulation was employed by comparing perspectives from students, teachers, and administrators. Member checking was also conducted by returning summary findings to several participants to verify the accuracy of interpretations.

In the follow-up stage, the program team developed a practical guide for internalizing religious moderation values through counseling and psychological communication, which was handed over to the boarding school for independent use. Continued support was provided through integration with routine pesantren activities such as halaqah (religious study circles), mentoring sessions, and student discussions. Recommendations were also formulated for developing a religious moderation-based curriculum that incorporates psychological aspects more systematically. Through this comprehensive and participatory design, the program aimed to foster adolescent students who are not only moderate in their religious attitudes but also resilient, empathetic, and capable of contributing to a harmonious and inclusive pesantren environment.

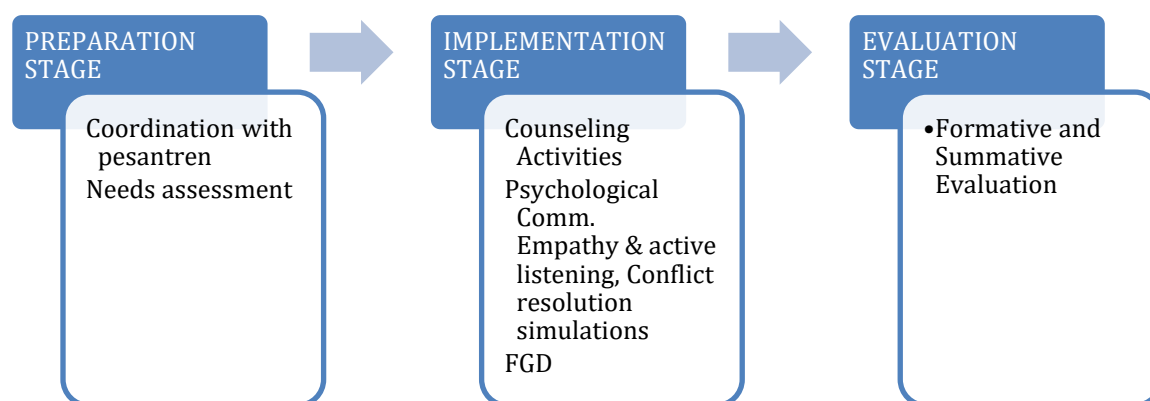


Figure 1. Qaryah Thayyibah-Based Community Service Program

## Result

### *Preparation Stage: Needs Assessment Findings*

The needs assessment conducted prior to the program involved all 147 students and aimed to identify their initial understanding of religious moderation, communication patterns, and psychological challenges. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire, observations, and interviews with caregivers. The questionnaire measured three main indicators: understanding of religious moderation concepts, self-reported communication skills, and frequency of interpersonal conflicts. Each indicator consisted of multiple items rated on a 4-point Likert scale.

Table 1. Needs Assessment Results (N=147)

| Indicator                             | Category                     | Number of Students (n) | Percentage (%) |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------|----------------|
| Understanding of Religious Moderation | Limited (score <60%)         | 100                    | 68.0%          |
|                                       | Adequate (score 60-79%)      | 37                     | 25.2%          |
|                                       | Good (score ≥80%)            | 10                     | 6.8%           |
| Self-Reported Communication Skills    | Low (score <60%)             | 91                     | 62.0%          |
|                                       | Moderate (60-79%)            | 42                     | 28.6%          |
|                                       | High (≥80%)                  | 14                     | 9.4%           |
| Experience of Interpersonal Conflicts | Frequent (≥3 times/month)    | 45                     | 30.6%          |
|                                       | Occasional (1-2 times/month) | 68                     | 46.3%          |
|                                       | Rare (never/almost never)    | 34                     | 23.1%          |

As shown in Table 1, the majority of students (68%) had a limited understanding of religious moderation, primarily defining it only as tolerance between different religious groups, while being unfamiliar with concepts such as balance (*tawazun*), justice (*i'tidal*), and deliberation (*syura*). Furthermore, 62% of students reported low communication skills, particularly in managing emotions during disagreements. Interviews with three caregivers confirmed that interpersonal conflicts among students, although generally minor, occurred regularly and were often handled without constructive resolution strategies.

