Exploring the Correlation of Religious Moderation, Character Education, and Ethics with Students' *Aqidah* Learning Performance

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Abstract

Research Objective– This study aims to explore the structural relationships between religious moderation, character education, ethics, and students' Aqidah learning performance at the Madrasah Aliyah level, and to examine how these value-based constructs collectively contribute to measurable academic outcomes.

Methodology– A quantitative correlational design was employed involving 75 students of MA Al-Hidayah Betoyo Kauman, Gresik. Data were collected through validated Likert-scale questionnaires and triangulated with teacher performance records. Statistical analyses included descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, multiple regression, and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using SPSS and AMOS.

Findings– The results indicate significant positive correlations among all variables. Character education emerged as the strongest predictor of Aqidah performance ($\beta = .37$), followed by ethics ($\beta = .33$) and religious moderation ($\beta = .29$). SEM analysis confirmed both direct and indirect effects, with religious moderation influencing performance through character education and ethics. The model demonstrated satisfactory fit indices and explained 54% of the variance in learning performance.

Research Implications/Limitations– The study highlights the importance of integrating moderation, moral reasoning, and character formation in Aqidah instruction. However, the limited sample size and single-school context restrict generalizability.

Originality/Value– This research advances Islamic education discourse by empirically modeling the interconnected influence of moderation, character, and ethics within a unified SEM framework

INTRODUCTION

Islamic education is ontologically and epistemologically grounded in an integrative paradigm that rejects the dichotomy between cognitive, moral, and spiritual dimensions. Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas asserts that the essence of Islamic education lies in ta'dīb, the cultivation of adab, which situates knowledge within a framework of value and moral order, thereby forming a civilized human being rather than merely a knowledgeable individual.[1] This perspective is reinforced by Hashim and Langgulung, who emphasize the continuity between classical and contemporary Islamic educational thought, in which the integration of faith, knowledge, and action constitutes the foundation of holistic Muslim personality development.[2] Within this framework, the teaching of Aqidah in madrasah education cannot be reduced to the transmission of theological doctrines; rather, it represents a process of internalizing belief systems that shape students' value orientation, cognitive structure, and ethical conduct.[3]

In the Indonesian context, strengthening religious moderation has become a strategic priority within Islamic education as a response to socio-religious polarization and contemporary ideological tensions. Azra conceptualizes moderation (*wasatiyyah*) as a principle of balance, tolerance, and justice in religious life.[4] Demonstrate that Islamic educational institutions play a pivotal role in mainstreaming religious moderation through curriculum design and academic culture.[5, 6, 7] However, Meyer argues that the discourse of "moderate Islam" often remains at a symbolic or narrative level without sufficient pedagogical measurement.[8] Similarly, Adie, Lloyd, and Beutel observe that moderation in educational discourse frequently operates as a normative construct that lacks empirical verification in relation to measurable learning outcomes.[9] Consequently, although religious moderation is widely recognized as a foundational value, its direct correlation with students' academic performance—particularly in Aqidah learning at the Madrasah Aliyah level—remains underexplored in quantitative research.

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[1] Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam: A Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1980).

[2] Rosnani Hashim and Hasan Langgulung, *Traditional and Contemporary Islamic Education* (London: Routledge, 2021).

[3] Asrori Asrori and Rusman Rusman, *Filsafat Pendidikan Islam: Sebuah Pendekatan Filsafat Islam Klasik* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Learning Center, 2020).

[4] Azyumardi Azra, *Moderasi Beragama dalam Pendidikan Islam* (Jakarta: Prenada Media, 2021).

[5] M. Nasir and M. Rijal, "Keeping the Middle Path: Mainstreaming Religious Moderation through Islamic Higher Education Institutions in Indonesia," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 11, no. 2 (2021): 213–241, https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v11i2.213-241

[6] Asrori, Asrori, Tobroni Tobroni, Samsurizal Yazid, and Abd Hadi. *Kurikulum Pesantren LDII dalam Membentuk Karakter Muslim Sejati di Pondok Pesantren Wali Barokah Kediri*. Yogyakarta: Bildung, 2024. https://eprints.umm.ac.id/id/eprint/4131

[7] Asrori, Asrori. *Psikologi Pendidikan: Pendekatan Multidisipliner*. Purwokerto: Pena Persada, 2020. https://repository.um-surabaya.ac.id/id/eprint/4461

[8] Verena Meyer, "Grave Matters: Ambiguity, Modernism, and the Quest for Moderate Islam in Indonesia," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 92, no. 1 (2024): 160–179, https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfae061.

