



## Teacher Creativity in Moral Education to Strengthen Religious Moderation: A Case Study at an Elementary School in Bima City, Indonesia

Faidah Safriatun<sup>1,a</sup>, Abdussahid Abdussahid<sup>2,b</sup>, \*Hermansyah Hermansyah<sup>3,c</sup>  
<sup>1,2,3</sup>Department of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Teacher Education, Faculty of Islamic Studies, Universitas Muhammadiyah Bima, West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia  
Email: <sup>a</sup>[faidahsafriatun@gmail.com](mailto:faidahsafriatun@gmail.com); <sup>b</sup>[abdussahid1@gmail.com](mailto:abdussahid1@gmail.com); <sup>c</sup>[hermandompu95@gmail.com](mailto:hermandompu95@gmail.com)

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### ABSTRACT

Strengthening religious moderation through moral education has become increasingly important in elementary education. However, previous studies have largely examined character education and religious moderation separately, while limited attention has been given to how teacher creativity supports the internalization of religious moderation values in primary school contexts. This study aims to explore how teacher creativity in moral education contributes to strengthening religious moderation among students at State Elementary School 12 Sarae, Bima City, Indonesia. This research employed a qualitative case study design involving one principal, four teachers, and twelve students selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation and analyzed using an interactive model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, supported by source and method triangulation. The findings indicate that teacher creativity was reflected in storytelling, interactive learning activities, habituation practices, and teacher role modeling, which supported the internalization of tolerance, empathy, cooperation, and respect in students' daily interactions. Challenges remained in designing innovative moral learning experiences and integrating moderation values consistently into classroom instruction. This study contributes by providing contextual insights into how creative moral education practices support religious moderation in elementary education within a socio-religious community setting.

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### \*Corresponding

#### Author

[hermandompu95@gmail.com](mailto:hermandompu95@gmail.com)



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## INTRODUCTION

Education plays a strategic role in shaping not only students' intellectual abilities but also their moral and social character. Rapid technological advancement and increasingly complex social dynamics require educational institutions to move beyond a sole focus on cognitive achievement and emphasize the cultivation of values that sustain social harmony. In the context of elementary education in Bima City, increased access to

### Editorial Office

STAI Auliaurasyidin, Kampus Panam (Parit Enam)  
Jl. Gerilya No. 12 Tembilahan Barat, Riau, Indonesia, 29213  
[asatiza@stai-tbh.ac.id](mailto:asatiza@stai-tbh.ac.id)

digital media and social platforms expose students to various forms of unfiltered information, including intolerant narratives, religious stereotypes, and misleading content that may shape their attitudes at an early age. Without proper guidance, this exposure can influence how students perceive differences and interact with peers from diverse backgrounds. Therefore, schools, including State Elementary School 12 Sarae, play a crucial role in fostering religious moderation values to ensure that students develop tolerant, respectful, and inclusive behaviors in both offline and online interactions (Setiadi et al., 2024). Moral education becomes a central component in this effort, particularly in fostering religious values that are moderate, inclusive, and tolerant. These values serve as a foundation for maintaining diversity and preventing the emergence of extreme and intolerant attitudes within society (Muhammad et al., 2022). However, preliminary observations at State Elementary School 12 Sarae indicate that students' tolerance in daily interactions remains inconsistent, as reflected in their reluctance to collaborate with peers from different religious or social backgrounds and the persistence of exclusive peer groupings.

Indonesia is characterized by a high level of religious, cultural, and ethnic diversity, which necessitates an educational approach that promotes mutual respect and peaceful coexistence. The concept of religious moderation has emerged as a response to these challenges by encouraging a balanced religious understanding and respect for differences (Little, 2024). The internalization of religious moderation values is not limited to adult society but must begin at an early stage through formal education. Elementary schools provide a crucial setting for building this foundation, as students at this level are in a critical phase of moral development (Ainun et al., 2025).

The process of instilling moral and religious values in elementary school students requires approaches that align with their developmental characteristics. At this stage, students tend to understand values more effectively through concrete experiences, social interaction, and real-life examples rather than abstract explanations (Susanto & Dwijayanto, 2022). Teachers play a central role in designing learning processes that accommodate these needs. Teacher creativity becomes a key factor in determining the success of moral education. Creative teachers are able to deliver engaging, varied, and

meaningful learning experiences, enabling students to internalize values not only cognitively but also in their attitudes and daily behavior (Ravšelj et al., 2025).