### ***Implementation Stage: Counseling Activities***

The counseling activities were conducted in two formats: individual and group sessions. Individual counseling was provided to 25 students who were identified during the needs assessment as experiencing moderate to severe psychological distress, including academic anxiety, social pressure, or identity conflicts. Each student participated in three to four sessions over a period of four weeks. Group counseling involved all 147 students, divided into 16 groups of 8-10 participants, and was held over four weekly sessions. Each group session lasted 90 minutes and focused on topics such as emotional management, empathy development, and appreciating differences.

Table 2. Participation in Counseling Activities

| Type of Counseling    | Number of Participants (n) | Number of Sessions  | Average Session Duration | Topics Covered                                          |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| Individual Counseling | 25                         | 3-4 per participant | 45-60 minutes            | Academic anxiety, social pressure, identity conflict    |
| Group Counseling      | 147                        | 4 sessions          | 90 minutes               | Emotional management, empathy, appreciating differences |

The individual counseling sessions successfully helped students address personal issues. Based on facilitators' notes, 22 of the 25 students (88%) showed positive progress, including reduced anxiety symptoms, improved ability to articulate personal problems, and identification of constructive solutions.

In group counseling, observations indicated a progressive increase in active participation. In the first session, only about 30% of students actively contributed to discussions. By the fourth session, active participation had increased to approximately 75%. Students who were initially reluctant to express their views gradually became more open. A religious teacher noted: *"I was surprised to see some students who used to be very quiet in class now speaking up and even mediating small disagreements among their friends."*

### **Implementation Stage: Psychological Communication Training and Simulations**

The psychological communication training aimed to enhance students' empathetic communication skills, active listening, and ability to express themselves assertively yet respectfully. All 147 students participated in three training sessions, each lasting 120 minutes. The training included interactive exercises, such as paired listening activities and group discussions on controversial but age-appropriate topics. Conflict resolution simulations were conducted through role-playing exercises based on real-life scenarios provided by the students themselves.

In one simulation involving a disagreement about division of chores in the dormitory, students successfully practiced deliberation to reach a consensus. A facilitator observed: *"Students were able to identify the core issues, express their feelings without blaming others, and propose mutually acceptable solutions. This was a significant improvement from their initial tendency to either remain silent or escalate conflicts emotionally."*

Following the training, a self-assessment questionnaire was administered to measure students' perceived improvement in communication skills.

Table 3. Self-Assessment of Communication Skills After Training (N=147)

| Statement                                                     | Agree/Strongly Agree (n) | Percentage (%) |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------|
| I feel more confident in expressing disagreement respectfully | 123                      | 83.7%          |
| I am better able to listen actively when peers express        | 119                      | 81.0%          |

|                                                         |     |       |
|---------------------------------------------------------|-----|-------|
| differing views                                         |     |       |
| I can control my emotions better during disagreements   | 108 | 73.5% |
| I know how to help friends resolve conflicts peacefully | 102 | 69.4% |

### ***Implementation Stage: Focus Group Discussions***

Four focus group discussions were conducted, each involving 15-20 students, five teachers, and three administrators. The first two FGDs explored students' understanding and experiences of religious moderation in daily life at the boarding school. The subsequent FGDs focused on identifying joint strategies to strengthen a moderate and inclusive *pesantren* culture.