[9] Lenore Adie, Margaret Lloyd, and Denise Beutel, "Identifying Discourses of Moderation in Higher Education," *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* 38, no. 8 (2013): 968–977, https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2013.769200

The literature on moral and character education consistently demonstrates that academic success is closely linked to the internalization of ethical values.[10, 11] Lickona argues that effective schools intentionally cultivate respect and responsibility as prerequisites for meaningful learning.[12] Althof and Berkowitz position moral education as central to the formation of responsible citizenship.[13] Rest and his colleagues, through the neo-Kohlbergian framework, highlight the importance of post-conventional moral reasoning in shaping ethical consistency and decision-making capacity.[14] Meyer further emphasizes that moral education grounded in the development of reasoning skills significantly enhances students' judgment and reflective capacity.[15] In Islamic educational contexts, Dakir et al. found that the level of character internalization among secondary school students is associated with religious maturity.[16] Habibi, Fahmi, and Muslim also demonstrate that the integration of character values in Islamic schools positively influences learning outcomes.[17] A recent systematic review by Bulkani et al. confirms that holistic learning models integrating affective and spiritual dimensions significantly contribute to character development.[18]

Despite these contributions, prior studies generally examine religious moderation, character education, and ethics as separate constructs. Research on moderation tends to focus on policy discourse or higher education settings,[19] while studies on character education are often descriptive and do not integrate ethical constructs within a unified structural model. Empirical investigations into Aqidah learning, such as Asrori's study on classroom management, demonstrate the importance of pedagogical factors in enhancing learning effectiveness.[15] Furthermore, Asrori and Saputro reveal a significant correlation between

[10] Asrori, Asrori. *Inovasi Belajar dan Pembelajaran PAI (Teori & Aplikatif)*. (Surabaya: UMSurabaya Publishing, 2019). https://repository.um-surabaya.ac.id/id/eprint/4629

[11] Khikam, Dawamul, Asrori Asrori, Sokhibul Arifin, Mohamed Esse Mohamoud, and Lailatul Fithriyah Azzakiyah. "Implementation of Teachers' Emotional, Moral, and Spiritual Competencies Through the Guru Penggerak Program." *Thawalib: Jurnal Kependidikan Islam* 6, no. 2 (2025): 275–286. https://doi.org/10.54150/thawalib.v6i2.546

[12] Thomas Lickona, *Educating for Character: How Our School Can Teach Respect and Responsibility* (New York: Bantam Books, 1992).

[13] Wolfgang Althof and Marvin W. Berkowitz, "Moral Education and Character Education: Their Relationship and Roles in Citizenship Education," *Journal of Moral Education* 35, no. 4 (2006): 495–518, https://doi.org/10.1080/03057240601012204.

[14] James Rest et al., *Postconventional Moral Thinking: A Neo-Kohlbergian Approach* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2020).

[15] Kirsten Meyer, "Moral Education Through the Fostering of Reasoning Skills," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 27 (2024): 41–55, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10677-023-10367-3

[16] J. Dakir et al., "Islamic Education and Level of Character Internalization of Secondary School Students in Malaysia," *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 6, no. 4 (2015).

[17] A. Habibi, M. Fahmi, and M. Muslim, "Character Education in Islamic Schools: Integration of Values and Learning Outcomes," *International Journal of Instruction* 15, no. 1 (2022): 123–140, https://doi.org/10.29333/iji.2022.1518a

[18] B. Bulkani et al., "Impact of Holistic Learning Models on Character Development: A Systematic Review," *Obrazovanie i Nauka* 27, no. 5 (2025): 111–141, https://doi.org/10.17853/1994-5639-2025-5-111-141

[19] Asrori Asrori, "The Function of Class Management in the Improving Effectiveness of Learning Aqidah in MTs Al-Hidayah Betoyokauman Gresik," *Studia Religia* 3, no. 2 (2019): 145–158, https://doi.org/10.30651/sr.v3i2.3950

differentiated instruction and academic achievement in Islamic Education.[20] Nevertheless, no study has simultaneously examined the structural relationships among religious moderation, character education, ethics, and students' Aqidah learning performance at the Madrasah Aliyah level. This gap underscores the need for a comprehensive quantitative approach capable of modeling latent constructs and their interrelationships.

Adolescent behavioral dynamics, as discussed by Asrori and Munawir, illustrate the dialectic between innate disposition (fitrah) and environmental influence, which can affect moral stability and religious commitment.[21] From the perspective of psychology of religion, mature religious belief is associated with emotional stability, intrinsic motivation, and consistent learning behavior.[22] Therefore, integrating moderation, character, and ethics within Aqidah instruction may not only strengthen theological understanding but also enhance measurable academic performance. Such integration aligns with the Qur'anic orientation of Islamic curriculum development and the formation of balanced religious attitudes.[23]

Methodologically, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) provides a robust analytical framework for examining multidimensional latent constructs simultaneously. Byrne emphasizes that SEM is particularly suitable for analyzing complex theoretical models involving unobservable variables.[24] Hair et al. further note that PLS-SEM is effective for predictive models incorporating reflective and formative indicators.[25] Accordingly, this study employs SEM to explore the correlation between religious moderation, character education, ethics, and students' Aqidah learning performance at Madrasah Aliyah Al-Hidayah Betoyo Kauman, Manyar, Gresik.

