

## AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP OF MADRASAH HEADS IN REALIZING A CULTURE OF RELIGIOUS MODERATION

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### Abstract

Islamic education has an important role in forming religious, tolerant, and inclusive students in the midst of the challenges of radicalism and social diversity. This study aims to analyze the leadership strategy of the head of Madrasah Aliyah Hidayatul Mubtadiin Jati Agung in internalizing the values of religious moderation, including the understanding of madrasah heads towards moderation in the local context, implementation strategies in the curriculum, school culture, and religious habits, parties involved as well as supporting and inhibiting factors, as well as the influence of strategies on the formation of a tolerant and inclusive madrasah culture. This study uses a qualitative method with a case study approach. Primary data was obtained from madrasah heads, teachers, education staff, and students, while secondary data was obtained from institutional documents, madrasah programs, disciplines, and activity documentation. The research was carried out at MA Hidayatul Mubtadiin Jati Agung, South Lampung. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, then analyzed using Miles et al.'s interactive model through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion/verification. The results of the study show that madrasah heads understand religious moderation as a religious attitude that is balanced, tolerant, anti-violent, and relevant to local social diversity. The internalization strategy is carried out through the integration of moderation values in learning, strengthening school culture, religious habituation, teacher capacity development, and collaboration with religious leaders, KUA, FKUB, and the community. Supporting factors include the commitment of the madrasah head, teacher involvement, community support, and the religious culture of the madrasah, while the inhibiting factors include differences in student understanding, limited literacy moderation, and the influence of the external environment. This strategy has an impact on the formation of a madrasah culture that is more dialogical, tolerant, inclusive, and responsive to the prevention of radicalism.

### Keywords

Madrasah Culture; Authentic Leadership; Religious Moderation; Islamic Education; Radicalism.



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## INTRODUCTION

Islamic education in Indonesia faces the complex challenge of balancing religious identity with the realities of a multicultural society (liputan6.com, 2024). In this context, religious moderation is an urgent need in educational institutions because it instills the values of tolerance and balance (*Tawassuth*), justice, non-violence, and respect for differences. Islamic educational institutions are not only required to produce students who understand religious teachings textually, but also to be able to practice them contextually in diverse social lives. Without strengthening religious moderation, schools and madrassas risk becoming less responsive to the problems of radicalism, intolerance, exclusivism, and social polarization (Hasan & Juhannis, 2024). Therefore, Islamic education needs to be directed as a space for the formation of a religious character that is inclusive, dialogical, and able to maintain the harmony of national life.

Madrasah Aliyah Hidayatul Mubtadiin Jati Agung, as an Islamic educational institution, has a strategic responsibility to form students who not only understand religious teachings normatively but are also able to apply them in an inclusive and harmonious social life. An important academic question is how madrasah leaders can build a culture of religious moderation in practice within the school environment (Abror & Wahrudin, 2025). In this context, authentic leadership becomes relevant because it emphasizes setting an example, integrity, openness, self-awareness, and moral consistency in leadership. The head of the madrasah not only serves as a manager of educational administration but also as an exemplary figure who influences how teachers and students understand the values of moderation. The example, integrity, and openness of madrasah heads can create an educational climate that is dialogical, tolerant, fair, and respects diversity in daily interactions (Akmansyah et al., 2024).

The culture of religious moderation at Madrasah Aliyah Hidayatul Mubtadiin Jati Agung needs to be strengthened through authentic leadership, as the values of moderation cannot be taught solely theoretically; they must be internalized through policies, habituation, communication, and the example of madrasah leaders. Authentic madrasah heads can create an educational environment that encourages fairness, balance, and openness to differences, and rejects all forms of violence in the name of religion (Ihsan et al., 2024). This leadership is important because the head of the madrasah serves as the director of institutional culture, the driving force of teachers, and a moral figure for students. Through integrity, openness, and consistency of values, madrasah principals can build a religious, tolerant, dialogical, and inclusive school climate. Therefore, research on the

authentic leadership of madrasah heads is important to explain the strategies, practices, and contributions of leadership in realizing a culture of religious moderation in the madrasah environment.

