

Religious Moderation Based Counseling and Its Implications for Student Spiritual Well-Being

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Article Information:

Received: December 24, 2025

Revised: April 12, 2026

Accepted: June 19, 2026

Keywords:

Religious Moderation,
Religious Counseling,
Spiritual Well-Being,
Higher Education,
Student Mental Health

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Abstract

The increasing pressure of academic life, future uncertainty, and the rise of religious exclusivism among students necessitate a counseling approach that integrates spiritual values with psychological resilience. In this context, religious moderation-based counseling offers a potential framework for strengthening students' spiritual well-being while fostering an inclusive and harmonious campus environment. This study aims to explore the implementation and impact of religious moderation-based counseling on the spiritual well-being of students at the Institut Attanwir Bojonegoro. Using a qualitative phenomenological design, data were collected through in-depth interview vcdgy6rgc3ews with five key informants consisting of lecturers, students, and university leadership, participant observation of weekly *halaqoh* sessions, and relevant documentation. Data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model, encompassing data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that moderation-based counseling, implemented through an inclusive curriculum, reflective activities, and humanistic dialogue, facilitates both cognitive and affective transformation among students. Students gradually shifted from rigid religious schemas toward a more adaptive, tolerant, balanced, and peaceful spiritual identity. This process contributed to reducing existential anxiety, strengthening emotional stability, and enhancing social harmony within the campus ecosystem. Religious moderation therefore serves as a robust foundation for spiritual well-being by providing students with cognitive filters and emotional resources to navigate religious diversity and the complexities of a pluralistic society. This study recommends the formal integration of moderate religious values into university counseling services as a strategic approach to strengthening students' spiritual resilience, psychological well-being, and harmonious social engagement.

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INTRODUCTION

The dynamics of higher education in the contemporary era demand not only academic excellence but also robust mental and spiritual resilience from students. As emerging adults in a transitional phase toward full independence, students are frequently confronted with existential crises, intense academic performance pressures, social expectations, and uncertainties regarding their future careers. These conditions can generate persistent anxiety and emotional vulnerability, particularly when students lack adequate internal resources to cope with complex academic and personal demands. Intellectual achievement alone is

How to Cite this Article:

Azis, M. A., Bakhtiar, M., & Rohmatullah, D. M. (2026). Religious Moderation Based Counseling and Its Implications for Student Spiritual Well-Being. *Al-Ihath: Jurnal Bimbingan dan Konseling Islam*, 6(2), 273-287.
<https://doi.org/10.53915/jbki.v6i2.94>

Publisher: Study Program of Islamic Guidance and Counseling | Faculty of Da'wah | Institut Attanwir Bojonegoro, Indonesia

therefore insufficient to guarantee psychological well-being without accompanying spiritual stability. Spiritual well-being serves as a crucial foundation that enables individuals to find meaning, purpose, and transcendental connections in life, thereby providing inner peace and emotional strength amidst increasingly complex professional and social demands (Chen et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2020). In this context, the development of students' spiritual resources becomes an important component of higher education because it can support their ability to interpret academic and personal challenges in a more meaningful and constructive manner.

Amidst the cultural and religious diversity within campus environments, a significant challenge arises when religious expression intersects with rigid religious exclusivism. Extreme religious understanding can create internal conflict among students, particularly when personal interpretations encounter different beliefs, values, and cultural perspectives. Such tensions may disrupt social harmony and diminish inner peace because of the discrepancy between deeply held values and the reality of diversity in everyday campus life. Religious orientations without openness and psychological flexibility may contribute to interpersonal tension and difficulties in adapting to pluralistic environments (Afwadzi & Miski, 2021; Nasir & Rijal, 2021). At the same time, religious beliefs can become an important psychological resource when developed through adaptive and constructive interpretations (Pargament & Lomax, 2013; Koenig, 2012). Therefore, an approach that bridges spiritual beliefs with inclusiveness is needed so that religion becomes a source of psychological strength and social connectedness rather than prejudice or conflict.