*Table 4.* Focus Group Discussion Implementation

| FGD | Participants                              | Main Focus                                          | Key Outcomes                                                      |
|-----|-------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1   | 15 students, 5 teachers, 3 administrators | Understanding of religious moderation in daily life | Identified gap between conceptual knowledge and practice          |
| 2   | 18 students, 5 teachers, 3 administrators | Experiences with differences and conflict           | Shared stories of successful and unsuccessful conflict resolution |
| 3   | 20 students, 5 teachers, 3 administrators | Strategies for strengthening moderation             | Proposed peer mediator program and integration into halaqah       |
| 4   | 16 students, 5 teachers, 3 administrators | Action plan and commitment                          | Formulated concrete recommendations                               |

The discussions revealed that religious moderation was often perceived as an abstract concept rather than a practical guide for behavior. However, through guided reflection, participants identified concrete examples of moderation, such as respecting peers from different regional backgrounds, avoiding gossip, and resolving disputes through dialogue rather than confrontation.

The FGDs resulted in several key agreements and recommendations. First, participants agreed to establish a "peer mediator" program, where selected students would be trained to assist in resolving minor conflicts among peers. Second, it was agreed that weekly *halaqah* (religious study circles) would include dedicated time for discussing values related to tolerance, balance, and deliberation. Third, teachers committed to modeling moderate attitudes in their interactions with students and to addressing intolerant remarks explicitly and constructively.

### ***Evaluation Stage: Quantitative and Qualitative Findings***

The summative evaluation employed both quantitative and qualitative methods to assess changes in students' understanding, attitudes, and skills. The quantitative evaluation used a pre-test and post-test questionnaire administered to all 147 students. The questionnaire consisted of

20 items measuring three dimensions: knowledge of religious moderation concepts (8 items), self-reported communication skills (6 items), and attitudes toward differences (6 items). Each item used a 4-point Likert scale. The instrument had been pilot-tested prior to the program with a small group of students from another boarding school, yielding a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.82, indicating good internal consistency.

Based on the complete data from 147 students, the following tables present the distribution of pre-test and post-test scores.

*Table 5. Distribution of Pre-test and Post-test Scores (N=147)*

| Score Range | Pre-test (n) | Pre-test (%) | Post-test (n) | Post-test (%) |
|-------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|
| 0-10        | 42           | 28.6%        | 0             | 0%            |
| 11-15       | 58           | 39.4%        | 24            | 16.3%         |
| 16-20       | 47           | 32.0%        | 72            | 49.0%         |
| 21-25       | 0            | 0%           | 51            | 34.7%         |
| Total       | 147          | 100%         | 147           | 100%          |

As shown in Table 8, there was a dramatic shift in score distribution. In the pre-test, 28.6% of students scored in the lowest range (0-10), and none reached the highest range (21-25). In the post-test, no students remained in the lowest range, and 34.7% achieved scores in the highest range.

*Table 6. Descriptive Statistics of Pre-test and Post-test Scores*

| Statistic          | Pre-test | Post-test |
|--------------------|----------|-----------|
| Mean               | 13.7     | 19.2      |
| Median             | 14.0     | 19.0      |
| Mode               | 15       | 20        |
| Standard Deviation | 4.2      | 3.8       |
| Minimum Score      | 5        | 12        |
| Maximum Score      | 20       | 25        |

The mean score increased from 13.7 to 19.2, representing a 40.1% improvement. A paired t-test confirmed that the difference between pre-test and post-test scores was statistically significant ( $t = 14.32$ ,  $df = 146$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). These findings provide strong empirical evidence for the effectiveness of the program in enhancing students' cognitive understanding of religious moderation.

Table 7. Improvement by Score Dimension

| Dimension                         | Max Score | Pre-test Mean | Post-test Mean | Improvement | Percentage Increase |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|---------------|----------------|-------------|---------------------|
| Knowledge of Religious Moderation | 32        | 21.4          | 30.2           | 8.8         | 41.1%               |
| Communication Skills              | 24        | 15.8          | 22.1           | 6.3         | 39.9%               |
| Attitudes Toward Differences      | 24        | 16.0          | 22.3           | 6.3         | 39.4%               |

When analyzed by gender, both male and female students showed comparable improvements.