Several studies over the past five years have shown that the leadership of madrasah heads plays an important role in strengthening religious moderation in Islamic educational institutions. Research (Sari et al., 2025) shows that the head of MAN 1 Garut implements religious moderation through the collective planning stage, implementation with transformational leadership that emphasizes example and empowerment, and continuous supervision, although it still faces challenges from students' critical attitudes towards different religious views. Research (Mahardika, 2024) found that religious moderation in the secondary school environment was implemented through integrating moderation values into learning, strengthening learning approaches, and education and training programs, as well as continuous teacher observation, to prevent extreme religious understanding. Research (Alabdulhadi & Alkandari, 2024) shows that Islamic education teachers play a role in instilling the value of moderation by strengthening personal faith and professional practice. However, they still face challenges such as weak religious awareness, the negative influence of technology, and differences in effectiveness based on teaching experience. Research (Age et al., 2025) Explained that transformative and contextual kiai leadership plays an important role in strengthening the culture of anti-violent religious moderation in Islamic boarding schools through the formulation of participatory policies, examples, adab-based book studies, rejection of physical punishment, and social activities of students that build harmony with the community. Research (Habibah, 2024) shows that the leadership management of madrasah heads based on religious moderation in MAN 3 Cilacap has been carried out through the planning, implementation, and evaluation stages, which include setting goals, policy strategies, division of tasks, training, strengthening the curriculum, extracurricular activities, conflict management, and periodic evaluations to strengthen the culture of moderation in madrasahs.

Based on the five studies, it can be seen that previous studies have examined the relationships among madrasah head leadership, authentic leadership styles, teacher training, the synergy of community leaders, and the implementation of religious moderation. The gap in this research lies in the limited studies that specifically describe the strategic practices of madrasah heads in interpreting, formulating, and implementing the values of religious moderation in the local context of a particular madrasah. Previous research has emphasized leadership styles in general,

moderation programs, and implementation management, but has not explained in depth how authentic leadership by madrasah heads builds a culture of religious moderation through example, value communication, internal policies, habituation, and external partnerships. The novelty of this research lies in its focus on the authentic leadership of the head of Madrasah Aliyah Hidayatul Mubtadiin Jati Agung in fostering a culture of religious moderation in the local context of Jati Agung, South Lampung. This study not only examines religious moderation as an institutional program, but also examines how madrasah heads display exemplary integrity, openness, and moral consistency in building a school culture that is religious, tolerant, inclusive, and responsive to the social diversity of the surrounding community.

Theoretically, this research is grounded in the concepts of authentic leadership and religious moderation. (Northouse, 2022) Explains that authentic leadership emphasizes self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced information processing, and an internalized moral perspective. Authentic leaders not only direct the organization through formal authority, but also build trust through integrity, openness, consistency of values, and moral exemplar. In the context of education, Tony et al. (2019) emphasize that educational leadership cannot be separated from leaders' ability to build visions, manage school culture, mobilize human resources, and create a learning environment that supports changes in values and behaviors. Thus, the head of the madrasah, as an educational leader, has a strategic role in translating the value of religious moderation into the madrasah's institutional culture, school policies, learning practices, and the social relations of madrasah residents.

Religious moderation in this study refers to the concept developed by the (Kementerian Agama, 2019), namely, religious views, attitudes, and practices that take a middle position, not extremes, and maintain a balance between the practice of religious teachings and respect for pluralism. A commitment to national identity, tolerance, nonviolence, and acceptance of local traditions characterizes religious moderation. The Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia also emphasized that religious moderation is not an effort to moderate religion, but rather to moderate how religious believers understand and practice their teachings, ensuring they remain fair, balanced, and not excessive. Based on this framework, the authentic leadership of madrasah heads is considered relevant because the values of integrity, example, openness, and moral consistency of leaders can serve as a basis for building a culture of religious moderation in the madrasah environment.

This study aims to analyze in depth the leadership strategy of the head of Madrasah Aliyah Hidayatul Mubtadiin Jati Agung in fostering the internalization of religious moderation values. The main focus includes: (1) how madrasah heads understand the concept of moderation in a local context; (2) what strategies are applied in the curriculum, school culture, and religious habits; (3) who are the parties involved, and what are the supporting and inhibiting factors for the implementation of the strategy; and (4) how the strategy affects the formation of a tolerant and inclusive madrasah culture. This research is expected to make a theoretical and practical contribution to the development of Islamic education management grounded in moderation values, as well as to present a strategic model applicable to other madrasahs.

## **METHOD**

This research uses a qualitative case study design to explore in depth the leadership strategies of madrasah heads in fostering a culture of religious moderation at MA Hidayatul Mubtadiin Jati Agung (Yin, 2009). The research location was chosen because the madrasah actively promotes religious moderation in its institutional activities, learning, and the habituation of madrasah residents, and because it is situated in the multicultural community of Jati Agung, South Lampung.