Religious moderation emerges as a vital paradigm for balancing adherence to religious teachings with respect for humanity and social diversity. In higher education, religious moderation does not mean weakening one's faith, but developing an inclusive, just, balanced, and contextual understanding of religious teachings. The integration of moderate values is important for preventing rigid attitudes and polarization that may trigger psychosocial stress among students. A balanced religious understanding can encourage students to respond to differences with greater openness while maintaining their religious identity, supporting adaptive psychosocial functioning (Afwadzi & Sumbulah et al., 2024; Nasir & Rijal, 2021). Moreover, the ability to accept differences and manage diverse perspectives can strengthen students' emotional stability and psychological resilience (Sa'idah et al., 2024; Syukrilla et al., 2024). Thus, internalizing moderate values can foster cognitive flexibility, tolerance, and constructive interpersonal responses in diverse academic and social environments.

Religious counseling, as a pillar supporting student mental health, needs to transform by explicitly adopting the principles of religious moderation. Conventional religious counseling can sometimes be associated with dogmatic approaches that are less relevant to contemporary students with critical, reflective, and open mindsets. Within a religious moderation framework, counseling should focus not only on behavioral problems but also on developing a more humanistic, contextual, inclusive, and adaptive spiritual understanding. Contemporary religious counseling requires approaches that respond to changing psychological and social needs, particularly among young people facing increasingly complex religious and cultural environments (Afwadzi & Miski, 2021; Helmawati et al., 2024). The integration of spiritual dimensions into psychological interventions can also help individuals understand their experiences without reducing their problems exclusively to psychological or religious factors (Pargament & Lomax, 2013; Rosmarin, 2021). This approach helps counselors support students in utilizing spiritual strengths as internal resources to manage anxiety, emotional distress, existential uncertainty, and personal challenges within a supportive, respectful, and non-judgmental counseling environment.

The implications of this moderate counseling approach are significant for enhancing student spiritual well-being holistically. Spiritual well-being encompasses a vertical dimension concerning one's relationship with God and a horizontal dimension involving relationships with oneself, others, and the surrounding environment. Students with higher spiritual well-being tend to develop more effective coping mechanisms because they can interpret challenges as opportunities for personal growth and spiritual maturation (Fisher, 2021). Similarly, balanced religious coping can support psychological adjustment and help individuals manage difficult experiences more constructively (Pargament & Lomax, 2013). Moderation-based religious counseling can therefore strengthen both dimensions by helping students maintain a meaningful relationship with God while developing empathy, tolerance, responsibility, and harmonious relationships with others. The integration of local cultural values is also important, as cultural wisdom similar to the Samin tribe's philosophy can support multicultural counseling practices emphasizing social harmony, ethical sincerity, simplicity, and peaceful coexistence (Faizin & Budianto, 2025).

Empirically, recent studies indicate a positive relationship between moderate religious practices and students' life satisfaction, psychological adjustment, and overall well-being. However, research specifically examining religious counseling interventions within a religious moderation framework in higher education remains limited. Existing studies often examine religious moderation from sociological or educational perspectives while addressing spiritual well-being primarily from a psychological perspective. Healthy spirituality requires a broad and balanced perspective so that religious commitment does not develop into narrow fanaticism that may undermine individual well-being and social relationships (Nasir & Rijal, 2021; Afwadzi & Miski, 2021). To address this gap, counseling practices need to incorporate contemporary psychological tools and culturally responsive strategies. Cognitive restructuring, for example, has demonstrated potential in reducing students' academic anxiety by helping them reorganize perceptions of academic pressure (Faizin et al., 2025). Likewise, specialized counseling media such as "Self-Care Adventure" demonstrate how Islamic counseling can address contemporary vulnerabilities while strengthening students' sense of safety (Zahro & Hafid, 2024). Thus, moderate counseling can provide an integrated framework for strengthening students' spiritual integrity and mental resilience.