Table 8. Improvement by Gender

| Gender | n  | Pre-test Mean | Post-test Mean | Improvement | Percentage Increase |
|--------|----|---------------|----------------|-------------|---------------------|
| Male   | 72 | 13.5          | 19.0           | 5.5         | 40.7%               |
| Female | 75 | 13.9          | 19.4           | 5.5         | 39.6%               |

## Discussion

### *Integration of Counseling and Religious Moderation: Strengthening Personal Foundations*

The results showed a significant increase in students' understanding of religious moderation, with mean scores improving from 13.7 to 19.2 (40.1% improvement,  $p < 0.001$ ). This finding aligns with the work of Rohman et al. (2025), who demonstrated that character education management based on behavioral counseling approaches significantly improved student character in Indonesian high schools, with N-Gain analysis showing high effectiveness (0.789). Similarly, Subiyantoro et al. (2026) found that integrating religious dimensions with humanistic education principles in Indonesian madrasas effectively enhanced student personality development by addressing both spiritual and psychological needs. The current study extends these findings by demonstrating that such integration is equally effective in the unique context of Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), where religious education is deeply intertwined with daily life.

The success of counseling in strengthening students' personal foundations can be understood through the lens of the SEARCH model proposed by Whitmarsh and Mullette (2009), which emphasizes an integrated strengths-based approach where adolescents actively identify their personal strengths. In the current program, individual counseling sessions helped students recognize their emotional patterns, while group counseling enabled them to practice new ways of responding to differences. This process of self-discovery and skill development reflects what Yilmaztürk (2023) described as the integration of spiritual resources with cognitive-behavioral techniques, which was shown to significantly decrease adolescents' trait anger and increase their positive religious coping levels.

The qualitative findings revealed increased self-awareness as a major theme, with students reporting greater consciousness of their emotional reactions and improved ability to manage them. This outcome resonates with the work of Carapeto et al. (2025), who highlighted the dual role of peer relationships in adolescents' mental health, noting that supportive peer interactions can strengthen resilience while negative interactions exacerbate vulnerability. By providing a structured space for students to process their experiences, the counseling component of this program helped transform potentially negative peer dynamics into opportunities for growth and learning.

### ***Psychological Communication: Enhancing Social Competencies***

The psychological communication training resulted in significant improvements in students' social skills, with 83.7% reporting increased confidence in expressing disagreement respectfully and 81.0% reporting better active listening abilities. These findings are consistent with Veenstra's (2025) synthesis of peer-led intervention research, which demonstrated that harnessing peer influence through structured interventions can effectively address adolescent behaviors across multiple domains, including bullying, internalizing problems, and healthy lifestyles. The current program's use of role-playing simulations and group discussions reflects the peer-led strategies that Veenstra identified as particularly effective, such as training influential peers to promote positive behaviors and counteract maladaptive norms.

The conflict resolution simulations proved especially valuable in helping students develop practical skills for managing differences. This approach aligns with the findings of Mundt and Zakletskaia (2019), who demonstrated that adolescents who sought psychological counseling nominated 65% more peers as friends and were twice as likely to be named as friends in highly interconnected peer social networks. Their research suggests that psychological counseling contributes to improved social functioning, a finding corroborated by the current study's observation that students began using active listening techniques spontaneously and initiating peer facilitation by the third week of the program.

The thematic analysis revealed "appreciation of differences" as a key outcome, with students reporting greater willingness to listen to and learn from peers with different opinions. This transformation is particularly significant in the context of Islamic boarding schools, where students come from diverse regional and cultural backgrounds. Carapeto et al. (2025) emphasized that understanding adolescents' perceptions of peers as either positive or negative influences is essential for developing peer-led programs aimed at preventing mental health problems and promoting well-being. The current program's success in fostering positive peer perceptions suggests that structured communication training can help shift peer dynamics from potential sources of conflict to sources of support and learning.