Teacher creativity in moral education can be manifested through various strategies, including interactive teaching methods, innovative use of learning media, and the integration of moral values into contextual learning activities. Approaches such as storytelling, role-playing, group discussions, and experiential learning provide opportunities for students to understand and experience the meaning of the values being taught (Hoktaviandri et al., 2024). Teachers also function as role models who demonstrate moderate, tolerant, and fair behavior in everyday interactions within the school environment. Such modeling reinforces the internalization process, as students tend to imitate observed behaviors (Satria & Budrianto, 2025).

Previous studies have extensively examined moral education and teacher creativity. Several findings indicate that teacher creativity positively influences student engagement and learning effectiveness. Other research highlights that consistent character education contributes to the development of positive social behavior among children. However, much of the existing literature focuses on general character education or cognitive learning outcomes, while studies specifically linking teacher creativity with the strengthening of religious moderation values remain limited. This indicates a research gap that requires further exploration (Roslan et al., 2024).

In addition to the limited empirical studies, challenges persist in the implementation of moral education oriented toward religious moderation at the elementary school level (Haq et al., 2023). Teaching practices often remain conventional and provide limited opportunities for students to develop critical and reflective understanding. Normative approaches risk reducing moral values to rules that are memorized rather than deeply understood and practiced. These conditions call for innovative learning strategies that effectively integrate religious moderation values into classroom practices (Prakoso et al., 2023). Preliminary observations at State Elementary School 12 Sarae indicate that while some teaching practices still tend to be conventional and focus on the transmission of moral rules, there are also emerging efforts by several teachers to adopt more creative and contextual approaches in delivering moral education.

Bima City is predominantly inhabited by a Muslim majority community with strong religious adherence, where social interactions are often shaped by shared religious norms; however, this homogeneity may also contribute to the formation of exclusive attitudes and limited exposure to diversity, making the cultivation of religious moderation values particularly important in educational settings. Schools, as formal institutions, bear the responsibility of guiding students toward open-minded and respectful religious understanding. State Elementary School 12 Sarae in Bima City presents a relevant site for examining how moral education is implemented and how teacher creativity contributes to strengthening religious moderation values.

This study contributes both academically and practically to the development of moral and character education in diverse social contexts. Unlike previous studies that generally examine religious moderation or character education in broader or urban settings, this research provides a contextualized understanding of how teacher creativity operates in strengthening religious moderation within a predominantly Muslim and community-oriented society such as Bima City. Specifically, this study offers new insights into how moral education is creatively implemented at the elementary level in State Elementary School 12 Sarae, where strong socio-religious norms shape students' interactions and perspectives on diversity. By highlighting the interplay between teacher creativity, local cultural-religious context, and value internalization processes, this study fills a gap in the literature on religious moderation in primary education, particularly in underrepresented regions. Practically, the findings offer context-sensitive strategies that can inform teachers and schools facing similar socio-cultural conditions in fostering tolerance, empathy, and inclusive behavior among students.

Given that this study aims to explore the forms of teacher creativity, the processes of value internalization, and the contextual challenges within classroom interactions, a qualitative case study design is considered appropriate, as it enables an in-depth and contextual understanding of teacher behaviors and student experiences that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative approaches.

## **METHOD**

Participants in this study were selected using purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in the teaching and learning process at State Elementary School 12 Sarae, Bima City. The inclusion criteria were defined to ensure the relevance and depth of the data obtained. The principal was included as a key informant due to their role in school policy and supervision of instructional practices. Teachers were selected based on the criteria of having at least one year of teaching experience and being actively involved in delivering moral or religious-related subjects. A total of four teachers participated in this study. Students were selected from grades 4 to 6, as they are considered to have sufficient cognitive and social development to understand and reflect on values related to religious moderation. A total of 12 students were involved, representing diverse classroom backgrounds. Overall, the study involved 1 principal, 4 teachers, and 12 students, ensuring a range of perspectives to comprehensively explore teacher creativity and the internalization of religious moderation values in classroom practices.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observations, and documentation. The interviews covered key themes, including teachers' understanding of religious moderation, the creative strategies used in moral education, and the challenges faced in implementing these practices. Student interviews explored their experiences in classroom activities and their understanding of values such as tolerance and respect, while the principal provided insights into school policies and institutional support. Observations were conducted in three classroom sessions, each lasting approximately 90 minutes, to examine classroom practices and teacher–student interactions. The observations focused on key aspects such as teacher questioning techniques, the use of creative learning methods and media, student responses and participation, as well as the integration of religious moderation values in classroom activities. Interviews were conducted to obtain detailed insights from participants, while documentation was used to support the data through lesson plans and relevant school records. Data collection was conducted iteratively, where initial classroom observations informed the development of interview questions, and preliminary interview findings were used to refine subsequent observations until no new themes emerged.