Mental health issues among students, including academic burnout, emotional exhaustion, and identity crises, are often associated with spiritual emptiness, uncertainty about personal values, or unresolved conflicts between individual aspirations and social expectations. Without appropriate guidance, students may seek certainty through extreme ideologies, rigid worldviews, or destructive behaviors. Such responses can deepen internal conflict and reduce their ability to adapt to diverse social environments. Spirituality can provide an important framework for interpreting personal difficulties and developing meaning in challenging circumstances (Koenig, 2012; Pargament & Lomax, 2013), while supportive educational and social environments can strengthen psychological adjustment and reduce vulnerability to emotional difficulties (Helmawati et al., 2024; Sa'idah et al., 2024). This condition highlights the importance of inclusive religious counseling that enables students to reflect on their position as spiritual beings within a pluralistic society while developing psychological safety, self-understanding, and spiritual direction.

Challenges in the digital era place additional pressure on students' spiritual development through continuous exposure to unfiltered information, religious polarization, and online narratives concerning religion-based conflicts. Although social media provides opportunities for religious learning and spiritual connection, it can also expose students to provocative and

divisive interpretations. Religious literacy is therefore increasingly important for helping students navigate diverse religious narratives in digital environments (Hanafi et al., 2022; Nasution et al., 2023). In this context, moderation-based religious counseling can function as an instrument of spiritual literacy by helping students critically evaluate religious information and distinguish constructive teachings from narratives promoting hatred or intolerance. By reinforcing the understanding of religion as a source of mercy and compassion toward all creation (*rahmatan lil alamin*), students can develop greater spiritual resilience and become less susceptible to divisive digital content (Afwadzi et al., 2024; Maulana et al., 2025).

Higher education institutions play an important role in providing counseling services that contribute to a healthy and supportive campus ecosystem. Universities should function not only as centers of intellectual development but also as environments that facilitate students' psychological, social, moral, and spiritual growth. Counseling programs therefore need to incorporate religious moderation and multicultural sensitivity so that counselors possess adequate cross-cultural and interreligious competencies. Supportive educational environments are essential for promoting students' adjustment and well-being (Helmawati et al., 2024; Ibrahim et al., 2023), while institutional support helps students manage academic, social, and personal challenges effectively (Naim et al., 2022; Naim et al., 2023). Accordingly, universities should develop preventive, developmental, and responsive counseling programs addressing students' academic, personal, social, and spiritual needs in an integrated manner. Such efforts can create a harmonious academic environment in which students feel psychologically and spiritually supported while maintaining their religious identity.

Based on the above description, this research aims to explore how religious moderation-based counseling can be effectively implemented in university settings. The study specifically examines how the principles of religious moderation can be integrated into counseling practices to strengthen students' spiritual well-being while responding to contemporary psychological, social, and digital challenges. Previous studies have demonstrated the relevance of spirituality and religious dimensions to individual well-being (Villani et al., 2019), while religious and spiritual factors have also been associated with psychological functioning (Zwingmann et al., 2021). Building upon these perspectives, this article analyzes the contribution of religious moderation-based counseling to students' spiritual and mental well-being in higher education. Ultimately, the study is expected to contribute to the development of a comprehensive counseling model that supports students' holistic development, psychological resilience, spiritual maturity, and harmonious engagement with religious and cultural diversity.

METHODS

Approach

This study employs a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design to explore the essence of individuals' subjective experiences regarding a specific social phenomenon in depth (Park, 2013). The qualitative approach was selected because of its ability to provide an interpretive understanding of the meanings participants assign to their lived experiences and social realities, producing descriptive data that are rich in context and personal meaning. Within this framework, the researcher serves as the primary instrument (*key instrument*) and is directly involved throughout the data collection process to understand participants' experiences, perceptions, and reflections. The phenomenological approach is specifically utilized to describe not only what individuals experienced but also how they experienced and

interpreted those experiences. Thus, the approach enables the researcher to develop a holistic understanding of the relationship between students' inner experiences, spiritual development, and the social context in which religious moderation-based counseling takes place.

