



Positive Moderation in Islamic Education: A Sociological Analysis of Its Implementation in Muhammadiyah Schools

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Abstract

The increasing prevalence of bullying in Indonesian educational institutions reflects deeper structural and cultural challenges within the education system. This study aims to analyze the implementation of positive moderation in Islamic education within Muhammadiyah schools as a preventive strategy against bullying. This research employed a qualitative field research design using a sociological approach to education. Data were collected through observation, interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and documentation, involving stakeholders in Muhammadiyah schools in Sragen Regency. Data analysis was conducted using the interactive model proposed by Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman, and was further strengthened by Pierre Bourdieu's theory capital. The findings indicate that positive moderation is systematically implemented through curriculum integration, dialogical and participatory active learning, and the development of an inclusive school culture. Theoretically, this study contributes to the

expansion of religious moderation into a broader framework of educational moderation. Practically, it offers a model for developing a humanistic and adaptive Islamic education system in response to contemporary social and interactive challenges.

Keywords: Bullying, Islamic Education, Muhammadiyah Schools, Positive Moderation

A. Introduction

The phenomenon of bullying in Indonesian educational settings is showing an increasingly worrying trend, both in terms of frequency and impact. Within a relatively short period of time in 2024, at least two cases of extreme bullying emerged in the public sphere, sparking widespread concern from various groups, from the public, parents, and education policymakers. These cases not only underscore the urgency of addressing bullying but also indicate unresolved structural and cultural issues within the national education system (Narsa, 2011; Smith, 2016).

The first case occurred in higher education, specifically in the Anesthesia Specialist Education Program (PPDS) at the Faculty of Medicine, Diponegoro University. According to media reports, the bullying practices, which occurred within senior-junior relationships, allegedly contributed to the severe psychological distress experienced by one student, resulting in his death (Solopos, 2024). Furthermore, additional findings regarding the existence of levies outside of official education fees indicate that the practice of seniority not only transforms into symbolic and psychological violence but also extends to economic exploitation. (Al-Saraireh, 2024; Ubaidillah, 2024)

From a psychological perspective, bullying has been shown to have a significant impact on victims' mental health, including depression, anxiety, and even suicide risk (Arseneault, 2018). This confirms that violence in education is not always physical, but often operates latently through profound psychosocial stress.

The second case occurred in a religious-based educational setting, namely an Islamic boarding school in Sukoharjo Regency, Central Java. A student reportedly died as a result of violence perpetrated by a senior, triggered by a trivial matter: refusing to give him a cigarette. This incident is ironic, considering that Islamic boarding schools are normatively positioned as institutions for the formation of morals, ethics, and religious character. These incidents demonstrate that seniority-based bullying practices occur not only in general educational institutions but also

in religious educational institutions, which should be bastions of ethical and spiritual values (Ali & Surakarta, 2025; Piri & Avarsin, 2022)

Historically and culturally, Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) are the result of an acculturation between local Nusantara traditions and Islamic teachings brought by Islamic scholars, as explained by Martin van Bruinessen. Pesantren function not only as institutions for the transmission of religious knowledge but also as spaces for the internalization of values of wisdom, moderation, and social harmony. In this context, the existence of bullying and violence within pesantren demonstrates a deviation between ideal values and empirical practice. In other words, there is a disorientation in the educational process, which should emphasize the principles of rahmah (compassion), tasamuh (tolerance), and ta'awun (cooperation). (Ali et al., 2025; Huda et al., 2021)

These two cases demonstrate that the primary problem lies not solely with the individual perpetrators, but rather with an educational culture that still tolerates seniority-based power relations. This culture is often reproduced systemically and considered an inevitable part of "tradition." In fact, various studies show that a non-inclusive school climate and rigid hierarchical relationships are key factors reinforcing bullying practices (Hamidi et al., 2010). Therefore, a new approach is needed that is not only repressive but also transformative in building a healthy educational culture.

Within this framework, the concept of educational moderation becomes relevant for development as an alternative paradigm. Moderation has been primarily understood in the context of religious moderation, whereas moderating values such as balance, justice, tolerance, and non-violence should also be internalized in broader educational practices (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2019). Educational moderation can be understood as a systematic effort to build an inclusive, humanistic, and violence-free learning environment through the integration of moderation values into the curriculum, pedagogy, and institutional culture.