Data analysis followed an interactive model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data validity was ensured through source and method triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from the principal, teachers, and students. Method triangulation was applied by cross-checking findings from classroom observations with interview data and supporting documentation to ensure consistency and credibility of the results. Ethical considerations were addressed by obtaining informed consent from all participants and maintaining confidentiality of their identities. The research design was systematically structured to ensure dependability, with all stages of data collection and analysis carefully documented to allow for transparency and auditability of the research process.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Results**

The findings of this study are presented based on data obtained from interviews, classroom observations, and documentation. First, teacher creativity in moral education is reflected in the use of storytelling and interactive learning methods. Interview data revealed that teachers frequently use stories and real-life examples to explain values such as tolerance and empathy. As one teacher stated, *"I usually use stories or real-life examples so students can understand how to respect others"* (Teacher A, interview). In addition, classroom observations showed that students were more engaged during storytelling sessions and actively responded to questions posed by the teacher.

Second, the internalization of religious moderation values is supported through consistent habituation practices. Observations revealed that teachers routinely implement activities such as greeting rituals, group work, and inclusive discussions to foster mutual respect among students. This finding is further supported by interview data, where teachers emphasized the importance of daily practices in shaping students' behavior.

Third, students demonstrated the development of tolerance and cooperative attitudes in classroom interactions. Observation data showed that students were able to work collaboratively in diverse groups, while interviews with students indicated that they understood the importance of respecting differences in their daily interactions.

To provide a clearer overview of the findings and their corresponding data sources, the main results of this study are summarized in Table 1 below.

**Table 1**  
*Overview of Research Findings and Their Data Sources*

Theme	Key Findings	Data Source
Teacher Creativity	Storytelling and interactive methods used	Interviews, Observations
Habituation Practices	Routine activities foster values	Observations, Interviews
Value Internalization	Students show tolerance and cooperation	Observations, Interviews
Challenges	Limited innovation in teaching strategies	Interviews, Documentation

As shown in Table 1, teacher creativity emerges as a central factor in supporting the internalization of religious moderation values through interactive methods and consistent habituation practices. The findings also indicate that while students demonstrate positive attitudes such as tolerance and cooperation, challenges remain in enhancing teachers' capacity to design more innovative and contextualized moral learning experiences.

Learning activities also include simple discussions in which students are involved in expressing their opinions and listening to the perspectives of their peers. During these activities, teachers provide guiding questions related to moral values to stimulate student responses. The discussions are conducted in a structured manner according to the level of students. The findings also show that the integration of moral values is implemented through daily classroom routines. Students are accustomed to praying before and after learning activities, working collaboratively in groups, and following classroom rules applied during the learning process.

These activities are carried out repeatedly as part of routine practices in the classroom. Teacher practices also include presenting examples related to situations experienced by students in their daily lives. During the learning process, teachers deliver examples such as respecting differing opinions during play or group activities. These examples are conveyed in relation to the learning material being taught in the classroom.

The findings show that teachers demonstrate attitudes reflecting religious moderation values in daily classroom interactions. Teachers treat students equally, respect differences in abilities, and maintain classroom conditions that allow all students to

participate in learning activities. Observation data revealed that these behaviors were consistently reflected during teaching and learning processes, particularly in how teachers encouraged inclusive participation and responded to diverse student needs. Observational data also indicate that some students display behaviors such as cooperating with peers, listening to others' opinions, and showing concern in classroom situations.

For example, during a group activity, students were observed working collaboratively to complete a task, where one student helped a peer understand the instructions while others listened and contributed ideas. As noted in the field notes: *"Students in one group discussed actively, took turns speaking, and helped each other complete the task without exclusion"* (Field note, observation).

The findings also identified several challenges in implementing creative moral education. Interview data indicated that some teachers experienced difficulties in designing innovative learning scenarios and facilitating discussions on sensitive diversity issues. Specifically, teachers reported that limited time was a major constraint in integrating moral values within subject content during classroom instruction. In addition, all teachers interviewed noted the absence of specific written guidelines for integrating religious moderation values, leading them to rely on their own approaches. Supporting this, documentation analysis showed that lesson plans still tend to emphasize normative instruction rather than interactive and contextual approaches.