Subjects and Objects

The subjects of this study were selected through purposive sampling involving students of the Attanwir Institute of Bojonegoro. The primary criterion for selecting participants was their active participation in or direct involvement with the religious moderation-based counseling program. Participants were considered appropriate sources of information because their direct experiences enabled them to provide meaningful accounts of the counseling process and the psychospiritual changes they experienced. The selection process also considered the participants' willingness to share their experiences openly and their ability to provide information relevant to the objectives of the study. Meanwhile, the research objects focus on two primary aspects. First, the process of religious moderation-based counseling, which integrates the principles of balance (*wasathiyah*), tolerance, openness, and respect for religious diversity. Second, its implications for students' spiritual well-being, encompassing inner peace, emotional stability, personal meaning, and the strengthening of relationships with transcendental and humanitarian values.

Types and Sources of Data

The data in this study are classified into two categories: primary data and secondary data. Primary data were sourced directly from students of the Attanwir Institute of Bojonegoro through intensive interactions, including in-depth interviews, participant observation, and written reflections concerning their experiences during the counseling process. These primary sources were intended to capture the authentic voices, perceptions, emotions, and interpretations of participants regarding the spiritual transformation they experienced. The use of multiple forms of primary data also enabled the researcher to examine whether participants' statements were consistent with their observable behavior and documented reflections. To complement and contextualize the primary findings, secondary data were collected through institutional document reviews, including relevant reports and records of counseling activities at the Attanwir Institute. In addition, academic literature consisting of international journal articles, books, and other relevant scholarly sources was examined to strengthen the theoretical framework and support the interpretation of research findings.

Data Collection Techniques and Instruments

In alignment with the phenomenological design, data collection was conducted through technical triangulation involving in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation. In-depth interviews were conducted using a semi-structured format, allowing the researcher to maintain focus on the research objectives while providing sufficient flexibility for students to express their thoughts, feelings, and spiritual experiences in their own words. Participant observation was used to identify contextual information and non-verbal expressions, including emotional responses, patterns of interaction, and behavioral changes emerging during counseling and religious activities. Documentation was conducted by examining relevant institutional records, student reflections, and materials associated with religious moderation-based counseling. The research instruments consisted of a comprehensive semi-structured interview guide, observation sheets containing indicators related to spiritual well-being and religious moderation, and a document checklist used to

systematically review relevant institutional and student documents. The researcher also maintained field notes throughout the process to record important observations and emerging analytical reflections.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was performed interactively and continuously throughout the research process by adopting the Miles and Huberman model, which consists of three main activity streams: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. Data reduction involved selecting, focusing, organizing, and simplifying raw field data to identify significant information and recurring patterns related to religious moderation-based counseling and students' spiritual well-being. At this stage, interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents were examined systematically to identify relevant themes and eliminate information that was not directly related to the research objectives. Subsequently, the reduced data were presented through descriptive narratives, thematic categorization, and structured displays to facilitate the identification of relationships between emerging phenomena. The final stage involved drawing and verifying conclusions by continuously comparing emerging interpretations with field data, interview transcripts, and observation records. This process was conducted iteratively to ensure that the conclusions accurately represented the experiences and meanings expressed by the participants.

Data Validity Techniques

To ensure the credibility and authenticity of the research results, the researcher applied systematic triangulation throughout the research process. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information from different participants and relevant institutional sources to identify consistency and differences in the findings. Methodological triangulation was applied through interviews, participant observation, and documentation to examine the phenomenon from different perspectives and minimize potential. In addition, the qualitative validity standards of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were maintained throughout the study. Credibility was strengthened through comparison across data sources and methods, while transferability was supported by providing adequate descriptions of the research context. Dependability was maintained through systematic documentation of the research procedures, and confirmability was ensured by grounding interpretations in the collected evidence. These procedures strengthened the methodological rigor of the study and supported the accurate representation of students' lived experiences at the Attanwir Institute of Bojonegoro.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The implementation of moderation-based religious counseling at the Attanwir Institute of Bojonegoro represents a deliberate institutional response to the contemporary challenges of radicalism and religious exclusivism within academic spheres. This initiative did not emerge in isolation; rather, it developed through a long-standing process of cultivating local wisdom and moderate religious values that have gradually been formalized within the higher education curriculum. Through weekly *halaqoh* (religious circle) sessions, the institute has created a constructive space in which spiritual values are not merely understood as static doctrines, but are interpreted as living principles that encourage students to develop collective

awareness, respect pluralism, and appreciate social and religious diversity. This process also provides students with opportunities to connect religious teachings with their everyday academic and social experiences.

