THE MODERATE CLASSROOM: DEVELOPING JUSTICE AND RELIGIOSITY IN SALATIGA MUHAMMADIYAH SCHOOL

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Abstract

This study examines the practical implementation of *wasathiyah* (Islamic moderation) principles, specifically focusing on the core values of justice (*al-i'tidal*) and religiosity (*al-tadayyun*), within the educational ecosystem of SMP Muhammadiyah *Tahfidz* Salatiga. The objective is to analyze how this established educational institution, aligned with the Muhammadiyah movement, translates abstract moderate Islamic values into practical school policies and daily practices. A qualitative descriptive method was employed, utilizing in-depth interviews with key school stakeholders, the Principal, the Vice Principal for Curriculum, and Muhammadiyah subject teachers, alongside focused observation of student activities and curriculum documents. The findings indicate that the value of religiosity (*al-tadayyun*) is systematically implemented through highly visible and mandatory habituation programs, particularly in standardized worship (*Ibadah*) and *Tahfidz* (Qur'anic memorization). Meanwhile, the value of justice (*al-i'tidal*) is primarily manifested through procedural fairness in disciplinary actions and the provision of equal co-curricular and academic opportunities to all students, ensuring institutional justice within its homogenous setting. This balanced integration successfully positions the school as an exemplar of moderate Islamic education.

Keywords: *Wasathiyah* Islam; *al-i'tidal*; *al-tadayyun*; Muhammadiyah

INTRODUCTION

The global situation demands that educational institutions proactively foster values of moderation, peace, and tolerance to counteract the growing occurrence of extremism and intolerance (Aruman et al., 2024; Pangeran et al., 2025). Islam, as a universal faith, fundamentally promotes peace and mercy (*rahmah li al-'alamin)*. Historical literature confirms that the essence of Islamic moderation, or *wasathiyah Islam*, is not a recent innovation but has existed since the descent of revelation. This principle fundamentally warns against all forms of excess (*ifrath*) or deficiency (*tafrith*), as excessive behavior, known as *ghuluw*, consequently leads to destruction and ruin (Farhan & Subagio, 2024). In the Indonesian context, studies on religious moderation have increasingly been developed as a strategy for preventing radicalism (Murad & Rizki, 2022).

In Indonesia, *wasathiyah Islam* has been adopted as an ideal expression of Islamic values that are intrinsically compatible with national principles, notably Pancasila (Subaidi, 2020). Additionally, Kasdi (2019) states that *Pancasila* is a

common ground (*kalimah sawa'*) to accommodate and protect the ethnic and religious diversity of the very plural Nusantaran people. As one of the largest Islamic organizations in the country, Muhammadiyah anchors its identity and educational mission in the concept of *wasathiyah* (Hidayah et al., 2025). Muhammadiyah explicitly positions itself on the straight and middle path (*al-tawassuth*), striving to realize the ideal Muslim society (*ummah wasath*) which is recognized as a just and chosen society (*Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah*, 2023). This requires that religious adherence is always tempered by rational inquiry, leading to the use of comprehensive *ijtihad* approaches: *bayani* (textual), *burhani* (rational), and *irfani* (spiritual) (Palahuddin, 2020). Such accommodation reflects a broader pattern in which Islamic norms are practiced through negotiation between conflict and consensus across diverse cultural contexts (Mulia et al., 2024).

Previous studies have formulated a definition of Islamic moderation (*wasathiyah*) with an emphasis on the principle of balance. Arif (2021), through library research, defines it as a middle stance that avoids both extremism and liberalism, adhering to the principle of proportional justice in practicing religious teachings. In line with this view, Farhan & Subagio (2024) found through Tafsir Al-Azhar that moderation means maintaining balance (*al-tawazun*) so that no extremism becomes too dominant and neglects the other side. Meanwhile, Falah et al. (2024) focuses on the practical dimension, using Surah *al-Baqarah* verse 143 as a basis for positioning wasatīyah as an anti-radicalism solution that is manifested in a commitment to nationalism, rejection of violence, tolerance, and a fair acceptance of tradition by each individual. Overall, these studies agree that Islamic moderation is a theological principle of balance manifested in a socio-political attitude that is just, inclusive, and rejects violence.

