



## Analysis of the Value and Role of Religious Education in the Structure of the Educational Curriculum to Strengthen Character Education and Social Cohesion

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### Abstract

The research aims to analyze the role of religious education in shaping the character of students oriented toward strengthening social cohesion. Plurality is a characteristic of Indonesian society, which carries the potential for social capital, but it also has the potential to trigger horizontal conflicts. The research focuses on how religious education plays a role in the formation of individual student character as a foundation for strengthening social harmony and cohesion. The research uses a qualitative approach grounded in hermeneutic phenomenology. The study's findings show that religious education, integrated into the national curriculum, plays an important role in internalizing religious values in the educational process. This integration is not only a ritual aspect but also forms religious awareness, manifested in students' daily religious attitudes and behaviors as agents of change in society. In the context of diversity, inclusive religious education will equip individual awareness with moral maturity, especially to appreciate differences. As a result, a strong religious character among students will lay the foundation for tolerance and the strengthening of social ties in Indonesian society. These findings may explain that religious education serves as a central instrument for strengthening national integration. This study is expected to serve as a theoretical reference for the development of future education and research policies, especially regarding socio-cultural dynamics in Indonesia, confirming that the maturity of an inclusive religious character is the key to maintaining the stability of the pluralistic Indonesian nation.

**Keywords: Religion; Education; Social Cohesion; Religious Character**

### Abstrak

*Penelitian ditujukan untuk menganalisis peran pendidikan agama dalam membentuk karakter siswa yang berorientasi pada penguatan kohesi sosial. Pluralitas merupakan karakteristik masyarakat Indonesia, yang membawa potensi sebagai modal sosial, namun dibalikinya ada juga potensi sebagai pemicu konflik horizontal. Permasalahan yang menjadi fokus penelitian adalah bagaimana pendidikan agama berperan dalam pembentukan karakter individu siswa sebagai landasan untuk memperkuat harmoni dan kohesi sosial. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif berbasis studi fenomenologi hermeneutik. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pendidikan agama, yang terintegrasi dalam kurikulum nasional memegang peranan penting dalam menginternalisasi nilai-nilai keagamaan dalam proses pendidikan. Integrasi ini bukan sekadar aspek ritual, namun juga membentuk kesadaran religius yang termanifestasi dalam sikap serta perilaku religius sehari-hari dalam diri siswa sebagai agen perubahan di masyarakat. Dalam konteks keberagaman, pendidikan agama yang inklusif akan membekali kesadaran individu dengan kematangan moral terutama untuk*

*menghargai perbedaan. Hasilnya, karakter religius yang kuat dalam diri siswa akan menjadi fondasi bagi terciptanya toleransi dan penguatan ikatan sosial di tengah masyarakat Indonesia. Temuan ini dapat menjelaskan bahwa pendidikan agama berfungsi sebagai instrumen sentral untuk menguatkan integrasi nasional. Kajian ini diharapkan menjadi referensi teoretis bagi pengembangan kebijakan pendidikan dan penelitian di masa depan, terutama terkait dengan dinamika sosial-budaya di Indonesia, yang menegaskan bahwa kematangan karakter religius yang inklusif adalah kunci utama dalam menjaga stabilitas bangsa Indonesia yang majemuk.*

***Kata Kunci: Keagamaan; Pendidikan; Kohesi Sosial; Karakter Religius***

## **Introduction**

In the dynamics of social and cultural life, especially in Indonesia, which is highly pluralistic, religious education in the national education system plays a strategic role in creating national stability (Nurman et al., 2022; Robita and Anwar, 2025). The relationship between religious education and character development not only aims to shape students' personalities but also to strengthen social cohesion amid the diversity of social, cultural, and religious structures in Indonesian society (Munawir et al., 2024; Susilawati et al., 2022).

Therefore, in the macro-pedagogical aspect, educational institutions, in carrying out religious education, must remain consistent and actively integrate it into the curriculum at various levels to build students with the awareness to foster strong social harmony. Phenomenologically, religious education in Indonesia's national education system has now transcended the formal curriculum and has become an important medium for shaping values, moral concepts, and ethical guidelines in society (Muid and Mustofa, 2023; Zuhdi and Sarwenda, 2020).