Academically, this research contributes to the literature by bridging classical Islamic educational philosophy (Al-Attas), contemporary moral education theory (Lickona; Rest), and empirical quantitative modeling within a unified analytical framework. It advances the discourse on value integration in Islamic education from philosophical articulation toward statistical validation. Practically, the findings are expected to provide empirical evidence for madrasah administrators and Aqidah teachers that strengthening religious moderation, character formation, and ethical reasoning is not merely a normative aspiration but a measurable determinant of academic performance.

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[20] Asrori Asrori and Riki Dwi Angga Saputro, "The Relationship Between Differentiated Instruction and Academic Achievement in the Teaching of Islamic Education Under Indonesia's Independent Curriculum," *Al-Mudarris: Journal of Education* 8, no. 1 (2025): 82–99, https://doi.org/10.32478/5728eq20

[21] Asrori Asrori and Munawir Munawir, *Anomali Perilaku Remaja: Dialektika Fitrah Manusia dan Pendidikan Islam* (Malang: Literasi Nusantara, 2020).

[22] Asrori Asrori, M. Maulana Mas'udi, and Ummi Masrufah Maulidiya, *Psikologi Agama* (Gresik: Zamron Presindo, 2023).

[23] M. Hendawi et al., "The Development of Islamic Education Curriculum from the Quranic Perspective," *Ar-Fachruddin: Journal of Islamic Education* 1, no. 2 (2024): 93–123, https://doi.org/10.7401/hms52091

[24] Barbara M. Byrne, *Structural Equation Modeling with AMOS: Basic Concepts, Applications, and Programming*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2016).

[25] Joseph F. Hair et al., *A Primer on Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM)*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2019).

METHOD

This research employed a quantitative correlational design to investigate the relationships between religious moderation, character education, ethics, and students' performance in *aqidah akhlak*. The correlational design was selected because it allows researchers to measure the strength and direction of associations between variables without manipulating the research setting.[26] Such designs are widely recognized in education and social sciences as effective tools for examining value-based constructs in relation to academic outcomes.[27] A cross-sectional survey served as the primary method of data collection, enabling the researcher to gather information from participants at one point in time. This approach was efficient, provided a representative snapshot of students' attitudes and learning performance, and minimized disruptions to classroom activities.[28]

The study was conducted at MA Al-Hidayah Betoyo Kauman Gresik, East Java, Indonesia. This *madrasah aliyah* was purposively selected due to its strong orientation toward integrating intellectual, moral, and spiritual education, particularly in the *aqidah akhlak* curriculum. The school's location in a socially diverse community further enhanced its relevance for exploring the dynamics of religious moderation (*al-wasatiyyah*), ethics, and character education in practice.[29]

The research population comprised all students of MA Al-Hidayah during the academic year 2024/2025. A sample of 75 students was determined using Slovin's formula with a 5% margin of error. To ensure proportional representation, stratified random sampling was applied across grades X, XI, and XII. This strategy accounted for potential differences in age, maturity, and exposure to Islamic education across levels, which prior studies indicate may affect moral and academic outcomes.[30]

The study used a structured questionnaire divided into four parts corresponding to each construct, measured with a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

1. Religious moderation items were adapted from Phan-ae et al.[31]
2. Character education items followed frameworks by Lickona[32] and Syarnubi et al.[33]
3. Ethics items were developed from Kim. [34]

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[26] John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 5th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2018).

[27] Kim, "Promoting Professional Socialization: A Synthesis of Durkheim, Kohlberg, Hoffman, and Haidt for Professional Ethics Education."

[28] H. H. Fraenkel, J. R., Wallen, N. E., & Hyun, *How to Design and Evaluate Research in Education*, 10th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 2019).

[29] Jubba, H., Awang, J., Qodir, Z., Hannani, & Pabbajah, "The Contestation between Conservative and Moderate Muslims in Promoting Islamic Moderatism in Indonesia."

[30] Lickona, *Educating For Character: How Our School Can Teach Respect and Responsibility*.

[31] Phan-ae, S., Asrori, A., & Rusman, "Deradicalization through Understanding the Value of Religious Moderation in Ma'had Darulrohmah Pattani Thailand."

[32] Lickona, *Educating For Character: How Our School Can Teach Respect and Responsibility*.

[33] A Syarnubi, Mansir, F., Purnomo, M. E., Harto, K., & Hawi, "Implementing Character Education in Madrasah," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 7, no. 1 (2021): 77–94, https://doi.org/10.15575/jpi.v7i1.8449.

[34] Kim, "Promoting Professional Socialization: A Synthesis of Durkheim, Kohlberg, Hoffman, and Haidt for Professional Ethics Education."