The consistent definition of Islamic moderation in academic studies aligns with the concrete efforts of major religious organizations in Indonesia, particularly Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), which explicitly declare the values of moderation as their ideological foundation. In the context of Muhammadiyah, Hidayah (2025) found through a literature review of official documents and scholarly articles that this organization actively maintains a progressive Islamic ideology rooted in the concepts of *wasathiyah* (moderation) and inclusivity. Muhammadiyah's primary strategies in countering the infiltration of radical and intolerant ideologies includes strengthening higher education, internationalizing institutions, and revitalizing cadre development. This study also underscores the importance of strengthening the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum based on moderate Islamic values as a strategic step in preserving national Islamic identity. In line with this, the core value of moderation in Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) is *al-tawasuṭ wa al-i'tidal* (a middle and just attitude), which serves as the foundation for other values of moderation. Kuswanto et al., (2023) explains that the process of internalizing Islamic moderation in schools under the patronage of NU is carried out through three pedagogical stages: 1) Knowing (through a Teacher-Centered Learning strategy with a Contextual Teaching and Learning approach and discussion); 2) Feeling (through strengthening intra-class activities, editing, and habituation); and 3) Doing (through implementation in intra- and extracurricular activities). Thus, both Muhammadiyah and NU not only adopt moderation conceptually, but also implement it through systematic institutional and pedagogical strategies to prevent radicalism.

This focus on the role of religious organizations in internalizing moderation is reinforced by several studies that specifically examine the implementation of Islamic moderation values in the Indonesian education system. A literature review conducted

by Hanif et al. (2025), Muqowim et al. (2022), and Musyahid & Kolis (2023) collectively found that the implementation of religious moderation in Islamic education includes strengthening moderation in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teaching and the use of various methods in schools. This implementation is comprehensive, carried out through various school activities, such as introducing moderation to new students, integrating moderation values into the curriculum (including the hidden curriculum), and direct learning activities such as lectures and question and answer sessions. These findings indicate that efforts to cultivate moderation are not limited to the abstract level and organizational policies but have translated into pedagogical practices in the formal school environment to shape balanced and tolerant student character.

Furthermore, findings regarding these pedagogical practices are confirmed by extensive field research conducted in Islamic educational institutions, from elementary to secondary levels, up to tertiary institutions. Studies by Kadi (2022), Miftah et al., (2023), Nurbayani & Amiruddin (2024), Shalahuddin et al., (2024), Solahudin et al., (2023), and Subaidi (2020) consistently show that the pattern of implementing moderation values tends to be similar. The primary pattern is utilizing a hidden curriculum inserted through integration into intracurricular, co-curricular, and extracurricular activities. Furthermore, the implementation of Islamic moderation is also strategically linked to the noble values embodied in Pancasila. The consistency of these field study findings strengthens the argument that a comprehensive approach through formal and non-formal curricula, along with strengthening national commitment, is the primary strategy employed by Islamic educational institutions in internalizing religious moderation in Indonesia.

Efforts to internalize Islamic moderation are not limited to the formal education sector but also extend to the public society through non-formal religious institutions. Institutions such as the *Majelis Ta'lim* (Islamic study groups) serve as crucial educational platforms (Pangeran et al., 2025), where messages of moderation can be disseminated to their congregations. In this context, *Majelis Ta'lim* serves to teach an inclusive understanding of religion, encourage interfaith dialogue, and foster tolerance among its followers. This dissemination is part of an integrated approach involving various elements of society, including inclusive education, fair policies, media literacy, and the active participation of all components of society (Syafi'i & Ramadhan, 2024). This confirms that Islamic moderation in Indonesia is a comprehensive cultural and educational movement, spanning from the academic realm and formal institutions to daily religious practices. At the community level, forums such as the Religious Harmony Forum (FKUB) also play a role in maintaining interfaith relations, as shown in West Aceh (Fitri et al., 2026).