Based on this background, this study offers novelty by examining the implementation of educational moderation in the context of Muhammadiyah schools and Islamic boarding schools, specifically through the Al-Islam and Muhammadiyah curriculum at Muhammadiyah's Leading Schools in Sragen Regency. This focus is crucial because Muhammadiyah, as a modern Islamic educational organization, has a long tradition of integrating Islamic values with

educational advancement (Nakamura, 2020). Thus, this research is expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of the educational moderation concept, as well as practical contributions to formulating bullying prevention strategies based on the values of moderation in educational settings and how the implementation in Muhammadiyah Schools.

Research on bullying in education has advanced rapidly, particularly from the perspectives of educational psychology and sociology. Studies by Smith (2016) and Arseneault (2018) emphasized the long-term impact of bullying on mental health. Meanwhile, Espelage & Swearer (2010) developed an ecological approach to understanding the causal factors of bullying.

On the other hand, studies on Islamic education, particularly Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), have focused more on the role of institutions in character formation and value transmission (Rahmah et al., 2025; Zamakhasyari Dhofier, 2011). However, these studies tend to be normative and have not yet explored the contradiction between ideal values and the violent practices that occur within them. The concept of religious moderation developed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs (2019) has also been the focus of recent research, but its implementation remains limited to the realm of religious discourse and has not been systematically integrated into formal educational practices. (Amin & Malik, 2024; Fatkhurrokhim & Widodo, 2024)

Specifically, the aim of this research is to describe the meaning of positive moderation in Islamic education perspective, to find out the experience of its application in Muhammadiyah Schools and what ideas and strategies are used in its application.

This research is field research, a type of research in which data sources are obtained directly from the empirical context in the field, allowing researchers to understand phenomena in depth and contextually (Nabila et al., 2025). Based on the characteristics of the data, this research falls into the qualitative descriptive category, which aims to comprehensively describe, interpret, and analyze social phenomena through non-numerical data in the form of narratives, perceptions, and experiences of research subjects (Barnes & Beaulieu, 2014; Espihani et al., 2025). The approach used is the sociology of education, an analytical framework that emphasizes the relationship between educational practices and the surrounding social dynamics, including relations of power, values, and culture within the educational environment (Singh et al., 2026).

Data collection techniques in this study were conducted through several methods to ensure data depth and validity, namely direct observation, questionnaire distribution, focus group discussions (FGDs), in-depth interviews, and documentation studies. Observations were conducted to capture the empirical reality related to educational practices and social interactions in schools and Islamic boarding schools. Interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) were used to explore the informants' perspectives, experiences, and interpretations of the concept of educational moderation. Meanwhile, documentation was used to supplement the data through analysis of official documents, such as curricula and institutional policies. Primary data sources were obtained from stakeholders, including the principal of a Muhammadiyah school in Sragen Regency, who served as a key informant in this study (Ali et al., 2025).

The primary data in this study were obtained from several informant samples, such as stakeholders, in this case the Sragen Elementary and Secondary Education Council or Majelis Dikdasmen (Wawan and Suharno), teachers, and school principals in Sragen Regency. Among the schools that served as informant sources were Trensains High School; Birrul Walidain High School; and Darul Ihsan High School Sragen.

In the research, to obtain data validity, the researcher used several data collection techniques, namely observation, in-depth interviews with several informants in different schools, documentation with references to journals or relevant research, and conducting FGD (Focus Group Discussion) with several stakeholders.

The data analysis in this study employed content analysis, a qualitative analysis method that aims to systematically identify patterns, themes, and meanings from collected data (Zed, 2008). The analysis process involved three main stages, as outlined by Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions or verification (Maragustam, 2021; Nazar et al., 2025). Data reduction was achieved by selecting and focusing data according to the research theme, while data presentation was conducted in the form of a structured descriptive narrative. The final stage, verification, was conducted to draw valid and accountable conclusions.

Furthermore, this research utilizes Pierre Bourdieu's social analysis approach, specifically capital theory, which encompasses social, cultural, and symbolic capital as a framework for understanding how moderation values are

internalized in educational practices (Adeni et al., 2021; Santoso et al., 2020). In this context, the data obtained are positioned as "analytical capital" processed within the research's conceptual framework to generate a deeper understanding of the dynamics of educational moderation within Muhammadiyah institutions.

B. Result and Discussion

Using Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical framework, the study reveals that several Muhammadiyah schools in Sragen strategically reproduce educational excellence on positive moderation through the accumulation of cultural capital, social networks, and institutional habitus that strengthen their competitive position in society. Through an interactive analysis approach, the findings also demonstrate a dynamic relationship between school culture, leadership practices, and community participation in shaping sustainable academic quality and students' character development. According to the psychological theory of school violence proposed by Dan Olweus, bullying has a significant negative impact on students' psychological well-being, including increased anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, social withdrawal, and emotional insecurity. Furthermore, social-ecological theory emphasizes that repeated exposure to bullying can disrupt students' cognitive, emotional, and social development, ultimately affecting their academic performance, interpersonal relationships, and overall mental health. The following is a further explanation.

