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Conceptualizing the SAHABAT Model: A Community-Based Socio-Ecological Framework for Cultivating Religious Moderation in Early Childhood

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Abstract

Religious moderation education in early childhood requires an approach that involves educational institutions, families, religious leaders, and local communities. This study aimed to develop a community-based Islamic education model for strengthening religious moderation values among young children in Tanjung Alam Village, Asahan Regency. A qualitative case study approach was employed. Informants were selected purposively, including PAUD/RA heads, teachers, parents, religious leaders, village officials, managers of children's religious activities, and young children. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and documentation, and analysed through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. Trustworthiness was ensured through source, technique, and time triangulation. The findings show that moderation values have been cultivated through religious habituation, role modelling, Islamic storytelling, collaborative games, social activities, and family-community interactions. However, these practices remain fragmented, lack structured guidelines, and have limited evaluation mechanisms. Therefore, this study developed the SAHABAT Model (Synergy, Analysis of Needs, Habituation, Applied Experience, Behavioural Guidance, Active Collaboration, and Thoughtful Review) as an integrated framework for child-friendly religious moderation. The model begins with stakeholder synergy and needs analysis, followed by value habituation, meaningful experiences, behavioural guidance, collaborative community engagement, and reflective evaluation. The SAHABAT Model strengthens tolerance, empathy, non-violence, justice, mutual cooperation, and respect for diversity through a contextual, humanistic, inclusive, collaborative, and sustainable approach.

Keywords: *religious moderation; early childhood; character education community-based education; SAHABAT Model*

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INTRODUCTION

Religious moderation has become a major issue in Indonesian Islamic education because society exists within a diverse social environment. Religious, cultural, linguistic, local-traditional, and socioeconomic differences should not merely be introduced to children as facts of life; they must also be habituated as part of everyday conduct. In this context, religious moderation should not be understood as a passive middle position, but as a fair, balanced, non-judgmental, non-violent, and respectful way of practising religion (Mubarok & Sunarto, 2024). The Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia defines religious moderation as a perspective, attitude, and religious practice that balances commitment to religious teachings with respect for humanity, national identity, and local culture. Its principal indicators include national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and acceptance of local traditions that do not conflict with religious values (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2019).

Religious moderation values need to be introduced from early childhood. At this stage, children do not yet grasp tolerance, justice, or non-violence through abstract explanations. They learn more effectively from experiences close to their lives, such as playing with peers, sharing toys, listening to stories, imitating adults, participating in religious activities, helping friends, and resolving minor conflicts peacefully (Musi et al., 2015). UNICEF emphasises that early childhood is a crucial developmental period in which children require responsive care, safety, protection, stimulation, and opportunities to learn through everyday interaction (UNICEF, 2024). Therefore, religious moderation education for young children should be concrete, enjoyable, repetitive, and grounded in role modelling.

The orientation of this study is consistent with Indonesia's early childhood education policy. The Early Childhood Education Learning Outcomes in the Independent Curriculum place religious values and character among children's essential foundational competencies. They encourage children not only to recognise God and their religious teachings, but also to develop positive conduct toward themselves, other people, and the environment. The national curriculum authority explains that these learning outcomes provide a framework for building foundational values, knowledge, and skills before children enter primary school (Badan Standar, Kurikulum, dan Asesmen Pendidikan, 2024). The Graduate Competency Standards for early childhood education similarly emphasise the integration of attitudes, knowledge, and skills developed through education (Kementerian Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah Republik Indonesia, 2025).

Nevertheless, religious moderation education in early childhood is still frequently viewed as the sole responsibility of formal educational institutions. Early childhood education programs or RA teachers are often positioned as the main actors, while families, religious leaders, managers of children's religious activities, village officials, and local communities are not consistently involved through deliberate planning. Young children, however, do not learn only in classrooms. They learn from the atmosphere at home, the language used by parents, adults' responses to difference, Qur'anic learning activities, peer interaction, community customs, and religious practices in their neighbourhoods. Religious moderation education is therefore unlikely to become firmly embedded when it relies only on early childhood education programs/RA institutions without continuity between school, family, and community (Nata, 2023).