Data were collected through observation of madrasah activities, in-depth interviews with madrasah heads, teachers, education staff, and student representatives, and documentation of the vision and mission, madrasah programs, discipline, and religious activities. Data are analyzed using interactive models (Huberman, 2019), which include data reduction, data presentation, and the drawing of conclusions and their verification. The validity of the data is maintained through triangulation of sources and techniques by comparing the results of observations, interviews, and documents. The researcher serves as the primary instrument for collecting, processing, and interpreting data reflectively to understand the authentic leadership practices of madrasah heads in building a culture of religious moderation.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Findings**

This study found that the head of MA Hidayatul Mubtadiin Jati Agung implemented a systemic, value-based leadership strategy to internalize religious moderation in the madrasah

environment. This strategy is not only manifested in programs but also in the school's work culture and social interactions among school residents. The three main strategies found are presented in Table 1 below.

**Table 1. Madrasah Head's Leadership Strategy in the Implementation of Religious Moderation**

No	Key Strategies	Form of Implementation	Parties Involved
1.	Integration of Moderation in Curriculum & Culture	Inserting moderation values in subjects, discipline, and daily activities	Teacher, Curriculum Representative, Homeroom Teacher
2.	Strengthening Human Resources of Teachers and Education Personnel	Internal training, discussion of the value of tolerance and anti-extremism	Head of Madrasah, Teacher
3.	External Collaboration	Cooperation with community leaders, religious institutions, and local governments	Head of Madrasah, School Committee

Source: Researcher-processed data, 2026

### **Internalization of the Value of Religious Moderation in the Curriculum and Institutional Culture of Madrasah**

The study's results show that the madrasah's head plays an active role in integrating the values of religious moderation into the madrasah's curriculum and institutional culture. The integration is carried out by strengthening the values of *tawassuth* (middle attitude), *tasamuh* (tolerance), *i'tidal* (justice), and respect for differences in the learning process. These values are not only conveyed normatively but are also intended to be part of the way students think, act, and behave in daily life. The subjects of Islamic Religious Education, Moral Beliefs, and Islamic Cultural History are the main spaces for teachers to instill an open, balanced, and non-extreme religious understanding.

The head of the madrasah also encourages teachers to adjust their teaching methods to be more dialogical and participatory. Teachers not only convey religious material textually but also relate it to students' social realities, such as the importance of respecting differences of opinion, maintaining brotherhood, and rejecting hate speech. This strategy shows that religious moderation is positioned as an educational value inherent to the learning process, not just an additional ceremonial program.

The strengthening of religious moderation is also seen in the institutional culture of madrasahs. Activities such as *tadarus*, morning prayers, religious formation, and Friday sermons are

directed to instill messages of tolerance, ukhuwah, discipline, and social responsibility. Madrasah rules also serve as an instrument for fostering a moderate culture by affirming polite attitudes, prohibiting hate speech, and obligating all madrasah residents to maintain good relations with one another regardless of background. These findings show that madrasah heads build a culture of moderation through a combination of policies, habituation, and institutional examples.

### **Strengthening Teachers' Competence as the Main Agent of Religious Moderation**

The study's findings show that madrasah heads consider teachers and education staff to be important elements in the successful implementation of religious moderation. Teachers are seen as the main actors who interact directly with students, so teachers' understanding and attitudes towards religious moderation greatly determine the quality of value internalization in the classroom. On this basis, the head of the madrasah strengthens teachers' capacity through internal training, discussion forums, early-semester coaching, and madrasah MGMP activities.

The capacity-building is aimed at increasing teachers' understanding of national insights, tolerance, anti-violence, and how to manage differences of opinion in the educational environment. Teachers are encouraged to create an open, safe learning environment and to respect students' diverse views. In learning practice, teachers begin to show changes in interaction patterns by providing a more polite discussion space, accepting students' critical questions, and directing differences of opinion to remain in the academic and religious ethics corridors.

These changes show that the leadership of madrasah heads extends beyond policy formulation to include the sustainable development of human resources. Madrasah heads strive to form teachers who are not only pedagogically competent but also socially and religiously sensitive in their accompaniment of students. Thus, teachers act as moderation agents who translate the values of tolerance, justice, and balance into learning practices and social interactions in madrasahs.

### **Collaborative Leadership in Building an Ecosystem of Religious Moderation**

The study also shows that madrasah heads foster a culture of religious moderation through collaboration with external communities. The head of the madrasah does not position it as an independent institution but rather as part of a broader social ecosystem. Collaboration is carried out with religious leaders, the Office of Religious Affairs, the Religious Harmony Forum, village officials, and other segments of society to strengthen the message of moderation within and beyond the madrasah environment.