1. Positive Moderation

Until now, the concept of moderation has tended to be understood narrowly within a religious context, whereas conceptually, moderation is more appropriately positioned as a social practice rooted in humanitarian values and social relations. Moderation is not simply a neutral, impartial "middle" position, but rather an ethical stance that remains grounded in norms, religious values, and principles of social justice. Misunderstanding moderation as a passive or relativistic attitude has the potential to obscure the essence of moderation itself (Kamali, 2015; Wibowo, 2022).

In this context, this study proposes the concept of positive moderation, a form of moderation that is selective, adaptive, and normative, while maintaining the values of the Quran, Hadith, and prophetic practices as its ethical foundation. Positive moderation is not only oriented towards social harmony but also towards the transformation of values of justice, inclusiveness, and nonviolence. This concept aligns with the Islamic notion of *wasatiyyah*, which emphasizes balance and social

justice as key principles of religious and social life (Amin Abdullah, 2000). This concept is implemented at Muhammadiyah Trensains dan Pesantren Darul Ihsan Senior High School in Sragen.

In the context of islamic education, positive moderation serves as the foundation for building a tolerant, collaborative, and humanistic education system. This research indicates that positive moderation in education reflected in several key characteristics: (1) innovative and open to reform, (2) upholding ethics (*adab*), (3) inclusive and tolerant, (4) progressive and responsive to social change, and (5) upholding responsible freedom. These characteristics reinforce previous findings that education based on the value of moderation can create a safe learning environment (Ihsan et al., 2024).

Bullying activity is a crucial issue in education that has a serious impact on the psychological and social development of students. Conceptually, bullying is defined as repeated aggressive behavior by an individual or group against a weaker party, whether physical, verbal, or social (Freeman et al., 2014; Smith, 2016). This phenomenon occurs not only in the real world but also in the digital space (*cyberbullying*), thus expanding its impact on victims. Bullying is a serious threat to children's education.

In the context of education in Indonesia, bullying has been categorized as one of the "three major sins of education," along with sexual violence and intolerance. This demonstrates that bullying is not merely an individual behavior, but rather a structural problem that requires a systemic approach to address. Studies show that bullying can lead to serious mental disorders such as depression, anxiety, and even suicidal tendencies (Arseneault, 2018).

According to the principal of one of the leading schools in Sragen (Sunardi), an alternative approach is needed that is not only repressive but also preventative and transformative. In this regard, positive moderation can serve as a value framework for building a non-violent, inclusive, and civilized school culture.

One way to implement positive moderation in education is through an active learning approach. This approach encourages active student involvement in the learning process, thus orienting it not only toward knowledge transfer but also toward fostering open, tolerant, and collaborative attitudes (Bonwell & Eison, 1991; Nabila et al., 2025; Nazar et al., 2025). In active learning, the teacher acts as a facilitator, creating a dialogic and participatory space for students.

This approach enables students to learn contextually, interactively, and experientially. Learning is no longer limited to the classroom but can take place in a variety of learning environments that support exploration and creativity. A comfortable and inclusive learning environment has been shown to contribute to increased student engagement and motivation (Freeman et al., 2014).

Furthermore, collaborative learning also eliminates the dichotomy between "intelligent" and "not intelligent" students. In line with Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, each individual has different intelligence potentials (Freeman et al., 2014). Therefore, learning evaluation must be conducted holistically, encompassing cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects. Thus, the role of the teacher is not only as a transmitter of material, but also as a moderating agent who instills the values of tolerance, empathy, and social responsibility in the learning process.

In the Indonesian Islamic educational tradition, santri hold a strategic position as agents of transmission of religious and cultural values. Historically, Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) are the result of the acculturation of local Nusantara traditions with the Islamic education system, as explained by Nurcholish Madjid and Martin van Bruinessen. Pesantren function not only as educational institutions but also as spaces for character formation and social ethics (Muwafiq & Samsuri, 2017).

Genealogically, pesantren are the result of a hybridization between the mandala system (traditional Hindu-Buddhist education) and the Islamic madrasah system. This process reflects moderation in Islamic education, namely the ability to accommodate local traditions without losing fundamental religious values. This demonstrates that moderation is not a new concept but has been an inherent part of the history of Islamic education in Indonesia (Huda et al., 2021; Syarif, 2020).