4. Learning performance indicators were triangulated with teacher records and student self-reports.

Content validity was assessed by two Islamic education scholars and one psychometric expert. Construct validity was examined through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA); all factor loadings exceeded the 0.50 threshold recommended by Hair et al.[35] Reliability was tested using Cronbach's alpha: 1) Religious moderation = 0.87. 2) Character education = 0.89. 3) Ethics = 0.85. 4) Learning Performance = 0.83. All values surpassed the 0.70 threshold, indicating strong internal consistency.[36]

Data collection was carried out in March 2025. The process began with obtaining formal authorization from the school administration to ensure institutional support. Following this, informed consent was secured from participating students, and parental consent was collected for those under the age of eighteen to guarantee compliance with ethical standards. Questionnaires were then administered directly in classrooms under the researcher's supervision to promote clarity and accuracy of responses. In addition to the primary survey data, secondary data were gathered from teacher records to provide a more comprehensive measure of students' learning performance.

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS 26 and AMOS 24. Descriptive statistics were first employed to summarize the demographic profiles of the participants and to provide an overview of variable distributions. Prior to inferential testing, assumption checks were performed to ensure the validity of the statistical models, including tests of normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity. Pearson's product–moment correlation analysis was then applied to examine the strength and direction of relationships among the variables. To further assess the predictive influence of religious moderation, character education, and ethics on learning performance, multiple regression analysis was conducted. Finally, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was utilized to validate the hypothesized model and to evaluate the interrelationships among variables simultaneously, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the constructs under investigation.[37]

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Results
Descriptive Findings

The demographic analysis of the 75 respondents revealed a fairly balanced composition across gender and grade levels, ensuring proportional representation. Approximately 52% of the students were female and 48% were male, with an average age of 16.8 years. This profile resonates with national patterns in Indonesian *madrasah aliyah*, where gender equity is systematically promoted.

The descriptive statistics of the main constructs are summarized in table 1. As shown, character education recorded the highest mean score (M = 4.31, SD = 0.48), followed closely

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[35] M Hair, J. F., Hult, G. T. M., Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, *A Primer on Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM)*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2019).

[36] I. H. Nunnally, J. C., & Bernstein, *Psychometric Theory*, 3rd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994).

[37] Barbara M. Byrne, *Structural Equation Modeling with AMOS: Basic Concepts, Applications, and Programming*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2016).

by ethics (M = 4.27, SD = 0.53) and religious moderation (M = 4.19, SD = 0.51). These results suggest that students consistently demonstrated inclusive and tolerant attitudes, while simultaneously internalizing values of responsibility, empathy, and moral reasoning. In terms of academic outcomes, *aqidah akhlak* performance showed a strong mean of 84.1 (SD = 6.2), indicating that the integration of moral and ethical education translated effectively into measurable learning performance.

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Constructs (N = 75)**

Construct	Mean	SD
Religious Moderation	4.19	0.51
Character Education	4.31	0.48
Ethics	4.27	0.53
Aqidah Akhlak Performance	84.1	6.2

These descriptive outcomes illustrate that the constructs under study—religious moderation, character education, and ethics—are not abstract ideals but have been effectively operationalized within the learning environment. They also provide a foundation for examining more advanced statistical relationships.

To provide a visual representation of these findings, figure 1 and figure 2 illustrate the distribution of mean scores across the constructs. Figure 1 highlights the three attitudinal variables (Religious Moderation, Character Education, and Ethics) measured on a 5-point Likert scale, while figure 2 shows the average academic performance in *aqidah akhlak*.
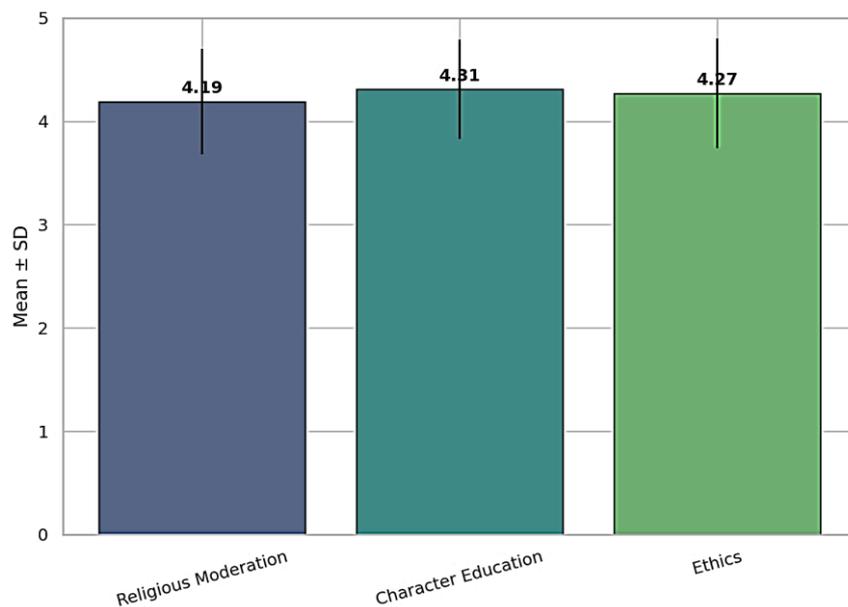
Figure 1. Mean Scores of Religious Moderation, Character Education, and Ethics
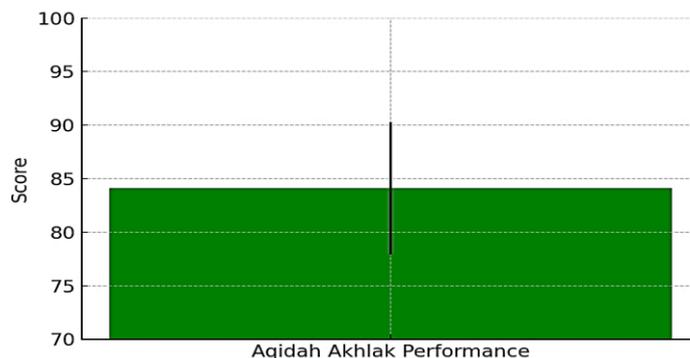
Figure 2. Mean Score of Aqidah Akhlak Performance