This form of collaboration can be seen through da'wah safari activities, national dialogue, religious coaching, and cross-school teacher training. This activity served as a meeting space between madrassas and the community to build a common understanding of the importance of tolerance, non-violence, and respect for diversity. Collaboration with community leaders also strengthens the legitimacy of the religious moderation programs run by madrassas, as the values instilled in schools receive support from students' social environment.

The impact of this collaborative strategy can be seen from the increasing public support for the madrasah program and the growing sense of belonging to the vision of religious moderation. The head of the madrasah succeeds in displaying the role not only as an administrator of education, but also as a moral and social leader who connects the madrasah with the community. These findings confirm that the success of religious moderation in madrassas is not only determined by internal policies but also by the ability of madrassas' heads to build networks, foster communication, and establish synergy with external actors.

## **Discussion**

### **Transformation of Madrasah Curriculum and Culture as a Space for Internalizing Religious Moderation**

This study's discussion shows that the transformation of Islamic education to encourage religious moderation and prevent radicalism in North Lampung is carried out through the integration of moderation values into madrasa curricula and culture. The research data shows that the head of the madrasah directs the teacher to enter the grades *Tawassuth*, *Tasamuh*, *I'tidal*, and appreciation for differences in PAI learning, Moral Faith, and Islamic Cultural History. These findings show that religious moderation is not placed as an additional material, but as a basic value that shapes the way of thinking and behavior of students (Hanipudin et al., 2023; Imamah, 2025; Masturin, 2023; Mouse, 2026). The Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia emphasizes that religious moderation is a fair, balanced, non-extreme, and respectful way of view, attitude, and religious practice. This means that the madrasah curriculum is a strategic instrument for fostering tolerant, anti-radical religious attitudes.

The findings are in line with research (Tobroni, 2024) that shows that the authentic leadership of madrasah heads is effective in building a culture of moderation by integrating values into the vision, mission, and curriculum. Research (Armayanti & Nasution, 2025) also emphasized that religious moderation education needs to be strengthened through habituation, teacher training, and

support for the social environment. Research (Age et al., 2025) shows that a weak understanding of moderation among teachers and students is the main obstacle to the implementation of tolerance values in schools. Compared to the study, the data in this study show a more operational aspect, namely how the head of the madrasah translates the value of moderation into a daily curricular and cultural practice. The value of moderation is present in subject matter, tadarus activities, morning prayers, Friday sermons, discipline, and the prohibition of hate speech in the madrasah environment.

The author's idea in this section is that the transformation of Islamic education cannot be achieved solely by adding moderation materials to the formal curriculum. Religious moderation must be an educational culture that lives in policies, teacher language, social relations, and student habituation. The antithesis to an approach that is only administrative needs to be affirmed, because madrasahs can have a vision of moderation but fail to foster moderate behavior if these values are not consistently practiced. A moderate curriculum must be accompanied by a madrasah culture that is dialogical, safe, and respectful of differences (Faizol et al., 2024; Harpendya et al., 2025)—the head of the madrasah serves as a value director and guardian of the institutional climate. Thus, the prevention of radicalism is not achieved through a repressive approach, but through the cultivation of open, fair, and responsible religious reasoning in the classroom.

### **Strengthening Teachers as Agents of Islamic Education Transformation and Religious Moderation**

The discussion of this study also shows that the transformation of Islamic education in North Lampung is highly determined by the quality of teachers, who serve as the main agents of religious moderation. The research data show that the head of the madrasah strengthens teachers' capacity through internal training, discussion forums, early-semester coaching, and the madrasah's internal MGMP. The activity was directed to strengthen national insight, tolerance, anti-violent attitudes, and teachers' ability to manage students' differences of opinion. Authentic leadership relies on self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced information processing, and internalized morality (Northouse, 2022). This framework is relevant because the head of the madrasah not only gives instructions but also shapes the teacher's awareness, enabling him to be an example of moderation. Teachers then act as translators of the value of moderation in learning and social interaction (Smaill, 2020; Yu et al., 2020).

