

## IMPLEMENTATION OF RELIGIOUS MODERATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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### Abstract

This study aims to examine the implementation of religious moderation at HKBP Nommensen University Medan as a case study. This research uses a qualitative approach with a type of phenomenology. Data were obtained through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and documentation studies. The informants consisted of lecturers, education staff, and students from various religious backgrounds. The results of the study show that religious moderation in the campus environment has been applied culturally and practically, as seen from the attitude of tolerance, the provision of interfaith worship facilities, and inclusive learning. However, the implementation has not been followed by a formal policy or a structured evaluation system. This condition makes the sustainability of moderation practices dependent on the values of the community and current leadership. In conclusion, the campus has become a participatory religious moderation space, but it is necessary to strengthen institutions in the form of written regulations and systematic evaluation to ensure the sustainability and quality of the implementation of moderation values in the future.

### Keywords

Implementation, Inclusive, Community, Religious Moderation, College.



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## INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a multicultural country with diverse religions, ethnicities, languages, and cultures that are the foundation of the nation's strength. This diversity is not just a social reality, but also a historical fact that shapes national identity. However, this plurality holds the potential for conflict if not managed properly. In a pluralistic society like Indonesia, religious intolerance and extremism are real threats that can damage the order of national life. Therefore, it is essential to develop an approach that can maintain a balance between belief and openness, one of which is through religious moderation (Zhao & Zhang, 2024). Religious moderation offers inclusive religious principles, upholds humanity, and rejects violence. This principle must be instilled early, especially in educational institutions, as a driver of social change. Higher education has a strategic role in shaping a young generation that is tolerant, open-minded, and able to coexist amid differences (Bar-Tal et al., 2021).

Unfortunately, not all higher education institutions in Indonesia can make religious moderation part of institutional policies and educational practices. Most campuses still view moderation as a purely normative issue, not yet at the level of praxis and a measurable evaluation system (balitbangdiklat.kemenag.go.id, 2019). Good practices in building a moderate campus climate can be an essential bulwark against the infiltration of extreme ideologies. Religious moderation on campus is not enough just with slogans or ceremonial activities; it must be manifested in policies, organizational culture, curriculum, and interaction between campus residents (fs.uin-antasari.ac.id, 2023). This is where a more in-depth study of how universities implement religious moderation is needed. Institutional identity and inclusivity dynamics are essential, especially on religious-based campuses such as HKBP Nommensen University Medan. Moderation should not stop at accommodating efforts but should be supported by an institutional system that guarantees sustainability. In this context, implementive studies are critical to understanding the practices, challenges, and directions of strengthening moderation in the future.

Several previous studies have highlighted the importance of religious moderation in social and educational life. The research (Afwadzi & Miski, 2021; Gumuruh, 2023; Hasan & Juhannis, 2024) emphasized that religious moderation is a response to strengthening conservatism that is not friendly to differences. Second, (Adha et al., 2023; Purwanto et al., 2019; Raharjo & Lopo, 2025), it shows that internalizing moderation values can build social harmony and become effective in multicultural education. Third, (Pajarianto et al. 2022; Subaidi, 2020; Wardi et al. 2023) examined

strengthening the value of moderation through character education based on local wisdom. Meanwhile, implementive studies such as those conducted (Khasanah et al., 2023; Mala & Hunaida, 2023; Rahmadi & Hamdan, 2023) highlight the practice of moderation in the context of Islamic education and Muslim communities. Lastly, (Arifianto, 2019; Rohim & Budhiasa, 2019; Wang et al., 2022) also mention the synergy between institutional policies and campus culture in realizing moderation. From these various literatures, it can be seen that the context of Islamic institutions still dominates the primary focus. Very few studies still highlight the practice of moderation in Christian-based higher education institutions that have openness to multiculturalism.

The research gap in this context is a significant gap that needs to be filled. HKBP Nommensen University Medan, as a Christian higher education institution amid a pluralistic society, offers an interesting context to study. This campus is a center for developing science and a social space where different religions and cultures meet. This research is vital because religious moderation on this campus runs culturally but has not been fully documented institutionally. There have been no formal regulations, success indicators, or evaluation systems specifically designed to measure the implementation of moderation. Such a system is fundamental to ensure the sustainability and quality of implementing moderation values. The absence of formal documentation also makes replicating good practices to other institutions difficult. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct research that is not only descriptive but also analytical of existing practices and challenges.