The visualizations reinforce the numerical findings. In figure 1, it is evident that character education dominates as the highest-scoring construct, aligning with Lickona's (1996) assertion that deliberate cultivation of values such as respect and responsibility strengthens academic perseverance. Meanwhile, the consistently high scores for ethics and religious moderation affirm the role of Islamic education in nurturing students who are not only cognitively competent but also morally grounded. Figure 2 illustrates that this moral and ethical grounding translates into a strong academic performance average in *aqidah akhlak*, further validating the practical implications of value-based learning.

Correlation Analysis

Pearson's product–moment correlation analysis revealed significant positive associations among the variables (see table 2). Religious Moderation was moderately correlated with Aqidah Akhlak performance ($r = .46$, $p < .01$), indicating that students who embraced principles of balance and tolerance tended to perform better academically. Character Education demonstrated the strongest relationship ($r = .52$, $p < .001$), consistent with Lickona's (1996) claim that moral formation nurtures responsibility and academic persistence. Ethics also showed a significant correlation with performance ($r = .49$, $p < .01$), supporting Rest et al.'s (2020) thesis that moral reasoning sustains disciplined behavior conducive to academic success.

Table 2. Correlation Coefficients Between Constructs and Learning Performance

Predictor Variable	Correlation with Aqidah Akhlak Performance	Significance (p)
Religious Moderation	0.46	< .01
Character Education	0.52	< .001
Ethics	0.49	< .01

Taken together, these findings highlight that while each construct independently contributes to learning outcomes, their cumulative and overlapping effects reinforce one another. The correlation patterns suggest that the integration of moral-spiritual values (moderation and ethics) with cognitive and behavioral dispositions (character education) plays a central role in fostering both intellectual achievement and moral maturity.

Regression Analysis

The results of the multiple regression analysis confirmed that the three independent variables—religious moderation, character education, and ethics—significantly predicted students' Aqidah Akhlak performance. Collectively, these predictors explained 54% of the variance in learning performance ($R^2 = .54$, $p < .001$), which represents a substantial contribution considering the complexity of value-based constructs in education.

Among the three predictors, character education emerged as the strongest determinant ($\beta = .37$, $p < .001$), followed by ethics ($\beta = .33$, $p < .01$) and religious moderation ($\beta = .29$, $p < .05$). These findings empirically substantiate Lickona's (1996) argument that deliberate cultivation of moral character supports responsibility and academic persistence, while also aligning with Rest et al. (2020), who emphasize that moral reasoning enhances disciplined academic behavior.

Table 3. Multiple Regression Results

Predictor Variable	Standardized β	t-value	Significance (p)
Religious Moderation	0.29	2.41	< .05
Character Education	0.37	3.82	< .001
Ethics	0.33	3.17	< .01
Model R²	0.54		p < .001

The regression model demonstrates that while all three constructs independently contribute to performance, the cumulative influence is even greater, providing empirical support for integrated pedagogical approaches that balance moderation, character, and ethics within Islamic education.

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)

The Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis validated the hypothesized model with satisfactory fit indices ($\chi^2/df = 1.87$; CFI = 0.94; RMSEA = 0.052), indicating strong model adequacy. The results confirmed that religious moderation exerted both direct and indirect effects on *aqidah akhlak* performance. Specifically, it directly influenced performance ($\beta = 0.21$, $p < .05$) while also indirectly shaping outcomes through character education ($\beta = 0.37$, $p < .001$) and ethics ($\beta = 0.33$, $p < .01$). Furthermore, Religious Moderation strongly predicted both Character Education ($\beta = 0.45$, $p < .01$) and Ethics ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < .01$), highlighting its pivotal role in shaping values and learning outcomes.