The broad reach of this moderation movement is further strengthened by studies showing that the implementation of moderation values is also being implemented in other religious educational institutions. Research by Wardi et al., (2023), for example, found that religious moderation at SMPK Santo Yusup was realized through faith development activities and the Instillation of national values through civic education (PKN) learning. This contribution of religious moderation-based education successfully instilled attitudes of openness, tolerance, anti-violence, justice, and mutual respect. Furthermore, Aruman et al. (2024) highlighted the existence of good social integration in North Toraja, where *madrasahs* and Catholic elementary schools integrate with each other in community service activities and joint holiday celebrations. These findings collectively conclude that the concept of religious moderation, fundamentally rooted in universal values, has become an effective platform for interaction, not only for

strengthening the internal bonds of the Muslim community but also for building tolerance and harmony between religious communities in Indonesia.

This research focuses specifically on two critical values within the *wasathiyah* framework: justice (*al-I'tidal*) and religiosity (*al-tadayyun*). The selection of these values is predicated on the essential need for balance (*al-tawazun*). Justice (*al-i'tidal*), defined as proportional and fair behavior, serves as the ethical framework that regulates the intensity of spiritual depth (religiosity). If a spiritual focus is pursued without the regulating influence of social justice, there is an inherent risk of fostering exclusivity, fanaticism, or excessive ritualism that deviates from the true path of *wasathiyah*. Therefore, investigating how these two values are coupled and maintained in equilibrium within a single educational setting is crucial for validating the implementation of true Islamic moderation. In Indonesian Muslim thought, the link between religiosity and universal values of justice is also evident in Nurcholish Madjid's view of human rights (Syamsuar et al., 2024).

The case study centers on SMP Muhammadiyah Salatiga (located on Jl Cempaka, Sidorejo Lor). This institution, sometimes referred to as SMP Muhammadiyah Tahfidz Salatiga due to its success in cultivating Quranic memorization, clearly aligns with the pillar of religiosity. Its vision, which seeks to produce a "Qur'anic Generation," underscores this spiritual commitment. However, while the development of strong spiritual discipline is evident, a thorough investigation is required to document and analyze the specific implementation methods, curriculum integration, school policies, and habituation that ensure this deep spiritual commitment is consistently and actively coupled with the social implementation of justice (*al-i'tidal*) in daily student life and social interaction. Understanding this systemic implementation provides empirical data essential for replication across the broader network of Islamic schools.

METHOD

Research Design

The study employed a qualitative descriptive method to analyze the practical implementation of *wasathiyah* principles, specifically the core values of justice (*al-i'tidal*) and religiosity (*al-tadayyun*), within the educational ecosystem of SMP Muhammadiyah Tahfidz Salatiga. This approach was selected to provide an in-depth, systematic description and interpretation of how the educational institution translates abstract moderate Islamic values into concrete school policies and daily practices. The qualitative design allowed for a holistic understanding of the contextual factors influencing the implementation process.

Participants and Data Sources

The research utilized key school stakeholders as participants for in-depth interviews. These stakeholders included the Principal, the Vice Principal for Curriculum, and Muhammadiyah subject teachers. The purpose of selecting these individuals was to gather comprehensive insights from various hierarchical and operational levels of the school. In addition to the interviews, primary data sources included the observation of student activities and relevant curriculum documents to triangulate and validate the verbal accounts with documented policies and practical evidence.

Data Collection

Data collection was carried out through three primary techniques: in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation analysis. The in-depth interviews were semi-structured to allow for detailed exploration of the implementation strategies for

al-i'tidal and *al-tadayyun*. The observation was conducted to systematically record highly visible and mandatory habituation programs, such as standardized worship (*ibadah mahdhah*), Qur'anic recital learning, and Qur'anic memorization (*tahfidz*). Documentation analysis focused on school regulations, disciplinary records, and curriculum outlines to examine the procedural fairness and the provision of equal opportunities.

Data Analysis

The data analysis followed the principles of qualitative descriptive analysis. Data gathered from interviews, observations, and documents were systematically transcribed, categorized, and synthesized. The analysis focused on identifying habitual themes and patterns that directly illustrated the translation of *al-i'tidal* (procedural fairness, equal co-curricular/academic opportunities) and *al-tadayyun* (mandatory habituation programs) into school practices. This repetitive process ensured that the findings accurately represented how the school maintains institutional justice (*al-I'tidal*) within its homogenous educational setting.