According to Suharno, in the contemporary context, students are expected not only to possess in-depth religious knowledge but also to adapt to social change in a moderate and inclusive manner. The students' moderation is reflected in their tolerant, civilized attitudes and their upholding of humanitarian values. Thus, students represent the transformation of Islamic education, moving from tradition to moderation, from exclusivism to inclusivity.

2. Implementation In Muhammadiyah Schools

The concept of moderation is etymologically derived from the English word "moderation," which refers to a moderate attitude, not excessive, and not taking extreme sides. In the Indonesian context, the term is rooted in the word "moderat," as defined in the Great Dictionary of the Indonesian Language, which connotes reasonable, non-deviant behavior and upholds the principle of nonviolence. Conceptually, moderation is not limited to the religious realm but encompasses broader humanitarian dimensions, particularly in building just and balanced social relations (Huda et al., 2021; Rodin & Huda, 2020; Zulkhairi, 2022).

However, in contemporary discourse, moderation is more often associated with the term "religious moderation," which is normatively rooted in the Quranic concept of *ummatan wasathan* (the state of being a just and just person), as enshrined in Q.S. Al-Baqarah [2]: 143. This term, according to linguistic analysis, is a *na'at-man'ut* construction describing a community (*ummah*) characterized by justice, balance, and a middle ground in addressing various issues (Kamali, 2015; Saeed, 2018). Thus, *ummatan wasathan* not only reflects a theological identity but also contains an ethical-sociological dimension that emphasizes the principles of distributive justice, inclusivity, and anti-domination in social life.

From this perspective, moderation is more accurately understood as "humanitarian moderation" or even "communal moderation," a paradigm that places the values of balance, justice, and anti-violence as the primary foundations of cross-identity social relations. This idea is relevant to the findings of various studies showing that a moderate approach can be an effective strategy in reducing extremism, violence, and intolerance (Nabila et al., 2025; Singh et al., 2026; Yusutria et al., 2021).

In the context of education, these values of moderation find their articulation in the Muhammadiyah educational system, which is known for its inclusiveness and progressiveness. Abdul Mu'ti calls this approach positive pluralism, namely an open attitude toward diversity while remaining grounded in Islamic values. (Wan Sabri et al., 2015) Departing from the integration of the concepts of moderation and positive pluralism, this study offers a conceptual framework of "positive moderation" as an effort to internalize the values of balance, justice, and tolerance in Muhammadiyah educational practices, particularly as a cultural strategy to prevent bullying and build a humanistic and inclusive educational environment.

Based on a statement also by Ketua Majelis Dikdasmen PDM Sragen (Suharno), the implementation of moderation in Islamic education in Muhammadiyah schools demonstrates a systemic and integrative approach, particularly through strengthening the values of balance, tolerance, and inclusivity in all aspects of education. Moderation is not only understood as a theological concept, but also as a social practice internalized in the educational process. This aligns with research findings that religious moderation in Islamic education emphasizes the principles of balance (*tawassuth*), tolerance (*tasamuh*), and justice in students' social interactions. Thus, Muhammadiyah schools especially in Sragen Regency play a strategic role in shaping moderate character through a holistic educational approach.

Wawan (secretary of Majelis Dikdasmen Sragen) states that in terms of the curriculum, the implementation of moderation is evident through the integration of moderate values into Al-Islam and Muhammadiyah subjects. The curriculum is oriented not only toward the transfer of religious knowledge but also toward the formation of contextual and adaptive religious attitudes to social realities. Research in Muhammadiyah schools shows that the values of moderation are internalized through learning tools such as syllabi, lesson plans, and teaching materials that emphasize an inclusive and non-extremist understanding of Islam. This demonstrates that educational moderation has become an integral part of curriculum design, not merely a normative discourse.

Beyond the curriculum, the implementation of moderation is also evident in classroom learning practices. Teachers employ a dialogic, participatory, and experience-based approach that encourages students to think critically and appreciate differences. This approach has proven effective in fostering a tolerant and open attitude among students, as they are actively involved in the learning process. Studies show that moderation-based learning can create inclusive interaction spaces and reduce the potential for social conflict in the school environment. Thus, pedagogy is a crucial instrument in transforming the values of moderation into concrete practice.