Table 4. SEM Path Coefficients

| Path	Standardized β	p-value
Religious Moderation → Learning Performance	0.21	< .05
Religious Moderation → Character Education	0.45	< .01
Religious Moderation → Ethics	0.42	< .01
Character Education → Learning Performance	0.37	< .001
Ethics → Learning Performance	0.33	< .01

To visualize the strength of these relationships, figure 3 presents a line plot of standardized coefficients across pathways.
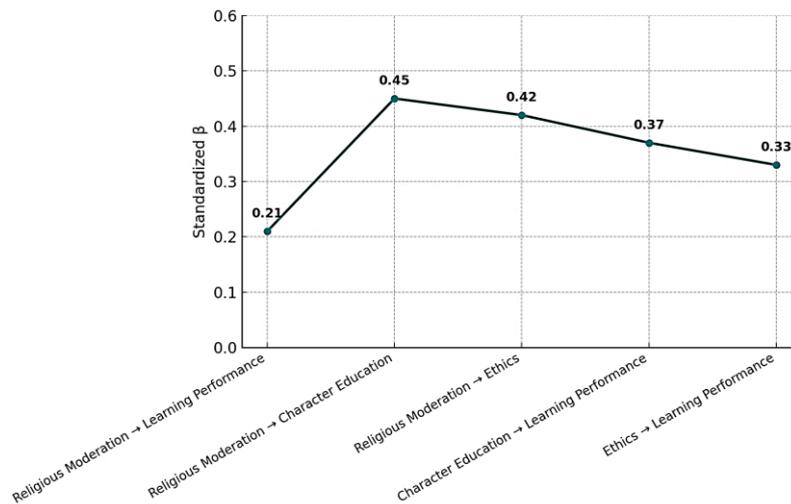
Figure 3. Line Plot of SEM Path Coefficients

The plot clearly shows that the strongest pathways were religious moderation → character education ($\beta = 0.45$) and character education → Learning Performance ($\beta = 0.37$). This finding underscores the central mediating role of Character Education, which acts as the most powerful channel through which moderation contributes to academic performance. Ethics also emerged as a meaningful mediator, reinforcing moral reasoning as a bridge between moderation and learning outcomes.

To further illustrate the relational dynamics, figure 4 depicts the SEM path diagram with standardized coefficients mapped across direct and indirect effects.
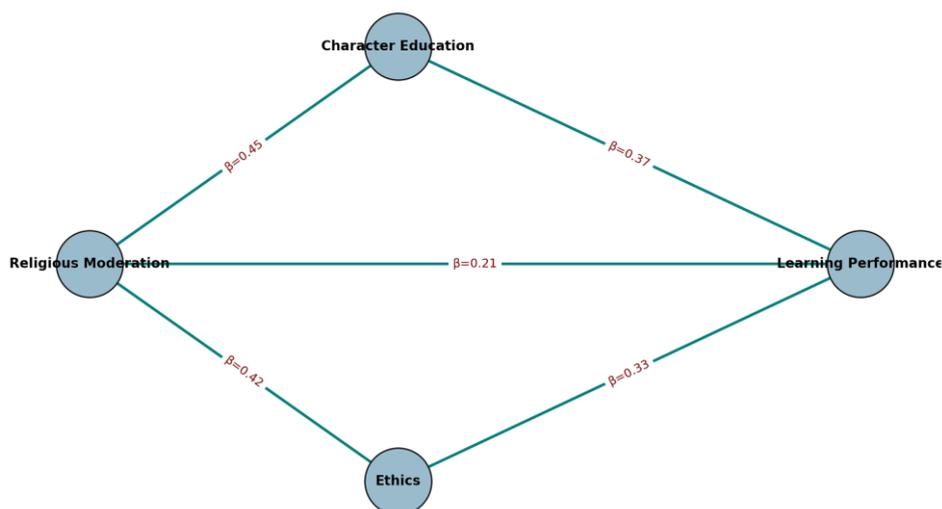
Figure 4. SEM Path Diagram

This integrated visualization reflects the interdependent nature of the constructs: Religious Moderation provides the overarching worldview, Character Education strengthens behavioral responsibility, and Ethics nurtures principled decision-making—together culminating in enhanced performance in *aqidah akhlak*. In line with Hendawi et al. (2022), these results confirm that embedding Qur'anic ethics into curricula not only nurtures moral values but also enhances academic outcomes. Likewise, Meyer (2024) emphasizes that exposure to moral disagreement, when framed within moderation, fosters critical reasoning— a dynamic mirrored in the indirect pathways of this SEM model.