FINDINGS

The Systematic Implementation of Religiosity (*Al-Tadayyun*)

The findings of this study convincingly demonstrate that the core value of religiosity (*al-tadayyun*) is regularly and robustly implemented throughout the school's educational ecosystem. This systematic implementation is realized primarily through a structured, mandatory habituation program that demonstrates the school's institutional commitment to shaping students' spiritual and moral character.

1. Scheduled Worship as an Institutional Standard

The value of *al-tadayyun* is clearly manifested in the practice of mandatory and highly standardized collective worship. This includes the implementation of scheduled congregational prayers, such as the *Duha* and *Zuhr* prayers, which are implemented into the daily schedule. This standardization of worship is not optional, but rather an institutionalized routine. Teachers are tasked with continuous supervision and correction, ensuring that the form and timing of worship adhere to the established *Tarjih* Muhammadiyah normative standards. This standardization aims to ensure uniformity. The principal reinforced this finding by emphasizing school commitment:

> *"Our commitment is to make worship not just a subject, but a daily routine for students. Quran memorization is mandatory, and we will not compromise, because that is our identity as a Muhammadiyah school."*

Echoing this sentiment, the Vice Principal of Curriculum explained the control mechanism:

> *"Every teacher has a prayer supervision schedule. This is not only to monitor attendance, but also to ensure that the prayer procedures are correct and consistent, in accordance with Muhammadiyah's principles. This habituation is the most effective."*

2. Strengthening Competence and Habituation of the Qur'an

The value of *al-tadayyun* is further strengthened through two main programs that focus on mastery and familiarization with the Qur'an. The first program is the Love of the Qur'an Movement (GENTA), which is held every morning before the learning process begins. Through GENTA, students are required to learn Qur'an recitation tailored to their individual ability levels, ensuring equitable improvement in Qur'an literacy. This program collaborates with the mandatory Qur'an memorization (*Tahfidz*), which carries significant academic weight. *Tahfidz* is directly integrated into the academic curriculum, complemented by clear achievement targets and regular

evaluations. The mandatory nature and high visibility of these two activities (GENTA and *Tahfidz*) ensure that religious values are not merely optional instruction, but rather a core and functional component of student development. These findings collectively demonstrate the successful translation of abstract piety into measurable and systematically enforceable patterns of religious behavior within the school environment.

The Manifestation of Justice (Al-I'tidal)

The findings reveal that the core value of justice (al-i'tidal) is primarily manifested through the school's strong commitment to procedural fairness and the guarantee of equitable opportunities, hence ensuring institutional uprightness (al-i'tidal) within the school's setting. This manifestation becoming an integrated system.

1. Procedural Fairness in Disciplinary Actions

Justice is actively operationalized by establishing and consistently applying clear, transparent, and objective disciplinary procedures. Data from documentation analysis and interviews with the Principal confirmed that sanctions are applied uniformly, regardless of a student's academic standing or social background. This impartial application of rules minimizes potential bias and ensures that disciplinary actions are perceived as fair, thereby building student trust in the system's equity.

The Vice Principal of Curriculum (VPC) emphasized the importance of consistency in rule enforcement:

> *"For example, in disciplinary cases, the rules are clearly stated in the regulations. Whether the student is the child of a teacher, a public official, or a regular student, if they violate the rules, the sanctions are the same. This is what makes the children feel comfortable and trust the system."*

2. Guarantees of Equity and Differential Treatment based on Need

The findings indicate a deliberate institutional effort to provide equitable co-curricular and academic opportunities to all students. This commitment is strengthened by a principle of equity, which requires differential treatment based on individual needs to achieve fair outcomes.

A key manifestation of this equity is observed in the implementation of the Quran recital learning programs (GENTA). Students are assessed and then placed into learning groups where they receive instruction tailored to their specific skill level. This practice ensures that students with lower proficiency receive the intensive support they need to catch up, while advanced students are challenged appropriately. This needs-based approach is considered a form of justice—distributing resources (instructional time and specialized teaching) not equally, but equitably.