This study examines the implementation of religious moderation at HKBP Nommensen University Medan. The study's focus includes how moderation values are applied in campus life, in terms of institutional policies, cultural approaches, and pedagogical methods. This research also explores the forms of tolerance, inclusivity, and appreciation for diversity that the campus academic community has carried out. With this approach, it is hoped that the research can contribute to developing an applicable and sustainable model of religious moderation in higher education. Furthermore, the results of this research can also be a practical recommendation for other educational institutions that want to build a harmonious campus environment that is open to differences. This research will also highlight the institutional aspect as an essential element underlined in the study of religious moderation. Therefore, by examining the context of Christian campuses open to diversity, this research is expected to enrich the literature and practice of religious moderation in Indonesia.

## METHOD

Using a phenomenological approach, this qualitative research aims to describe the implementation of religious moderation at HKBP Nommensen University Medan. This approach was chosen to deeply understand the experiences and views of the academic community regarding religious practices on campus (Hadi, 2021). The research was conducted directly through field observations, interviews, questionnaires, and documentation. The research data is non-numerical descriptive information sourced from lecturers, education staff, interfaith students, and institutional documents such as strategic plans, activity reports, and photo archives. The observation was conducted from February 2 to March 15, 2024, in the campus environment to observe worship activities, interfaith interactions, and socio-religious dynamics.

Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner with nine informants who were selected purposively, consisting of three lecturers, two education staff, and four students from various religious backgrounds. The questionnaire was distributed to capture the general perception of the academic community towards the values of moderation, with instruments containing open-ended and closed-ended questions about tolerance, freedom of worship, and openness. Documentation includes a collection of official and visual documents that reflect moderation practices on campus. Data analysis is done through data reduction, presentation, conclusion, and verification. The reduction is done by sorting out relevant data and presenting it as a thematic narrative. Furthermore, the data were critically analyzed using religious moderation theory and value-based education approaches, and the results of previous studies were compared to strengthen the findings and validity of the data.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Findings

This study found that although HKBP Nommensen University Medan does not have a written policy or official document that explicitly regulates religious moderation, the practice of religious moderation has taken place in a real and substantive way in the campus environment. The values of religious moderation are present through a culture of tolerance, religious freedom, and respect for diversity in the daily interactions of the academic community. This study reveals the implementation of religious moderation values at HKBP Nommensen University Medan, which has been running substantively, even though formal institutional documents or policies have not

supported it. The findings of the study are presented in Table 1:

**Table 1.** Implementation of Religious Moderation at HKBP Nommensen University Medan

<b>Forms of Moderation Values Cultural on Campus</b>	<b>Strategic Recommendations</b>
Interfaith celebrations and shared worship	It is necessary to form a special unit for religious moderation on campus
Freedom of worship and provision of worship spaces	Need SOPs on the use of interfaith worship spaces
Integration of moderation values in RPS and lectures	It is necessary to develop guidelines for the integration of moderation in learning
No prohibition of religious attributes	Need documentation of campus policies related to religious expression
Presence of interfaith students in all activities	It is necessary to strengthen inclusive regulations in campus governance

The findings of this study show that the implementation of religious moderation at HKBP Nommensen University Medan takes place through various cultural practices rooted in campus life. First, celebrating interfaith religious holidays shows tolerant attitudes that grow from social interaction. Students from multiple religious backgrounds attend and support each other in religious events, such as Christmas, Easter, and breaking the fast together, which reflect an active, rather than passive, form of tolerance. Second, freedom to practice worship and use religious symbols such as the hijab, cross, or other religious attributes is socially guaranteed without pressure or discrimination. This indicates that the campus openly and equally upholds each individual's religious expression. Third, the campus also provides interfaith worship spaces that can be used freely, such as prayer rooms, and other places of worship, which are equipped with worship equipment and are accessible without obstacles by all religious groups. This provision shows equal treatment in meeting the spiritual needs of the academic community. Fourth, moderation values are also integrated into learning and curriculum.