As an educational instrument that serves as a liaison, religious education seeks to internalize universal values that can be accepted by diverse groups in society (Latif and Latif, 2022; Wowor, 2020). In addition to ritual aspects, religious education is also oriented towards the formation of religious character, the principle of integrity, and awareness of tolerance, which makes it a compulsory subject for producing a civilized young generation (Haerudin, 2025; Shiddiqoh, 2024). However, the demographic complexity of Indonesia's plural society, with diverse social and cultural forms, is currently a major challenge, especially in maintaining the nation's unity amid the negative impacts of plural social dynamics (Pranata et al., 2020; Razak, 2023).

The current era of globalization and the rapid progress of the times also bring various foreign cultures and ideologies that demand a more humanist approach to religious education, but remain a fortress of filtering (Hilal et al., 2024; Kiarie, 2024). This phenomenon requires that the religious education curriculum must be able to be a concrete solution to the challenges of the times by strengthening the values of character, the principle of justice, and social solidarity among students (Jennissen et al., 2023; Mazur and Szauer, 2024).

The main problem in this research and study arises because there are still many incidents of religious intolerance in Indonesia, thus raising questions about whether religious education has not been fully able to reduce social fragmentation and inter-group conflicts triggered by the entry of radical ideologies (Judijanto et al., 2024; Setinawati et al., 2025). Although ontologically religious education is an integral part of the national education system, indications of weakening social disharmony integration are still seen through the increasing acts of intolerance, social segregation, and polarization on social media (Faizin et al., 2024; Sukmayadi and Yahya, 2020).

This condition of fragmentation will certainly threaten the collective solidarity that is the main foundation of national unity Garay et al., (2022); Kurniawan et al., (2024) the Indonesian nation is no exception, being plural in its social and cultural aspects. The impact of fragmentation is conceptually significant in hindering the growth of awareness of the importance of social cohesion and the formation of positive student character in the midst of unstable social conditions (Haerudin, 2025; Shiddiqoh, 2024). When the principle of social cohesion, as the glue of the nation, becomes fragile, the potential for horizontal conflict will certainly increase, hindering the pace of national social and economic development (Jennissen et al., 2023; Judijanto et al., 2024).

This will reflect the failure to internalize religious values inclusively, which, according to Durkheim's perspective, religion should be an element of social power that unites society through collective values (Walsh, 2024; Lelis, 2024). Although much research has been done on religious education and character formation, there is a real gap in the literature related to the integration of these two aspects, especially the study of character education in strengthening social cohesion from the perspective of the sociology of religion (Annisha, 2024; Shiddiqoh, 2024). Most previous studies have focused on aspects of values and character education and have not fully addressed the pedagogical analysis of learning within Indonesia's plural social structure. Therefore, there is still a lack of research that in-depth examines how the mechanism of internalizing religious values can directly overcome social fragmentation and strengthen bonds between groups in Indonesia. Therefore, this study's analysis aims to fill this gap. In terms of novelty, this research's contribution lies in using the sociology of religion as the main analytical framework to understand the role of religious education in strengthening social cohesion by shaping students' character values as social and cultural capital. In contrast to previous studies that were partial, this study holistically seeks to explain and integrate the social, cultural system, and religious dimensions to uncover how religious values are implemented in real life. This approach seeks to offer a deeper understanding of the interrelationships among religious education, inclusive character building, and complex social structures in Indonesia, particularly in shaping social cohesion.

Theoretically, the urgency of this research is to enrich the literature on the sociology of religion by affirming the role of education as an agent of moral and ethical transformation for students (Kuriakose and Jena, 2025; Metcalfe, 2021). In line with Peter L. Berger's view, the success of social cohesion depends heavily on how religious teachings are internalized in a pluralistic society (Kurniawan and Fitriyanto, 2025; Lapis, 2025). In addition, this research aims to provide an empirical basis for developing national education policies that support social integration, foster an inclusive national character, and promote sustainable solidarity.