Discussion

The findings of this study reinforce the argument that religious moderation, character education, and ethics constitute an integrated and mutually reinforcing framework within Islamic education. The high descriptive means across these constructs indicate that value internalization has been systematically embedded in the pedagogical environment. This observation aligns with Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas' conception of Islamic education as ta'dīb, where the ultimate purpose of education is the cultivation of adab—moral discipline, intellectual clarity, and spiritual awareness as an integrated unity.[38] In this framework, academic excellence is inseparable from ethical refinement.

The elevated mean score of character education (M = 4.31) confirms that students have internalized values of responsibility, respect, and empathy. This empirical pattern substantiates Lickona's foundational thesis that character education strengthens perseverance and academic engagement when moral values are deliberately cultivated within classroom culture.[39] Similarly, Althof and Berkowitz emphasize that moral and character education are not peripheral but central to citizenship formation and disciplined learning behavior.[40] In Islamic schooling contexts, Syarnubi et al. demonstrate that systematic character-based interventions in madrasah significantly enhance both moral internalization and learning motivation.[41] The present study extends these findings by showing that character education not only correlates with but also predicts aqidah akhlak performance.

The moderate correlation between religious moderation and academic performance (r = .46) provides empirical support for the growing discourse on wasatiyyah in Indonesian Islamic education. Azra argues that moderation in religious understanding promotes balance, inclusivity, and social harmony.[42] Nasir and Rijal further contend that mainstreaming moderation through Islamic educational institutions produces transformative pedagogical outcomes.[43] The present data advance this discourse by empirically demonstrating that

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[38] Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam: A Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1980).

[39] Thomas Lickona, "Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education," *Journal of Moral Education* 25, no. 1 (1996): 93–100.

[40] Wolfgang Althof and Marvin W. Berkowitz, "Moral Education and Character Education," *Journal of Moral Education* 35, no. 4 (2006): 495–518.

[41] Syarnubi et al., "Implementing Character Education in Madrasah," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 7, no. 1 (2021): 77–94.

[42] Azyumardi Azra, *Moderasi Beragama dalam Pendidikan Islam* (Jakarta: Prenada Media, 2021).

[43] Mohamad Nasir and M. Rijal, "Keeping the Middle Path," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 11, no. 2 (2021): 213–41.

moderation is not merely a sociopolitical agenda but an educational construct with measurable academic implications. Jubba et al. note that moderation counters exclusivism and ideological rigidity;[44] this psychological openness likely contributes to cognitive flexibility, which in turn enhances learning outcomes.

The regression findings, where character education emerged as the strongest predictor (β = .37), followed by ethics (β = .33) and religious moderation (β = .29), confirm the hierarchical but interconnected nature of these constructs. This pattern is theoretically consistent with Rest's Neo-Kohlbergian framework, which posits that moral reasoning fosters principled decision-making and self-regulated academic behavior.[45] Meyer further argues that exposure to moral reasoning processes strengthens critical thinking capacities,[46] suggesting that ethical deliberation enhances intellectual engagement rather than limiting it. In Islamic philosophical thought, as articulated by Asrori and Rusman, ethical refinement and intellectual growth are dialectically related, forming a holistic educational paradigm.[47]

The SEM results deepen this interpretation by revealing both direct and indirect pathways. Religious moderation significantly predicted character education (β = .45) and ethics (β = .42), which subsequently influenced learning performance. This confirms the mediating role of character education as the primary behavioral channel translating worldview orientation into academic achievement. Such structural interdependence reflects the integrative curriculum model advocated by Khozin, Haris, and Asrori, where moral, spiritual, and cognitive dimensions are embedded within a unified educational design.[48]

The satisfactory model fit indices (χ^2/df = 1.87; CFI = 0.94; RMSEA = 0.052) indicate strong construct validity and theoretical coherence, consistent with SEM methodological standards proposed by Byrne and Hair et al.[49] The substantial R^2 value (.54) demonstrates that value-based constructs explain more than half of the variance in aqidah akhlak performance—an impressive contribution considering the multifactorial determinants of academic achievement. Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun emphasize that in educational research, explanatory power above 0.50 in social-behavioral models reflects strong predictive adequacy.[50]

These findings also resonate with empirical studies on Islamic curriculum development. Hendawi et al. argue that Qur'anic ethical integration enhances both moral consciousness and academic quality.[51] Dakir et al. found that Islamic education significantly

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[44] Hilman Jubba et al., "The Contestation between Conservative and Moderate Muslims," *Cogent Social Sciences* 8, no. 1 (2022): 1–14.

[45] ames Rest et al., *Postconventional Moral Thinking* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2020).

[46] Kirsten Meyer, "Moral Education Through the Fostering of Reasoning Skills," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 27 (2024): 41–55.

[47] Asrori and Rusman, *Filsafat Pendidikan Islam* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Learning Center, 2020).

[48] Khozin, Abdul Haris, and Asrori Asrori, "Pengembangan Integrasi Kurikulum," *Tadarus* 10, no. 1 (2021): 84–94.