Furthermore, this commitment to *al-i'tidal* is evident in the open and transparent scheduling of other extracurricular activities and the criteria for participation in academic competitions, which are broadly communicated and based purely on merit or student interest.

> According to the VPC, the dimension of *al-i'tidal* extends to resource allocation: "*We apply justice starting from the distribution of teaching hours for teachers, the allocation of activity budgets, right up to determining who is eligible to participate in the competitions. Everything must be measurable; there should be no lobbying or favoritism. Transparency is the key to al-i'tidal in our school."*

This focus on equity ensures that institutional resources and opportunities are effectively utilized to benefit the entire student body, strengthening *al-i'tidal* in the school's operational framework.

3. Upholding Democratic Principles and National Values

The manifestation of justice is also strongly connected to the inculcation of democratic principles, aligning with *Pancasila*, the foundational state philosophy of Indonesia. This is evidenced by the fair and transparent process for student leadership elections. A concrete example of non-discriminatory implementation is the selection of a female student as the head of the Muhammadiyah Student Association (IPM) in 2025. This comprehensive implementation of justice covers not only religious and academic aspects but also civic education, shaping students to be citizens who uphold procedural fairness and equal opportunity.

Differences From Previous Publications

This study's findings offer a unique contribution that differentiates it from general literature on Islamic schooling, particularly concerning the mechanism of value translation:

Integration Model for *wasathiyah*: Many previous studies often discuss the values of *wasathiyah* conceptually or focus on a single value (e.g., peace or tolerance). This research, however, empirically documents the balanced and simultaneous integration of the two core, often-separated, values of religiosity (*al-tadayyun*) and justice (*al-i'tidal*)—within a single, standardized operational framework. The successful use of mandatory habituation for *al-tadayyun* alongside procedural fairness for *al-i'tidal* demonstrates a unique, functional model for achieving institutional uprightness, a specific and successful equilibrium that previous works often analyze only theoretically.

Focus on Procedural Justice: While many studies on Islamic education focus on the content of religious curriculum, this study highlights that procedural fairness in discipline is the primary practical manifestation of *al-i'tidal*. The focus is not just on teaching justice but on enacting it through institutional governance, a practical operationalization often overlooked in favor of more visible curricular content. This emphasis on institutional uprightness as an implemented policy, rather than just a moral lesson, is a distinct finding of this research.

DISCUSSION

Translating *Wasathiyah* Values into Practice

The findings confirm that SMP Muhammadiyah *Tahfidz* Salatiga successfully translates the abstract principles of *wasathiyah* (Islamic moderation), specifically *al-tadayyun* (religiosity) and *al-i'tidal* (justice), into an actionable educational framework. The distinct mechanisms employed mandatory habituation for religiosity and procedural fairness for justice are interpreted as the school's strategic response to the constant challenge of instilling character values in a structured, measurable way.

The implementation of mandatory habituation programs for *al-tadayyun*, such as standardized *ibadah,* GENTA and *Tahfidz*, aligns with established constructivist theories in value education, which emphasize that knowledge is built through consistent interaction and experience. By making these practices non-negotiable and highly visible, the school moves beyond mere cognitive instruction, integrating the value into the psychomotor and affective domains of the students' daily lives. This mechanism is crucial for ensuring the value is naturalized and becomes a part of the student's character, or *akhlaq al-kareema* .

Moreover, the manifestation of justice (*al-i'tidal*) through procedural fairness in disciplinary actions and the provision of equal opportunity represents an effective governance model for value-based education. This suggests that the value of justice is not merely taught as a moral lesson but practiced as an institutional policy. This finding emphasizes that the integrity of the school's commitment to *wasathiyah* is intrinsically linked to its organizational *al-i'tidal*. A just system, as observed, fosters trust, which is foundational for effective social and emotional development, mirroring the societal need for responsible and just individuals. A similar emphasis on clear structures and authority as the basis for just Islamic institutions is found in comparative studies of Shariah courts (Wahyudi et al., 2026).

Achieving Institutional Justice (*Al-I'tidal*)

The most significant implication of the findings is the demonstration of a functional model for achieving institutional uprightness through the balanced integration of spiritual (*al-tadayyun*) and societal (*al-i'tidal*) values.