### ***Comparison with Existing Religious Moderation Programs***

When compared with previous initiatives to strengthen religious moderation in Islamic educational settings, the current program demonstrates several distinctive features and comparable outcomes. Wardi et al. (2023) examined the implementation of religious moderation values in madrasahs in Sampang Regency, finding that collaboration with educational professional communities (KKM, KKG, MGMP, and MGBK) significantly contributed to fostering tolerance for student diversity. Their study emphasized the role of social networks and inter-organizational collaborations in promoting harmony among students from diverse backgrounds. The current program extends this approach by focusing specifically on adolescent students within the pesantren context and by integrating psychological interventions that address not only cognitive understanding but also emotional and social competencies.

Muhsin et al. (2024) investigated the implementation of religious moderation policies at IAIN Ponorogo, finding significant progress in integrating moderation values into curriculum, research, and community service programs. However, they also identified persistent challenges in achieving consistent understanding and application of moderation principles among academic stakeholders, with psychological and cultural factors presenting additional barriers. The current program's emphasis on psychological counseling and communication directly addresses these barriers by helping students process the emotional and social dimensions of religious moderation. The 40.1% improvement in understanding scores suggests that this integrative approach may be more effective than purely cognitive or policy-based approaches.

Nurhayati et al. (2025) explored the integration of digital citizenship and religious moderation in open and distance education, finding that this approach reduces digital radicalization risk and enhances intercultural understanding. Their study emphasized the importance of teacher training in digital pedagogy and curriculum support for digital literacy and religious moderation. While the current program did not explicitly address digital dimensions, its focus on face-to-face counseling and communication within the pesantren environment complements digital approaches by providing the foundational interpersonal skills necessary for navigating both online and offline interactions.

Ainissyifa and Nasrulloh (2025) analyzed the implementation of religious moderation values in Islamic religious higher education in Garut, West Java, finding that moderation is integrated through an Aswaja-based curriculum approach and rahmatan lil 'alamin values, with lecturers playing the role of facilitators in building tolerant and inclusive student characters. Their study identified obstacles including conservative ideologies, limited religious understanding among students, and challenges from social media. The current program's success in achieving measurable improvements across all participant groups suggests that psychologically grounded interventions can help overcome these obstacles by addressing the underlying emotional and social factors that contribute to resistance to moderation values.

### ***Unique Contributions, Practical Implications and Recommendations***

The novelty of this community service program lies in its integration of religious moderation values with psychological counseling and communication within the Qaryah Thayyibah framework—a participatory, community-based model that emphasizes collaboration, local wisdom, and reflective learning. While previous studies have examined religious moderation in educational settings (Wardi et al., 2023; Muhsin et al., 2024; Ainissyifa & Nasrulloh, 2025) and others have explored counseling interventions for adolescents (Rohman et al., 2025; Muslikah et al., 2026), few have explicitly combined these approaches in the pesantren context.

The current program's unique contribution is its recognition that religious moderation is not merely a cognitive concept to be taught but a way of being that must be internalized through emotional and social learning. This understanding aligns with Pandit's (2022) advocacy for a community approach to adolescent development in the Indian context, which emphasizes that community-led interventions can act as strong protective factors to promote resilience among adolescents. By engaging students, teachers, and administrators as active participants rather than passive recipients, the program fostered a sense of ownership and collective responsibility for maintaining a moderate and inclusive pesantren culture.

The findings of this program have several practical implications for Islamic boarding schools seeking to strengthen religious moderation among their students. First, the significant improvement in understanding scores suggests that integrating psychological approaches into character education can be more effective than relying solely on cognitive instruction. As Rohman et al. (2025) demonstrated, behavioral counseling approaches can systematically enhance student

character development when integrated into the educational framework. Therefore, pesantren leadership should consider establishing structured counseling services that address not only academic and personal issues but also explicitly incorporate religious moderation values.