Some lecturers consciously include material on tolerance and religious diversity in the Semester Learning Plan (RPS), as well as using references from various spiritual traditions in the teaching and learning process. Fifth, although all these practices have gone well, formal institutional policies have not accommodated religious moderation on this campus. No strategic planning documents, SOPs, or work programs explicitly regulate and evaluate the implementation of religious moderation values. This shows that implementation is still cultural and has not been administratively institutionalized.

## Discussion

The implementation of religious moderation at HKBP Nommensen University Medan reflects a strong campus culture grounded in tolerance, openness, and respect for religious diversity. The study found that practices such as interfaith worship, the celebration of various religious holidays, and the provision of inclusive worship facilities occur consistently, even in the absence of formal institutional regulations. This demonstrates that moderation is not imposed through top-down policies, but rather emerges from a cultural foundation rooted in social participation and the academic community's shared awareness of the importance of peaceful coexistence. The commitment to religious harmony at the university grows organically through daily interactions and mutual respect, making moderation a lived value rather than a procedural obligation. This strengthens (Adib et al., 2019; Amrullah & Islamy, 2021; Mustaghfiroh, 2020) the view that changes in values in educational institutions often start from daily social practices that slowly form collective consciousness before being translated into formal policies.

In the institutional context, the absence of official documents such as Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), strategic plans, or dedicated units addressing religious moderation poses a significant structural challenge. Without these formal frameworks, even well-established practices risk stagnation or discontinuity, especially during transitions in leadership or shifts in organizational culture. This vulnerability reflects a broader principle in institutional management theory, which holds that the longevity and effectiveness of any policy are closely tied to how deeply it is embedded within the formal systems of the institution. Sustainable implementation requires not only cultural acceptance but also administrative reinforcement through clear guidelines, structured responsibilities, and mechanisms for regular evaluation. Without these, religious moderation may remain a positive cultural practice, but lack the institutional resilience needed to ensure its continuity and further development (Mölder et al., 2021; Ostrom, 2019; Serafini et al., 2022). Therefore, the transformation from a cultural approach to an institutional approach is a necessity that must be pursued if the campus wants to maintain this value systemically and in the long term.

Normatively, religious moderation is not only a response to social necessities but is also deeply grounded in the theological foundations of diverse spiritual traditions. In Islam, the concept of *ummatan wasathan* is mentioned in QS. Al-Baqarah: 143 underscores the values of balance, justice, and moderation as defining characteristics of an ideal community, while QS. Al-Baqarah: 256 affirms the principle of *lā ikrāha fī al-dīn*—that there is no compulsion in religion—emphasizing the sanctity

of individual freedom of belief. In the Christian tradition, the principles of love, peace, and reconciliation form the moral core that promotes tolerance and respect for others. When these values are reflected within a university environment, they demonstrate that religious moderation is not merely a sociocultural approach but a profound expression of shared spiritual convictions. Thus, the practice of moderation on campus represents a convergence of theological wisdoms that honor pluralism as both a divine design and a practical necessity for peaceful coexistence (Islamy, 2023; Siswadi et al., 2024; Zaman et al., 2022). Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers hold a strategic position in shaping students' character to be tolerant and open to diversity. Meanwhile, in the university setting, the mainstreaming of religious moderation is part of a holistic effort to create an inclusive academic ecosystem. In line with this, Islamic spirituality has also been shown to make a significant contribution to enhancing individual happiness, which in turn supports more peaceful and moderate religious practices in the broader society (Amiruddin et al., 2021; Qorib & Wirian, 2022; Setiawan et al., 2023).

However, the implementation of religious moderation at UHN Medan has yet to undergo any formal evaluation process. Currently, there are no established quantitative or qualitative indicators available to measure its effectiveness or impact on campus life. This lack of assessment tools poses a challenge, as evaluation plays a crucial role in the policy cycle—not only in identifying successes, but also in revealing weaknesses, gaps, and opportunities for further improvement. Without a structured evaluation mechanism, the practice of religious moderation remains difficult to assess objectively, which in turn hinders its potential to be refined, institutionalized, or replicated by other higher education institutions seeking to adopt similar inclusive models (Marjani, 2023; Miller, 2021; Nahmias & Perel, 2021). Therefore, preparing a data-based evaluation system is an urgent need for the campus to reflect on policies continuously.