Balancing the Poles: Previous research on Islamic education often examines religious piety (spiritual development) or civic/moral virtues (social development) in isolation. This study provides empirical evidence of a school successfully integrating both: thorough spiritual practice (through *Tahfidz*, Qur'anic studies and *Ibadah*) is structurally supported by a system of fair and transparent governance (*al-i'tidal*). This simultaneous implementation ensures that students are developed with both strong faith and social ethics, fulfilling the holistic human development goal of Islam.

The Difference: This simultaneous integration mechanism distinguishes the school's approach from models focused primarily on either explicit religious instruction or merely implicit moral examples. The use of institutional procedure (fairness) to enforce a spiritual attitude (piety) creates a unique equilibrium, preventing the highly religious environment from turning into extremism (lack of *al-i'tidal*) and ensuring that the focus on justice remains grounded in Islamic ethics (*al-tadayyun*). The school thus serves as an important instrument for the transmission of moderate Islamic values.

Theoretical And Practical Implications

Theoretically, this research contributes to the literature on *wasathiyah* education by shifting the focus from definitional consensus to practical implementation models. It argues that the successful teaching of moderation requires the simultaneous application of specific, measurable mechanisms for both the spiritual and ethical dimensions.

Practically, the findings offer a replicable model for other Islamic educational institutions seeking to strengthen their character education programs: for curriculum developers, the study suggests that abstract values must be translated into mandatory, standardized activities with clear operational protocols to ensure consistency and prevent subjective interpretation and for School Administrators, the findings underscore that governance and discipline are the most important system. On the other words, procedural fairness is as critical to character development as investing in religious curriculum content.

Limitations And Future Research

A primary limitation of this study is its qualitative descriptive nature and single-case design within a homogenous, non-public school setting. While it offers deep insights into how the values are implemented, the findings may not be immediately generalizable to public or secular institutions.

Future research should employ a comparative case study (e.g., comparing a Muhammadiyah school with a State Islamic School) to test the resilience of the *al-tadayyun* and *al-i'tidal* integration model across different institutional contexts. Further investigation could also explore student perceptions of the justice (*al-i'tidal*) to fully assess the psychological impact of the procedural mechanisms.

CONCLUSION

This study successfully analyzed the practical implementation of *wasathiyah* (Islamic moderation) principles, specifically the core values of justice (*al-i'tidal*) and religiosity (*al-tadayyun*), within the educational ecosystem of SMP Muhammadiyah *Tahfidz* Salatiga. Utilizing a qualitative descriptive method, the research documented how this institution, aligned with the Muhammadiyah movement, translates these abstract moderate Islamic values into concrete school policies and daily practices. Systematic Implementation of *al-tadayyun*: The value of religiosity is systematically implemented through highly visible and mandatory habituation programs, notably standardized worship (*Ibadah*), Quran recital learning program *(GENTA)* and *Tahfidz* (Qur'an memorization). This approach successfully embeds spiritual values into the students' daily routine, moving beyond simple instruction to ensure character formation in the affective and psychomotor domains.The value of justice is primarily manifested through procedural fairness in disciplinary actions and the provision of equal co-curricular and academic opportunities to all students. This operationalization ensures institutional uprightness by making justice a core principle of school governance, rather than just a moral lesson.

The balanced integration of these two mechanisms namely spiritual commitment secured by standardization, and social ethics secured by procedural fairness is the most significant finding. This equilibrium successfully positions the school as an exemplar of moderate Islamic education, demonstrating a functional model for achieving institutional *al-i'tidal*. The study differentiates itself by providing empirical evidence of this simultaneous and procedural integration.

Recommendation

For Educational Institutions: Schools seeking to adopt or enhance values-based education should replicate this model of dual value integration, recognizing that spiritual piety (*al-tadayyun*) must be reinforced by a structurally fair and equitable governance system (*al-i'tidal*) to ensure true moderation and uprightness.

For Future Research: Further comparative studies are recommended to test the generalizability of this model across different types of Islamic and public school settings, including longitudinal research to assess the long-term impact of procedural fairness on student development and adherence to justice values after graduation.

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