Second, the success of the psychological communication training indicates that students need explicit instruction and practice in skills such as active listening, empathetic expression, and conflict resolution. These skills are not automatically acquired through daily interaction but require structured learning opportunities. Schools should integrate such training into their regular activities, perhaps through weekly halaqah sessions dedicated to practicing communication skills alongside discussing religious values.

Third, the positive outcomes of the focus group discussions suggest that creating spaces for reflective dialogue among students, teachers, and administrators can strengthen collective commitment to moderation values. Regular forums where community members can openly discuss challenges and successes related to religious moderation could help sustain the momentum generated by this program.

For policymakers and educational authorities, the program's success at a single pesantren suggests the potential for broader implementation. However, as Veenstra (2025) cautioned, the effectiveness of peer-led interventions varies and is often limited by inconsistent leadership, implementation challenges, and the age-dependent nature of peer influence. Therefore, any scaling-up effort should include careful attention to facilitator training, ongoing supervision, and contextual adaptation.

For researchers, this program opens several avenues for further investigation. Longitudinal studies could examine whether the gains observed in this program are sustained over time and whether they translate into real-world behaviors such as reduced interpersonal conflict or increased prosocial behavior. Comparative studies could examine whether the integrative approach used here is more effective than purely cognitive approaches across different types of Islamic educational institutions. Additionally, research could explore how digital technologies might be harnessed to extend the reach of such programs, building on the work of Nurhayati et al. (2025) on digital citizenship and religious moderation.

## Conclusion

This Qaryah Thayyibah-based community service program, which integrated psychological counseling and communication to revitalize religious moderation values among adolescent students at the Nurul Muttaqin Islamic Boarding School in Malang, has demonstrated significant success in achieving its objectives. The program involved 147 adolescent students, five religious teachers, and three administrators in a participatory and collaborative process that addressed both cognitive understanding and psychosocial competencies related to religious moderation.

The findings lead to several key conclusions. First, the integration of psychological counseling into religious moderation education proved effective in strengthening students' personal foundations. Through individual and group counseling sessions, students developed improved emotional management skills, enhanced self-awareness, and greater resilience in facing interpersonal challenges. The qualitative data revealed that students who previously struggled with anxiety, social pressure, and identity conflicts were better able to reflect on their experiences and find constructive solutions aligned with moderate Islamic values.

Second, the psychological communication training significantly enhanced students' social competencies. The majority of participants reported increased confidence in expressing disagreement respectfully (83.7%), improved active listening abilities (81.0%), and better emotional control during disagreements (73.5%). The conflict resolution simulations enabled students to

practice deliberation and consensus-building, skills that are essential for living out the values of tolerance, balance, and justice in daily interactions within the pesantren environment.

Third, the program achieved substantial quantitative improvements in students' understanding of religious moderation. The mean score increased from 13.7 in the pre-test to 19.2 in the post-test, representing a 40.1% improvement that was statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ). The distribution of scores shifted dramatically, with no students remaining in the lowest score range (0-10) after the program and 34.7% achieving scores in the highest range (21-25). These gains were consistent across all dimensions measured—knowledge of religious moderation concepts, communication skills, and attitudes toward differences—and across both male and female students.

Fourth, the participatory Qaryah Thayyibah approach proved to be an effective framework for community-based intervention. By involving students, teachers, and administrators as active participants rather than passive recipients, the program fostered collective ownership of religious moderation values and generated concrete strategies for sustaining and strengthening a moderate pesantren culture. The focus group discussions resulted in agreements to establish a peer mediator program, integrate moderation discussions into weekly halaqah, and commit teachers to modeling moderate attitudes in their daily interactions.

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## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest in the writing and publication of this article. This community service activity was carried out with the approval and coordination of the Institute for Research and Community Service (LPPM) of the State Islamic University (UIN) Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang as part of the Qaryah Thayyibah program.

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