[49] Barbara M. Byrne, *Structural Equation Modeling with AMOS*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2016); J. F. Hair et al., *A Primer on PLS-SEM*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2019).

[50] Jack R. Fraenkel, Norman E. Wallen, and Helen H. Hyun, *How to Design and Evaluate Research in Education*, 10th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2019).

[51] M. Hendawi et al., "The Development of Islamic Education Curriculum from the Quranic Perspective," *Ar-Fachruddin* 1, no. 2 (2024): 93–123.

strengthens character internalization among secondary students in Malaysia,[52] while Zainuddin and Saada highlight that Islamic pedagogy promotes holistic student development encompassing spiritual, moral, and intellectual domains.[53] Moreover, Asrori's earlier work on classroom management in aqidah learning underscores that structured moral environments enhance instructional effectiveness,[54] reinforcing the present finding that moral climate and academic success are interlinked.

In a broader sociological perspective, Tobroni, Isomudin, and Asrori argue that Islamic education must be understood as a socio-cultural system shaping collective identity and ethical citizenship.[55] Dreamson's work on citizenship education similarly suggests that moral-social integration strengthens pedagogical legitimacy.[56] The present study contributes to this interdisciplinary dialogue by empirically validating a structural model in which religious moderation serves as a normative worldview, character education operates as behavioral mediation, and ethics functions as a cognitive-moral regulator—together producing enhanced aqidah akhlak achievement.

Ultimately, these findings reaffirm the classical and contemporary Islamic educational vision that rejects the dichotomy between moral formation and academic success. Asserts, true education harmonizes knowledge and virtue.[57, 58, 59] The empirical evidence presented here confirms that when moderation, character, and ethics are intentionally integrated within instructional practice, they not only cultivate moral maturity but also significantly elevate measurable academic performance.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that religious moderation, character education, and ethics play a significant and interconnected role in shaping students' aqidah akhlak performance in the madrasah context. The descriptive results show consistently high levels across all constructs, indicating that value-based education has been effectively internalized by students. The correlation and regression analyses further reveal that each construct contributes

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[52] J. Dakir et al., "Islamic Education and Level of Character Internalization," *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 6, no. 4 (2015).

[53] N. Zainuddin and N. Saada, "Islamic Pedagogy and Holistic Student Development," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 31, no. 3 (2020): 401–420.

[54] Asrori, "The Function of Class Management in the Improving Effectiveness of Learning Aqidah," *Studia Religia* 3, no. 2 (2019): 145–158.

[55] Tobroni, Isomudin, and Asrori, "Kajian Pendidikan Agama Islam dalam Perspektif Sosiologi dan Antropologi," *Tadarus* 10, no. 2 (2021): 20–39.

[56] Ngai Pun Dreamson, "East Asian Citizenship Education and Its Pedagogical Justification," *Asia Pacific Journal of Education* 43, no. 1 (2023): 28–41.

[57] Asrori, Asrori, Muhammad Maulana Masudi, and Muhammad Hambal Shafwan, "Islamic Educational Approaches to the Resilience of Former Terrorism Convicts: A Study of the Social Reconstruction Curriculum," *Al-Hayat: Journal of Islamic Education* 10, no. 1 (2026): 111–129. https://doi.org/10.35723/ajie.v10i1.194

[58] Asrori, Asrori, Tobroni Tobroni, Samsurizal Yazid, and Abd Hadi. *Kurikulum Pesantren LDII dalam Membentuk Karakter Muslim Sejati di Pondok Pesantren Wali Barokah Kediri*. (Yogyakarta: Bildung), 2024. https://eprints.umm.ac.id/id/eprint/4131

[59] Asrori, Asrori, and Riki Dwi Angga Saputro. "The Relationship Between Differentiated Instruction and Academic Achievement in the Teaching of Islamic Education Under Indonesia's Independent Curriculum." *Al-Mudarris: Journal of Education* 8, no. 1 (2025): 82–99. https://doi.org/10.32478/5728eq20

positively to learning outcomes, with character education emerging as the strongest predictor of academic performance.

The SEM analysis provides deeper insight into the structural relationships among the variables, showing that religious moderation not only influences aqidah akhlak performance directly but also exerts strong indirect effects through character education and ethics. These mediating pathways highlight the essential function of moral reasoning and character formation as channels through which moderation values translate into academic competence.

Overall, the findings affirm that aqidah akhlak performance is shaped by an integrated constellation of spiritual, moral, and behavioral dispositions. Educational practices that harmonize moderation, character building, and ethical reasoning are therefore crucial for fostering holistic student development. The study underscores the need for Islamic education institutions to adopt pedagogical approaches that nurture balanced worldviews, strong moral character, and principled ethical conduct to support both moral maturity and academic achievement.

Future research should expand the model by exploring additional factors—such as parental involvement, teacher competence, digital ethics, and peer dynamics—to further understand the complex ecosystem that shapes students' moral and academic development in contemporary Islamic education settings.

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