Furthermore, differences in student characteristics and backgrounds required teachers to continuously adjust their strategies to accommodate varying student responses and classroom dynamics. Observation data showed that teachers adapted learning methods and classroom approaches based on situational needs, modifying activities, instructions, and interactions in response to students' engagement levels and classroom conditions during the learning process.

## **Discussion**

### ***Teacher Creativity as a Pedagogical Strategy in Internalizing Religious Moderation Values***

The findings indicate that teacher creativity is not merely a variation of teaching methods but a pedagogical strategy that directly contributes to the internalization of religious moderation values among students (Setiawan et al., 2025). The use of interactive

methods such as storytelling, role-playing, and discussion does more than increase student engagement; it transforms the way students understand moral values from abstract concepts into concrete and applicable experiences.

This suggests that the effectiveness of moral education is determined not only by what is taught but also by how it is delivered (Wahid & Wardatun, 2023). This study specifically found that students were able to recall and relate moral messages from stories to their daily interactions, indicating that values were not only understood but meaningfully internalized. From the perspective of constructivist theory, learning is viewed as an active process in which students construct knowledge through experience and social interaction. This aligns with Piaget's (1965) view that moral development in children progresses from heteronomous morality (accepting rules as fixed and external) to autonomous morality (understanding rules as cooperative agreements). The interactive strategies identified in this study, such as group discussions and role-playing, support this transition by allowing students to negotiate meaning and develop moral reasoning through peer interaction rather than passively accepting adult-imposed rules (Burga & Damopolii, 2022).

For example, observations showed that during discussions and role-playing activities, students actively expressed opinions, responded to peers, and negotiated meaning, demonstrating that moral values were constructed through interaction rather than passively received. This process enables deeper and more lasting understanding. In this regard, teacher creativity in designing meaningful learning experiences becomes essential in connecting moral knowledge with students' social realities (Saputra et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the use of storytelling can be analyzed through narrative learning theory, which emphasizes the power of stories in shaping moral understanding by engaging students' emotional dimensions (Endartiningsih et al., 2023). Stories drawn from everyday life help students identify values such as tolerance and honesty within familiar contexts. This was evident when students were able to retell story content and explain its moral relevance to their own classroom interactions, enhancing internalization as values are no longer perceived as rigid norms but as meaningful elements of lived experience (Rahayu & Dong, 2023). From a social learning perspective, teacher creativity

is also reflected in the teachers' ability to create a learning environment that facilitates observation and imitation. By combining interactive methods with inclusive and open classroom interactions, teachers provide students with opportunities to observe behaviors that reflect religious moderation (Mappaenre et al., 2023).

Observations showed that when teachers modeled respectful communication, students tended to imitate similar behaviors during group activities, indicating that creativity extends beyond instructional techniques to include the design of social interactions within the classroom. Moreover, the ability of teachers to connect learning materials with students' real-life experiences reflects the application of contextual teaching and learning (CTL) (O'fhová et al., 2022). This approach emphasizes the relevance of learning content to students' daily lives. In this study, teachers consistently linked religious moderation values to everyday situations, such as group interactions and differing opinions. This strengthens the relevance of the values being taught and increases the likelihood of their application in real-life contexts (Achi et al., 2025). The significance of these findings lies in the recognition that teacher creativity is a crucial prerequisite for the success of moral education based on religious moderation.

Without creative approaches, such values risk being understood superficially and failing to be internalized effectively (Dagher et al., 2024). This is supported by limited observations of more conventional teaching moments, where instruction focused on one-way explanation of moral rules and resulted in lower student engagement and minimal interaction. However, as this study is based on a single-case design, it does not aim to establish causal comparison but rather to provide an in-depth understanding of how creative practices support value internalization in a specific context. These findings also imply that teacher development should not only focus on content mastery but also on enhancing creative pedagogical competencies that bridge moral values and students lived experiences.

### ***Habituation and Teacher Modeling as Social Mechanisms in Shaping Moderate Attitudes***

The findings reveal that habituation and teacher modeling function as primary social mechanisms in shaping students' religious moderation attitudes. Both elements operate simultaneously to create a learning environment conducive to value

internalization. However, from Kohlberg's (1981) perspective, habituation alone is insufficient for achieving higher stages of moral development, which require the ability to reason about moral dilemmas and understand principles of justice and fairness. Therefore, the creative strategies observed in this study, particularly storytelling and reflective discussions, play a crucial role in moving students beyond mere compliance with rules (conventional morality) toward a more principled understanding of tolerance and empathy as intrinsic values. Habituation, implemented through routine activities, serves not only as repetition of behavior but also as a process of constructing social structures that influence how students think and interact (Saepudin et al., 2023). From a behaviorist perspective, habituation is understood as the reinforcement of behavior through repetition and reinforcement mechanisms.