Fundamentally, the strategy employed in these *halaqoh* activities integrates an instructive approach through systematic lectures with a participatory approach through open dialogue. This integration is important because it facilitates the internalization of religious moderation values across both cognitive and affective domains. Students are guided to distinguish between absolute theological tenets (*aqidah*) and relative socio-cultural practices, providing them with greater cognitive flexibility when encountering differences in religious schools of thought (*mazhab*) or mass organizations. Through discussion and reflection, students are encouraged to understand differences without immediately interpreting them as threats to their own religious identity. This process supports the broader goal of character building, ensuring that students are not only intellectually proficient but also spiritually mature, tolerant, and capable of responding constructively to diversity.

Data gathered through in-depth interviews with various members of the academic community indicate a significant synchronization between rectorate policies, faculty teaching methodologies, and students' psychological responses. Key informants, ranging from university leadership to active students, provide a comprehensive perspective on how the values of *wasathiyah* (moderation) are transmitted and practiced within daily campus life. The findings from field observations further demonstrate that the campus environment has developed into a relatively harmonious social space, where differing viewpoints can be expressed through empathy, intellectual openness, and mutual respect. This interaction suggests that religious moderation is not only communicated through formal counseling activities but is also gradually reflected in students' everyday patterns of communication and social engagement.

Furthermore, the impact of religious counseling is evident in the improvement of students' spiritual well-being, particularly through a reduction in social anxiety associated with religious and identity differences. When students possess a moderate religious framework, they tend to demonstrate greater emotional stability and resilience when interacting with diverse social groups and encountering different religious perspectives. The effectiveness of this initiative is reflected not only in students' theoretical understanding of religious moderation but also in their everyday behavior, including the absence of discriminatory conflicts and the lack of reported radical behaviors within both internal (OMIK) and external (OMEK) student organizations. These findings indicate that the counseling process contributes to creating a safer and more harmonious social environment for students.

As a foundation for understanding the dynamics of this value transformation, the following table summarizes the crucial points derived from the conducted interviews. These findings illustrate how moderation-based religious counseling has gradually taken root within the institutional environment and generated positive implications for students' spiritual development and campus social relations. Each informant's statement represents an important component in understanding the program's implementation and outcomes, encompassing its historical development, counseling methodology, institutional support, and observable behavioral impacts. The table therefore provides a concise representation of the qualitative evidence underlying the findings and serves as a basis for further interpretation of the role of religious moderation in strengthening students' spiritual well-being.

Table 1. Summary of Interview Results (N=5 Key Informants)

Informant	Position/Status	Key Interview Points
KF	Lecturer	Religious moderation values have long been instilled informally, but formal and specific implementation began in 2024.
IT	Lecturer/Instructor	The lecture method remains effective for time efficiency and systematically delivering the concepts of <i>tawasuth</i> (middle path), <i>tasamuh</i> (tolerance), and <i>tawazun</i> (balance).
FA	Student Association (HMPS) Officer	Students eagerly anticipate the Q&A sessions to consult on social anxieties and differences in religious schools of thought (<i>mazhab</i>).
AA	Islamic Counseling Student	Practices practical tolerance with neighbors from different religious organizations (Muhammadiyah-NU) through mutual visits during Eid celebrations.
KI	Vice Rector III	There are no reports of criminal activity or discrimination within internal (OMIK) or external (OMEK) student organizations following the strengthening of moderation; a clear indicator of success.

The experiences of students at the Attanwir Institute of Bojonegoro in receiving religious moderation-based counseling reveal a complex socio-psychological reality in which traditional religious values intersect with contemporary mental health needs. Structurally, this counseling is implemented through weekly *halaqoh* (study circles), which function as more than a medium for transferring religious knowledge. These activities provide a regular space for students to encounter, discuss, and reflect on religious values within the context of their academic and social experiences. Based on observations, the *halaqoh* sessions have developed into a dialectical space where students are not merely passive recipients of religious doctrine but active participants who engage with and internalize the values of inclusiveness, tolerance, balance, and mutual respect. The interaction created within these sessions also allows students to express questions and perspectives that may arise from their encounters with religious and cultural diversity. This process contributes to a more serene academic climate in which differences in perspective are increasingly understood not as threats to religious identity but as part of the diversity of human experience and universal grace.