Regarding educational theory, the approach taken by UHN Medan aligns closely with the principles of value-based education, which emphasizes the cultivation of core values as the foundation for shaping institutional culture and character. Within this framework, values such as tolerance, respect for differences, and nonviolence are not peripheral, but central to creating a truly inclusive academic environment. At UHN Medan, these principles are not only promoted but actively practiced through interfaith dialogue, visible respect for religious symbols, and openness to incorporating cross-traditional references in teaching and learning. Such practices demonstrate that the university has successfully internalized the essence of religious moderation, embedding it into

everyday academic and social life. As a result, the campus functions not merely as a center for intellectual development, but also as a spiritual space that nurtures mutual understanding and social harmony among a religiously diverse community (Hakim et al., 2024; Hanipudin, 2019; Sulistyowati, 2024; Zahara et al., 2024).

This finding aligns with (Mufarokah et al., 2025) research, which states that higher education is vital in instilling moderate values through an adaptive and dialogue-based curriculum. (Julaikha et al., 2021) Also emphasized that the success of religious moderation lies in consistent daily practices and is based on the collective value of the academic community. (Acar-Ciftci, 2019) Cultivating values through a cultural approach is more effective than a formal one. However, compared to the study of (Kusnanto et al., 2023), which emphasized the importance of structural support through policies and institutional tools, the conditions at UHN Medan still show a gap in policy formalization.

This is where a critical antithesis emerges—that the practice of religious moderation can indeed grow organically and endure through the cultural roots of a campus community, even in the absence of formal institutional legitimacy. The lived experiences at UHN Medan affirm that cultural values and social participation can effectively sustain inclusive practices. However, the author argues that the lack of formal policy remains a significant limitation, as it offers no structural guarantee for the continuity and resilience of these practices. Relying solely on cultural momentum risks fragility, especially amid leadership changes or shifting institutional priorities. Therefore, positive social practices must be promptly documented, codified, and institutionalized to ensure they are preserved beyond specific individuals or temporal contexts. Furthermore, the development of evaluative tools and clearly defined success indicators is a necessary and practical step to reinforce the credibility and sustainability of religious moderation, both as a scientific framework and as an institutional commitment.

Finally, the implementation of religious moderation at HKBP Nommensen University Medan demonstrates that diverse religious values can coexist within a pluralistic and tolerant academic environment. The spirit of *ummattan wasathan* in Islam and the principle of love in the Christian tradition serve as unifying foundations that open space for genuine interfaith dialogue on campus. Although these practices have yet to be formalized into institutional policy, the existing cultural and social dynamics reflect a tangible success in fostering moderation. Nonetheless, to position UHN as a model of a moderate campus, affirmative actions are required—namely, the



formulation of clear policies, regulatory frameworks, and systematic evaluation mechanisms. Only through these efforts can religious moderation be sustained not merely as a social habit, but also as an institutionalized policy capable of long-term preservation, measurable outcomes, and replication across other educational contexts.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the implementation of religious moderation at HKBP Nommensen University Medan has taken place substantively through a cultural approach that lives in the daily lives of the academic community. Values such as tolerance, freedom of worship, and respect for diversity have been manifested through interfaith celebrations, providing inclusive worship spaces, and integrating moderation values in the learning process. This practice grows out of egalitarian and participatory social interactions, without pressure or discrimination against particular religious identities. However, implementing religious moderation on campus has not been supported by formal policies, standard operating procedures, or a structured institutional evaluation system. This makes the sustainability of moderation practices highly dependent on the values of the community and current leadership. Therefore, institutional strengthening is a strategic step that must be taken, through preparing policy documents, establishing special moderation work units, and formulating evaluative indicators based on quantitative and qualitative data. For this reason, the subsequent research is suggested to examine the institutional-based religious moderation policy development model in higher education. Further research can also expand the context by comparing moderation practices on Islamic, Christian, and general campuses to formulate contextual religious moderation patterns that can be replicated across higher education institutions in Indonesia.

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