Furthermore, the implementation of moderation in Muhammadiyah schools is also strengthened through the establishment of an inclusive and harmonious school culture. The school environment is conditioned as a social space that values diversity, both in terms of thought, background, and religious practice. Extracurricular activities, social interactions, and school policies are directed at strengthening the values of togetherness and solidarity. Research shows that a

school culture based on religious moderation can foster the development of student character that is adaptive to differences and possesses high social sensitivity. This confirms that educational moderation occurs not only in the classroom, but also within the school ecosystem as a whole. (Ali et al., 2025; Piri & Avarsin, 2022)

Ultimately, the implementation of educational moderation in Muhammadiyah schools has significantly contributed to developing a tolerant, inclusive, and non-violent generation. Moderation-based education has proven to be a preventative strategy against the emergence of extremism, intolerance, and bullying in the school environment. By integrating the value of moderation into the curriculum, learning, and school culture, Muhammadiyah has demonstrated a model of Islamic education that is adaptive to the challenges of the times while remaining rooted in Islamic values. Therefore, educational moderation can be positioned as an important paradigm in the development of contemporary Islamic education oriented toward humanity and civilization (Ali, 2022; Zulkhairi, 2022).

3. Learning Moderation through Collaboration

The ideal learning environment is contextual, interactive, and experience-based. This means that the learning process does not always have to involve students sitting quietly and simply listening to teacher explanations. Instead, students need to be given space to collaborate with a variety of learning resources and media, tailored to their interests, talents, and preferences. In this context, the concept of learning through play, or using games as a learning medium, becomes highly relevant and effective in increasing student engagement and understanding (Lect Arcelan Sadiq Al-Shammari, 2021; Nabila et al., 2025).

Furthermore, learning spaces should not be limited to formal classrooms. Learning outside the classroom, such as in natural environments or open spaces, can provide more meaningful and enjoyable learning experiences. A supportive learning environment does not have to be luxurious, but it should be comfortable, both in terms of facilities and the academic atmosphere. Therefore, it is important for teachers to condition the learning environment before the learning process begins to create a conducive atmosphere (Ali & Rushd, 2017; Pradhana & Sutoyo, 2019).

In an active learning approach, the primary goal of learning is student understanding the material. The emphasis is not only on the final result, such as grades, but also on the learning process and methods used. Ideally, education equips students with various important skills such as critical thinking, hard work,

perseverance, communication skills, and collaboration skills (Bonwell & Eison, 1991).

The opening of collaborative spaces in learning eliminates the dichotomy between students considered "intelligent" and "not intelligent." The theory of multiple intelligences asserts that every child has different intellectual potential according to their natural talents (Amin & Malik, 2024; Bastomi et al., 2025; Espihani et al., 2025). Therefore, appropriate learning methods are needed to optimally tap into this potential. If there is still a perception that a student is "not intelligent," this is a critical reflection for educators, as the approach used has not yet reached student's potential.

In the context of evaluation, teachers should not only focus on cognitive aspects but also need to comprehensively assess affective and psychomotor aspects. Holistic assessment allows teachers to see students holistically and develop their full potential.

Based on arguments of Muhammadiyah teachers in Darul Ihsan Sragen (Wibowo Juli Saputro), teachers are also required to be moderate and tolerant of the student potential diversity. The teacher's role is no longer as a sole source of information (informant), but rather as a facilitator who guides, motivates, and creates a fun and enlightening learning environment. Thus, according Amir (Head Master of SMP Birrul Walidain Sragen), learning not only produces students who "know," but also students who truly "understand" and are able to apply that knowledge in real life to support positive moderation in schools.

Finally, effective learning depends not only on classroom lectures but also on thorough, systematic, and high-quality planning. Reflecting on existing learning practices is a constructive step for teachers to continuously improve the quality of learning designs that are more inclusive, contextual, and oriented towards developing students' holistic potential.

C. Conclusion

This research shows that the phenomenon of bullying in education is not solely caused by individual factors, but also closely related to an educational culture that still tolerates hierarchical and less inclusive power relations. In this context, the concept of positive moderation offered in this study provides a transformative alternative approach to building a humanistic, tolerant, and violence-free education system in schools. The implementation of positive moderation in Muhammadiyah

schools has been proven to be systematic through three main dimensions: the integration of moderation values into the Al-Islam and Muhammadiyah curriculum, the application of dialogic and participatory active learning, and the establishment of an inclusive and collaborative school culture. Theoretically, this research expands the concept of religious moderation into a more operational realm, namely educational moderation, by offering a conceptual framework of "positive moderation" as a synthesis of Islamic values and a sociological approach to education. Thus, positive moderation is relevant not only as a normative discourse but also as an effective cultural and pedagogical strategy for creating a civilized, inclusive educational ecosystem oriented toward universal human values. Meanwhile, as recommendation on the next research, in practical terms, needs study that contributes to the implementation of a model for educational moderation that can be replicated in other Islamic educational institutions, particularly in efforts to prevent bullying and strengthen students' character in the contemporary digital era.

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