The internalization of moderation values within the *halaqoh* is facilitated through a curriculum that integrates classical texts (*kitab kuning*) with contemporary issues relevant to students' everyday lives. This integration enables religious teachings to be connected with current social realities, including relationships among students, differences in religious perspectives, academic pressures, and challenges arising from digital media. Counselors employ a humanistic and dialogical approach so that students do not feel pressured by rigid dogmatic interpretations, but instead experience psychological support and opportunities for open reflection. The counseling process encourages students to examine religious issues critically while maintaining respect for established religious principles. Field data indicate that the effectiveness of this counseling depends considerably on the consistency, accessibility, and relevance of the material delivered, particularly in addressing students' internal struggles in the digital era. Through continuous interaction and reflection, students gradually develop greater openness, emotional stability, and confidence in responding to differences.

The findings further indicate that the counseling process does not operate solely through the

delivery of religious material but also through the creation of a supportive social environment that reinforces the values discussed during the *halaqoh*. Students are given opportunities to translate the principles of moderation into everyday behavior, particularly through respectful communication, tolerance toward different viewpoints, and constructive participation in campus activities. In this sense, the *halaqoh* functions as both a learning forum and a practical space for developing students' spiritual and social competencies. The consistency between counseling content, interpersonal interaction, and students' daily experiences strengthens the internalization of religious moderation as a lived value rather than merely a theoretical concept. To provide a more measurable overview of the intensity, thematic focus, and implementation of this counseling, the following table presents the distribution of themes delivered during the last semester.

Table 2. Distribution and Depth of Moderation-Based Religious Counseling Materials

No	Strategic Material Focus	Frequency	Time Allocation (Min)	Focus of Student Transformation	Attendance Rate (%)
1	Inclusive Theology (Foundations of <i>Rahmatan lil 'Alamin</i>)	4 times	360	Reconstructing the paradigm of a Merciful God	98%
2	Psychology of Tolerance (Practice of <i>Tasamuh</i> & Empathy)	3 times	270	Deconstructing exclusive attitudes and social judgment	95%
3	Balance of Life (Management of <i>Tawazun</i> & Mental Health)	3 times	270	Emotional stability and spiritual coping mechanisms	92%
4	Digital Literacy & Resilience (Anti-Radicalism)	2 times	180	Strengthening cognitive filters against extreme content	94%
5	Ethics of Difference (Harmony of Schools & Cultures)	2 times	180	Navigational social skills in a pluralistic society	96%

Five interviewees consistently revealed that the *halaqoh* provided them with a strong emotional and spiritual anchor, influencing how they understood and expressed their religious identity. Participants described a gradual shift from initially exclusive or rigid perspectives toward a more open, tolerant, and balanced understanding of social and religious plurality. The material delivered was fundamentally rooted in the integration of sacred texts with justice-oriented humanitarian contexts, allowing students to connect religious teachings with their everyday social experiences. Through this process, religion was perceived not merely as a set of doctrines but also as a source of guidance for building constructive relationships with others.

The interview findings further indicate that experiencing religion in a moderate form provides students with a greater sense of existential security and emotional stability. Participants reported that the *halaqoh* helped reduce uncertainty and anxiety about the future while strengthening their sense of belonging within the campus community. The supportive atmosphere created through dialogue and reflection also encouraged students to express their concerns without fear of judgment. These experiences suggest that religious moderation-based counseling contributes not only to students' understanding of religious diversity but also

to the development of spiritual well-being through inner peace, social connectedness, and a stronger sense of meaning. The following table summarizes the in-depth interview results according to the identified meaning units and their implications for students' spiritual well-being.