## **Method**

This study employs a qualitative research design with a hermeneutic-phenomenological approach to explore the phenomenon in depth and holistically. The main focus is to analyze the relationship between religious education and the process of character formation among students in Indonesia, as well as the contribution of character education to strengthening social cohesion. Through this approach, the researcher seeks to examine the subjective perception of research participants regarding the meaning of religious education in the national curriculum and the urgency of character education in shaping a conscious student personality to maintain harmony. Data were collected through in-depth interviews that positioned researchers as key instruments for uncovering participants' authentic experiences, as well as through literature analysis to reinforce the theoretical foundations of previous research. Data analysis is carried out systematically

through the reduction stage, the presentation of data based on certain patterns, and the drawing of conclusions that integrate interview findings with literature studies. To maintain credibility and minimize bias, the researcher uses triangulation by comparing data from various sources. In addition, the integrity of research is ensured through the application of strict ethical principles, including the protection of participant identities, the prevention of conflicts of interest, and the use of data intended solely for scientific purposes after obtaining official permission from all participants. With this comprehensive methodological framework, it is hoped that the research results will provide a complete picture of the strategic role of religious education within the pluralistic socio-cultural structure of Indonesian society.

## **Results and Discussion**

The study's findings confirm that religious education is a strategic pillar of the national education system, integrated at all levels and aligned with each student's beliefs and religion. The focus goes beyond teaching dogma to internalizing the moral and ethical values in the scriptures to form character and civilized behavior in students. This integration plays an important role in shaping students' consciousness, strengthening social cohesion and harmony by fostering tolerance amid pluralism. Therefore, integrating the principle of religious moderation into the educational curriculum is urgent to equip students to navigate the dynamics of social life. An in-depth analysis of the phenomenon will be outlined in the following themes:

### **1. The Position of Religious Education in the Education Curriculum in Indonesia and Its Relation to Strengthening Character Education in the Integration of Religious Moderation for Students**

Since the establishment of the Republic of Indonesia, religious education has occupied a strategic position in the national curriculum at all levels, from primary to secondary education, as well as in higher education (Chandra and Suleeman, 2023; Muzayroh, 2021). Its role goes beyond the transmission of dogmatic teachings; it also functions as a vital instrument in shaping students' morals and character (Suantara, 2020; Taja et al., 2021). Conceptually, religious education is designed and delivered to internalize the values of religiosity based on the scriptures believed by students, and to make them mandatory elements that strengthen the national education system (Octaviani et al., 2019; Zulfikar et al., 2023).

The legal foundation of education in Indonesia explicitly defines education as a conscious effort to create a learning process that develops spiritual potential, self-control, and noble morals (Baharuddin et al., 2024; Nashohah, 2021). This emphasis on spiritual power emphasizes the urgency of integrating religious education into the curriculum to foster a personality that benefits society and the state (Sakti et al., 2024; Syaefulloh et al., 2022). In the context of the plurality of national identities in the social and cultural spheres, religious education serves as an important ethical foundation for guiding good student behavior in daily life (Suhardiyanto et al., 2025; Supriatna et al., 2023).

This aims to produce intellectually, morally, and socially mature individuals (Mustakim et al., 2024; Zakiyah et al., 2024). In line with this view, Budiarta, who is a Hindu Religious Teacher, mentioned that:

National education is a grand educational design to foster spiritual maturity, which is not just an intellectual transformation. The integration of religious education is a conscious effort designed to equip students with noble morals as the basis of their personalities, so that they retain integrity and are useful to the nation (Interview, June 6, 2025).

In line with this statement, the same thing was also conveyed by Arya, who is also a Hindu teacher. The participant stated that:

In schools, religious education is not just a subject; it also serves as a foundation for teaching ethics, guiding students' behavior in their daily associations. The goal, of course, is to form individuals who are not only cognitively intelligent but also morally mature so that they can become the glue of harmony (Interview, June 11, 2025).

Based on the analysis of the two participants' statements, religious education is theoretically closely related to supporting the character education process. This is because character education in the national curriculum is a process of internalizing positive values to form individuals who actively contribute to their environment (Kusnendar et al., 2024; Mudana, 2023). This process of moral development aligns with Lawrence Kohlberg's theory, which states that ethical values develop through cognitive and affective stages influenced by systematic education (Kohlberg, 1981; Nainggolan & Naibaho, 2022; Walrath, 2011).