Routine practices such as praying, cooperating in groups, and adhering to classroom rules act as continuous stimuli that strengthen positive behaviors (Apriliani et al., 2024). Over time, these behaviors become embedded habits. However, a potential limitation of habituation is that repeated behavior may lead to rote compliance rather than genuine internalization of values. In this study, this concern is addressed by the finding that habituation is consistently accompanied by teacher guidance and reflective interaction, where teachers explain the meaning behind actions and encourage students to relate them to real-life situations (Hanif et al., 2024). This indicates that habituation in this context goes beyond behavioral conditioning and contributes to the development of moral awareness.

In the framework of character education, habituation is a key strategy for integrating cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of learning. Students not only understand religious moderation values cognitively but also experience and practice them in daily interactions. This explains why behavioral changes among students occur gradually rather than instantly. The internalization of values requires consistency and sustained practice (Suradi, 2022). Teacher modeling further strengthens habituation through mechanisms of identification and imitation. According to Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, individuals learn by observing the behavior of others, particularly those perceived as authority figures.

Teachers, as central figures in the classroom, hold significant influence over students' behavior. When teachers consistently demonstrate fairness, openness, and respect for differences, students gain concrete examples of how religious moderation values are enacted in practice (Zhao & Masnan, 2023). A deeper analysis suggests that teacher modeling also carries a symbolic dimension in moral education, as teachers' behaviors may reflect and reinforce the values promoted within the school environment. However, this interpretation is based on observed classroom practices rather than explicit evidence from school-level policies or formal institutional documents.

Therefore, the symbolic role of teachers should be understood as an analytical interpretation derived from interaction patterns rather than a formally documented institutional framework. The challenges identified, such as limited instructional time and the absence of specific guidelines, indicate that the implementation of moral education based on religious moderation requires stronger institutional support. Interview data showed that teachers specifically highlighted the need for clearer instructional guidelines and more structured support in integrating values into subject content. From the perspective of educational policy implementation theory, the success of a program depends not only on individual actors but also on the availability of resources and the clarity of policy frameworks (Arifin et al., 2024).

The constraints experienced by teachers reflect a gap between educational expectations and structural support. Despite these challenges, teachers demonstrate adaptability by adjusting their instructional strategies to classroom conditions. This adaptability reflects a broader dimension of creativity, encompassing flexibility in responding to dynamic learning situations (Kadis et al., 2024). Teachers function not only as curriculum implementers but also as innovators capable of addressing contextual needs. This reinforces the argument that strengthening religious moderation values is closely linked to the active role of teachers as agents of change (Nafi'a et al., 2022).

Overall, habituation and teacher modeling are proven to be effective social mechanisms in shaping religious moderation attitudes. Both elements complement each other in creating a sustainable process of value internalization (Huda, 2024). While the need for stronger institutional support and enhanced teacher capacity emerges partly from the study findings and partly from analytical interpretation, these implications highlight

the importance of aligning classroom practices with broader structural support to sustain value-based education.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study demonstrates that teacher creativity in moral education plays a crucial role in strengthening religious moderation values among students at State Elementary School 12 Sarae, Bima City. Such creativity is reflected in the use of interactive learning methods, consistent habituation practices, and teacher role modeling in daily interactions. These aspects support the internalization of values, as students demonstrated early indications of tolerance, empathy, and mutual respect in classroom activities based on observation and teacher reports. Academically, this study contributes to the literature by specifically linking teacher creativity to the strengthening of religious moderation values at the elementary level within a predominantly religious and community-oriented context, which has received limited attention in previous research focused more broadly on character education.

Practically, the findings suggest that schools should allocate structured time for teachers to collaboratively design and implement creative moral learning activities, such as storytelling, role-playing, and reflective discussions, to ensure that value internalization is systematically integrated into classroom practice. Future research is recommended to conduct comparative studies across urban and rural schools in West Nusa Tenggara and longitudinal studies examining whether these values persist as students transition to higher levels of education. This study is limited to a single school context with a relatively small number of participants; therefore, the findings may not be generalizable without further research in different settings. Overall, this study shows that teacher creativity transforms moral education from rule-based instruction into lived experience for students, which is particularly important in the socio-religious context of Bima City where shared norms strongly shape student interactions.

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