Table 3. Matrix of In-depth Interview Results on Student Experiences

Name (In.)	Narrative of Experience Before Counseling	Cognitive & Affective Transformation After Counseling	Improved Dimension of Spiritual Well-Being
FA	Felt anxious and defensive when facing religious arguments in class.	Became calmer, listening to other perspectives without feeling faith was threatened.	Communal: Relationships with peers became more harmonious.
AT	Held rigid views and restricted social circles only to those with the same affiliation.	Flexible in interacting with local residents of different religious organizations.	Social: Inclusive and open social connectivity.
KH	Easily provoked and angered by hate-based religious narratives on social media.	Developed a critical filter; understood that hate is not part of the essence of religion.	Resilience: Psychological resistance to external negative influences.
IT	Viewed religious practices as a heavy and frightening burden of rules (rigid dogma).	Found inner peace; viewed God as the source of love and universal justice.	Transcendental: Peaceful relationship with the Creator.
DS	Struggled to accept differences in jurisprudence (<i>fiqh</i>) and often trapped in debates.	Realized diversity is <i>sunnatullah</i> ; focused more on the essence of humanity.	Emotional: Emotional balance and maturity of thought.

The methodology applied in this religious counseling reflects a highly varied andragogical approach, combining traditional lecturing with participatory interactive dialogues. The lecture method is maintained for its effectiveness in delivering foundational frameworks systematically and authoritatively. However, the success of this process is largely determined by open dialogue sessions that provide space for students to perform emotional catharsis. In these sessions, counselors act as facilitators who accompany students in finding solutions to their spiritual concerns without an authoritative stance, creating a teacher-student relationship based on compassion (*rahmah*).

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that religious moderation-based counseling can serve as an important educational strategy for strengthening students' understanding and practice of moderate religious values. This finding is consistent with previous research showing that religious moderation among university students can be developed through educational processes that emphasize tolerance, anti-violence, national commitment, and respect for cultural diversity. Andrian and Padli (2024), for example, found that students of Islamic Education at UIN Mataram demonstrated a relatively high level of religious moderation through these dimensions. Similarly, studies on religious moderation in higher education emphasize that the cultivation of moderate values requires continuous educational engagement rather than merely the transmission of theoretical concepts (Andrianto et al., 2025; Mahdiyyah & Jasminto, 2025). In the context of the Institut Attanwir Bojonegoro, the weekly *halaqoh* therefore functions not only as a religious learning activity but also as a

practical space for students to develop tolerance, openness, and balanced religious attitudes.

The findings also reinforce the importance of institutional involvement in preventing exclusive and radical religious attitudes among students. Previous research has shown that students may have diverse and sometimes incomplete understandings of radicalism, making them vulnerable to exposure to radical ideologies. Active involvement of lecturers and the provision of religious education in an open and moderate atmosphere are therefore important preventive strategies (Achmad et al., 2023). This perspective is supported by research on Religious Moderation Houses and other institutional programs, which demonstrate that universities can play a strategic role in strengthening religious moderation and preventing radicalism through structured educational and institutional initiatives (Ilmudinulloh et al., 2023; Murad & Rizki, 2022). The present findings extend this perspective by showing that counseling can provide a more interpersonal dimension to these institutional efforts, enabling students to discuss personal concerns, religious doubts, and social differences in a supportive environment.

The students' growing openness toward religious and cultural differences is also consistent with research emphasizing that religious moderation should be reflected not only in religious knowledge but also in students' attitudes and everyday behavior. Prayona and Wahyudi (2023) developed a measurement framework for religious moderation among university students, while Sa'idah et al. (2024) examined moderation through students' attitudes and behavior. Syukrilla et al. (2024) similarly highlighted the importance of understanding religious moderation among Indonesian Muslim adolescents. These findings help explain why the counseling process observed in this study does not simply produce changes in students' religious understanding but also encourages more constructive interpersonal responses. The internalization of moderation values appears to help students manage differences without immediately interpreting them as threats to their religious identity.