Within the sociology of religion, religious education serves as the primary instrument in the process of internalizing character. Given Indonesia's complex diversity, the government has integrated the concept of religious moderation into character education (Arimatea and Sukarna, 2024; Saepudin et al., 2023). The principle of moderation emphasizes that tolerance is a form of respect for differences and a rejection of extreme and intolerant behavior (Hoktaviandri et al., 2024; Rantung, 2024). This concept is relevant to Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which states that individual attitudes are learned through healthy social observation and interaction (Bandura, 1985). Through a moderation approach, religious education is expected to foster an inclusive and harmonious character among students. In the context of character education as a strengthening of the principle of religious moderation, Dikta stated that:

Character education to form the character of moderate students is essential to balance religious obedience with national commitment. In the view of being a religious teacher, of course, the goal is to shape the way of awareness of students who are not religious in an extreme way, so that students remain firm in their personal beliefs but remain flexible and inclusive in respecting differences in society (Interview, June 22, 2025).

In line with this statement, Putra provided arguments and responses that strengthened the following:

In our opinion, a good religious character of students is a moderate character, where students must not only be obedient in worship but also have high empathy for differences in the student environment. This is especially important so that students do not grow into exclusive individuals but become social agents of tolerance in the midst of the diversity of the Indonesian nation (Interview, June 25, 2025).

The empirical support from the two statements by participants strengthens the argument for the importance of character education in the context of religious moderation. This indicates that integrating religious moderation in religious education is effective in building self-control and awareness of the importance of tolerance (Mufi et al., 2023; Zakso, 2021). The findings also show that strengthening character through school-based education can help minimize risky behaviors that trigger conflicts among students, thereby creating a conducive academic environment (Haerudin, 2025; Sakti et al., 2024). These findings confirm that religious education, as the foundation of character education, is a prerequisite for creating students with moderate and inclusive social and religious character.

As a policy implication, the implementation of the curriculum in religious education must be directed toward the development of a systematic, moderate attitude. The government and educational institutions should ideally improve the pedagogical competence and professionalism of religious teachers to apply an adaptive humanist approach to the social dynamics that emerge in society (Ningsih, 2021; Sakti et al., 2024). Teacher training is the key to ensuring that character values are conveyed effectively to students. In conclusion, the position of religious education in Indonesia is very strategic because it is oriented towards the formation of students with moderate, tolerant, and integrity. The integration of the principle of moderation in religious education is believed to be the glue of social cohesion in the nation's life. Therefore, the development of learning methods grounded in the latest educational theories and empirical research is indispensable to achieving the goals of national education effectively. Religious education is not just a means of transmitting knowledge, but a key instrument for the formation of Indonesian human personalities who can live in harmony in diversity.

## **2. Integration and Internalization of Character Education and Religious Moderation for Students as Builders of Social Cohesion in Indonesia**

Conceptually, strengthening character education based on religious moderation integrates relevant methods in Indonesian society's plural and multicultural social culture. Based on the findings of this study, an important aspect shows that the process of character education that internalizes the values of religious moderation has implications for the personality of students who are oriented towards strengthening solidarity and social integration in a heterogeneous community environment. In the view and point of view of the study of the sociology of religion, these findings represent a manifestation of the essential function of religion in social life that seeks to form social cohesion through the awareness of shared norms and values that bind each member of society in a social community. Religious moderation, as a guideline for social life, becomes a foundation of education integrated into character education to instill moral values and inclusive, ethical teachings in building social solidarity among the Indonesian people (Arimatea and Sukarna, 2024; Saepudin et al., 2023). This moderate attitude toward religion for each individual prevents individuals and religious communities from fanaticism and extremism that can trigger horizontal conflicts and social divisions (Hadiyanto et al., 2025; Zaluchu et al., 2025).

Therefore, character education based on the integration of values and principles of religious moderation is expected to play a role as social control that forms social balance and harmony in a pluralistic society. This finding aligns with Weber's view, which affirms the importance of rationalization and self-control in religious practices in the social environment as factors supporting social harmony (Adair-Toteff, 2016; Weber, 2012). Referring to this argument, Putera, who is an academic, stated that:

Religious moderation in the view of an integrated educational curriculum in character education is an effective effort to instill inclusive values from an early age in students. Of course, it will be a foundation for students to build strong social solidarity, so that the diversity of our nation is maintained in a mutually agreed ethical harmony (Interview, July 1, 2025).