This finding aligns with Saputra's (2024) research, which shows that the success of religious moderation is influenced by the synergy among madrasah heads, teachers, students, and the community. Religious moderation management needs to be carried out through continuous planning, implementation, and evaluation. The main challenge in implementing moderation is the uneven understanding of contextual moderation practices. The data from this study expand on these findings by showing that madrasah heads not only demand that teachers teach tolerance but also build teachers' pedagogical and moral capacities. The change is evident in how teachers accept students' opinions, facilitate polite religious discussions, and encourage students to be fair toward groups of different religions, sects, or social views (Hidayah, 2021; Ningsih et al., 2025; Rodin et al., 2026; Yuyun Alfasius Tobondo, 2025).

The author's idea in this subtheme is that teachers are a critical point in the success of religious moderation education. Moderation programs will be weak if teachers understand moderation only as an institutional slogan, rather than as a pedagogical and ethical competence (Kurniawan et al., 2026; Omar et al., 2024). A counterpoint to the formal approach to training needs to be proposed, because teacher training often ends at delivering material without changing classroom practices. Teacher strengthening must address three aspects: conceptual understanding, pedagogical skills, and exemplary attitudes. Madrasah heads need to ensure that teachers can manage sensitive issues, differences in interpretation, and the dynamics of students' identities wisely (Abidin et al., 2024; Karim et al., 2025). Thus, preventing radicalism in madrassas cannot be achieved solely through student behavior control, but rather through the formation of teachers who are reflective, open, and able to present Islam as a value of grace.

### **Madrasah Collaborative Leadership in Building an Ecosystem of Moderation and Radicalism Prevention**

The discussion in this study shows that the transformation of Islamic education to encourage religious moderation and prevent radicalism in North Lampung does not occur only in the classroom but also through madrasah social networks. Research data shows that madrasah heads build cooperation with religious leaders, KUA, FKUB, village officials, and elements of the surrounding community. The collaboration is realized through da'wah safaris, national dialogue, religious coaching, and cross-school teacher training. Educational leadership plays a role in building vision, managing organizational culture, and connecting schools with their social environment (Tony et al., 2019). Based on this theory, the head of the madrasah can be understood not only as an

internal administrator, but as a social leader who builds an ecosystem of values around the madrasah (Ilham et al., 2026; Shobri, 2025).

These findings are in line with the research of Jayanti et al. (2023), which emphasizes the importance of community leaders' involvement in strengthening religious moderation education. Research shows that synergy between schools and communities contributes to the formation of a tolerant and non-violent educational environment (Afwadzi & Miski, 2021; Ashoumi et al., 2022). Authentic leadership has the power to build trust and participation of madrasah residents (Hussain et al., 2025). The data from this study enriches the findings by showing that external networks not only support madrasah programs but also expand the range of moderation values into the social environment of students. Community support keeps the moderation program from stopping in the school room but continues in family life, religious communities, and local social spaces where students interact.

The author's idea in this subtheme is that religious moderation should be understood as an ecosystem project rather than merely a school project. The antithesis to an overly madrasah approach needs to be conveyed, because students are not only shaped by teachers and curriculum, but also by families, social media, religious leaders, and the community environment. The head of the madrasah needs to serve as the link between formal education and local social forces, so that the value of moderation gains mutual legitimacy. Preventing radicalism will be more effective if madrasahs build networks capable of presenting a peaceful, dialogical, and contextual religious narrative (Budiman et al., 2024; Koehler, 2025; MacKenzie & Kaunert, 2021). Thus, the authentic leadership of the madrasah head is evident in his ability to integrate personal integrity, institutional policy, and social collaboration to foster a culture of sustainable moderation.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that the authentic leadership of madrasah heads plays a strategic role in fostering a culture of religious moderation by integrating moderation values into the curriculum, strengthening institutional culture, enhancing teacher capacity, and collaborating with external communities. The strength of this research lies in its ability to describe the leadership practices of madrasah heads in a contextual and operational sense, not only at the conceptual level. This research shows that religious moderation can be built through example, value communication, habituation of religious activities, strengthening discipline, and involvement of

teachers and the community. Thus, madrasas not only function as religious educational institutions but also as spaces for social transformation that instill the values of tolerance, justice, balance, and the prevention of radicalism within the school environment.

The limitation of this study lies in its scope, which still focuses on one madrasah, so the results cannot be generalized to all Islamic educational institutions with different social characteristics. This research also emphasizes the perspectives of madrasah heads, teachers, education staff, and students, so it has not fully explored the views of parents, alums, community leaders, and education policymakers more broadly. Therefore, further research is recommended to use more diverse locations, involve more external informants, and compare authentic leadership practices across several madrasas with different social and cultural characteristics. Subsequent researchers can also develop quantitative or mixed-methods studies to more precisely measure the influence of authentic leadership on students' religious moderation attitudes.

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