Furthermore, the present findings suggest that religious moderation needs to be embedded within a broader multicultural educational environment. Religious moderation education can contribute to the development of competencies required for students to interact constructively within diverse social settings. Dabutar et al. (2025) demonstrate that religious moderation can function as a strategy for developing student competence in multicultural educational environments, particularly by strengthening tolerance and preventing radicalism. This perspective is relevant to the Attanwir Institute, where students encounter different perspectives, backgrounds, and interpretations of religious issues. Thus, the counseling process should not isolate religious development from students' social and cultural experiences but should instead connect religious understanding with their capacity to live harmoniously within diversity.

At the institutional level, the findings are also in line with the argument that religious moderation in higher education can be intentionally designed through educational programs, campus culture, and religious activities. Muliadi et al. (2025), for instance, demonstrate that religious moderation in Indonesian higher education can be systematically internalized through institutional and sociological approaches, with particular attention to tolerance, anti-violence, national commitment, and accommodation of local culture. Similarly, Naim et al. (2022) and Naim et al. (2023) highlight the role of *madrasah diniyah* and *Ma'had Al-Jami'ah* programs in strengthening religious moderation within Islamic higher education. In this study, the *halaqoh* can be understood within the same broader institutional framework, although its distinctive contribution lies in combining religious learning with counseling-oriented dialogue

and reflection. Such integration allows religious moderation to become not merely an institutional policy but an experience that is personally meaningful for students.

Finally, the findings indicate that religious moderation-based counseling can strengthen students' capacity to respond to contemporary challenges without abandoning their religious identity. Khasanah et al. (2023) emphasize the importance of integrating moderation into the Islamic education system, while Halid et al. (2025) demonstrate that religious moderation in Islamic higher education is closely connected to the relationship between religion, institutional life, and campus social dynamics. The present study adds a counseling perspective to this discussion by demonstrating that students need not only moderate religious content but also a safe interpersonal space in which they can process religious experiences, emotional concerns, and social differences. Therefore, religious moderation-based counseling may be understood as a complementary approach that connects religious education, psychological support, and multicultural competence, thereby contributing to students' spiritual well-being, psychological resilience, and harmonious participation in a pluralistic campus environment.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that religious moderation-based counseling at Institut Attanwir Bojonegoro extends beyond an administrative intervention, representing a paradigmatic transformation in students' spiritual consciousness. Through structured yet humanistic *halaqoh*, students reconstructed their religious understanding, shifting from rigid and exclusive perspectives toward inclusive, just, and balanced (*wasathiyah*) views. The findings indicate that strengthening moderate religious values contributes to improved spiritual well-being, reflected in greater emotional stability, more empathetic conflict resolution, and stronger psychological resilience against academic pressures and radical narratives in the digital era. This model effectively integrates religious texts with humanistic realities, fostering a campus environment that supports both intellectual development and spiritual well-being. Practically, it offers a potential model for higher education institutions seeking to promote diversity while supporting students' mental health holistically.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors wish to express their deepest gratitude to the rectorate and the entire academic community of the Institut Attanwir Bojonegoro for their indispensable support, administrative cooperation, and for providing an open environment during the data collection process. Special appreciation is extended to the students who served as key informants; their willingness to share profound personal experiences and spiritual reflections provided the essential "authentic voice" for this study. We also acknowledge the *halaqoh* instructors and religious counselors whose practical insights into the dynamics of moderate spiritual guidance were invaluable. This research is expected to contribute meaningfully to the advancement of religious moderation and mental health discourse within the Indonesian higher education landscape.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

The authors confirm their significant and multifaceted contributions to the development of this research. M.A.A. served as the primary investigator, responsible for developing the conceptual framework, designing the phenomenological methodology, and conducting in-

depth field interviews. M.B. provided critical analytical support in interpreting the research findings and ensuring their validity through methodological triangulation. D.M.R. contributed as the lead reviewer, providing a comprehensive evaluation of the entire manuscript to ensure theoretical consistency, academic rigor, and overall alignment with scholarly standards. All authors actively collaborated in drafting the manuscript, performed critical revisions to enhance its intellectual depth, and approved the final version of the manuscript for publication.

COMPETING OF INTEREST

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest related to this study.

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