A similar statement was also made by Pramana, a practitioner in the field of education. Participants stated that:

Integrated character education based on religious moderation is crucial to fortify students from fanaticism and extremism. Students with a moderate perspective are expected to form individuals who can control themselves in the face of provocations that could trigger horizontal conflicts and divisions in society (Interview, July 5, 2025).

Supporting this statement, Lestari, who is also an academic, stated that:

As a tool of social control, the concept of religious moderation is expected to create a student personality who can balance himself, especially in pluralistic community interactions. The values of moderation are believed to train students' rationality in religion, whose goal is to encourage the creation of stable social harmony through a consistent attitude of tolerance (Interview, July 13, 2025).

These three statements explain the importance of character education as the foundation for the formation of moderate student character, especially in the sociological context. In addition, from another sociological perspective of religion, Durkheim emphasizes that the role of religion in people's lives serves as a social glue that binds individuals in collective consciousness based on the principles of norms and values that society embraces and believes in (Courpasson et al., 2021; Launay, 2022). In this regard, character education in the view of the sociology of religion integrated by the principle of religious moderation can be seen as a process of internalizing moderate religious values in individuals, thus having an impact on strengthening aspects of social cohesion that are aroused through inclusive and tolerant collective understanding and awareness (Saepudin et al., 2023).

In line with these findings, Hefner argues that religious practices that are harmonious, based on an attitude of acceptance of differences, will generally be able to create national stability; this certainly indicates that religious behavior that is tolerant of adherents of different religions will have a significant impact on the sustainability of social cohesion (Hefner, 2025). Going deeper into the findings regarding character education in this sociological study, based on the principle of religious moderation will have an impact on strengthening social ties and solidarity between religious groups with different religious and cultural backgrounds (Nasih et al., 2024; Zaluchu et al., 2025).

Mutually respectful attitudes and behaviors taught through internalizing inclusive moral values and ethics through character education will create a space for constructive dialogue and social interaction (Saepudin et al., 2023). The development of this concept will lead to the growth of solidarity oriented towards strengthening social cohesion. In the context of learning in schools, this view is by the theory of symbolic interactionism, which emphasizes the importance of social bonds and relationships in forming social identity through understanding the meaning of knowledge formed by students.

Other research also corroborates this view, such as several previous research results that focus on the role of education in shaping an attitude of acceptance of inclusive differences; this makes character education an important foundation in strengthening the role of students in strengthening social cohesion in a pluralistic Indonesian society (Iksal et al., 2024; Jaedi et al., 2024). In addition, character education internalized by the principle of religious moderation is an instrument in strategic steps in overcoming social fragmentation and potential conflicts arising from religious and cultural differences.

Therefore, on a practical level, Indonesia, as a country with a high diversity of religions and cultures, needs individuals with social awareness to maintain unity. This will be able to be formed if character education can instill the values of religious moderation in students. This process will be a social and educational instrument that can address challenges by strengthening social cohesion and forming inclusive and tolerant attitudes and behaviors. Thus, it can be concluded that character education integrated with the principles of religious moderation has a central function in strengthening social cohesion. These findings are relevant and in line with theories and approaches in the study of the sociology of religion that place the position of religion as a factor in shaping stability and social cohesion.

## Conclusion

Based on the discussion of the results of the research, it can be concluded that religious education in Indonesia occupies a strategic position in the national curriculum, especially as the main foundation for strengthening the internalization of character education, which is not just a transfer of dogmatic teachings but a process of instilling deep moral and ethical values in students. From a character education perspective grounded in the sociology of religion, this integration is believed to be effective in increasing students' social awareness and minimizing negative behavior by fostering harmonious interaction patterns within a pluralistic society. In addition, strengthening religious moderation is an important pillar for instilling an inclusive attitude and high tolerance among students, thereby positioning religious education to become a vital instrument in maintaining national harmony. This research has limitations, especially in failing to measure the effectiveness of religious learning practices. Still, it is believed to make a significant contribution to the conceptual foundation of strengthening character education. To deepen the study's context, it is recommended to use mixed methods in future research, enabling the implementation of the curriculum to be evaluated more holistically and systematically. In conclusion, the synchronization between religious teachings as the foundation for character formation that integrates the values and principles of moderation is expected to be able to produce individual students who are not only spiritually mature, but also have strong social integrity to strengthen the solidarity and harmony of the Indonesian nation in the midst of diversity.

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