Research on family involvement in early childhood education shows that such involvement extends beyond parents' physical presence at school. It includes educational activities at home,

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participation in school programmes, and communication between families and educational institutions. Otero-Mayer identify three major dimensions: home-based involvement, school-based involvement, and home-school communication (Otero-Mayer et al., 2025). This reinforces the argument that value formation requires an interconnected educational ecosystem rather than isolated activities.

Previous studies have examined the cultivation of religious moderation values in early childhood. The strengthening of religious moderation values in educational settings is influenced by institutional practices that involve leadership commitment, curriculum implementation, habituation processes, and teacher role modelling. Previous research indicates that these elements contribute significantly to the formation of moderate religious attitudes among learners (Wahab & Kahar, 2023). Showed that religious moderation can be introduced through learning themes, national activities, non-violent habituation, and local culture (Nurdin & Muqowim, 2023). Other studies have demonstrated that tolerance, non-violence, mutual cooperation, respect for God's creation, and justice can be introduced through storytelling, collective prayer, sharing activities, and role play (Mhd. Habibu Rahman, 2025). The cultivation of moderate Islamic character among young children requires learning experiences that are relevant to their social contexts. Previous studies indicate that activities embedded in children's daily social experiences contribute to the development of moderate Islamic values and character formation (Gusnarib & Dulumina, 2020). However, these approaches still require a broader framework that connects educational institutions, families, and communities in a continuous process of value internalisation

These studies nevertheless leave an important research gap. Most focus on teacher strategies, school culture, habituation within Early childhood education programs/RA institutions, or limited parental participation. Few have specifically formulated a community-based Islamic education model that integrates families, educational units, religious leaders, managers of children's religious programmes, village officials, and local communities within a single value-education ecosystem. In village life, children encounter religious and social education beyond classroom learning: they observe religious practice, listen to adults' advice, participate in social activities, and absorb values from community habits (Salma Rozana, Rika Widya, Hadi Saputra Panggabean, 2025).

The phenomenon motivating this study is the observation that efforts to cultivate religious moderation in early childhood remain largely reactive and institution-bound, emerging mainly in response to visible incidents of intolerance rather than through deliberate, everyday habituation across the settings in which young children actually live. Discussions of religious moderation in Indonesia have predominantly focused on socially and religiously heterogeneous settings, where exposure to difference is assumed to naturally invite tolerance (Siti Nurhamidah Auliani et al., 2024). Religiously and culturally homogeneous rural communities have received comparatively little scholarly attention, even though homogeneity carries its own risk: without deliberate exposure to alternative practices, perspectives, and ways of life, children raised in homogeneous environments may develop insular or exclusivist dispositions by default, not because moderation is rejected, but because it is never actively practised or modelled. This makes homogeneous village communities a scientifically important, yet underexamined, site for studying how religious moderation values can be deliberately instilled from early childhood, rather than left to emerge passively from social diversity alone.

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Tanjung Alam Village in Asahan Regency provides a relevant context for examining this issue. Religious moderation values are already strengthened through daily activities such as religious habituation, adult role modelling, Islamic stories, collaborative games, social activities, and children's interactions in family and community settings. However, these practices have not yet been organised into a shared model. Implementation remains fragmented, depends on individual initiative, lacks agreed guidelines, does not systematically involve all community elements, and is unsupported by an instrument for evaluating the development of moderation values.

This condition demonstrates the need to develop a contextual and operational community-based Islamic education model. Islamic education for young children should not stop at introducing worship, memorising prayers, or establishing ritual routines. It must also embody compassion, care, justice, mutual cooperation, respect for differences, and rejection of violence in behaviours that children can experience directly. Concrete experience is more meaningful to young children than verbal instruction alone, as early childhood learning is strongly influenced by habituation, interaction, play, and meaningful social experiences (Suyadi & Ulfah, 2021). The conceptual foundation for a community-based model draws on (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) ecological systems theory, which posits that a child's development is shaped not by a single institution but by the interaction of nested environments, including family, school, religious, and community settings that together form the child's ecological system. Accordingly, the community-based Islamic education model proposed in this study is grounded in the premise that religious moderation values are most durably formed when family, educational institutions, religious leaders, and the wider community act as a mutually reinforcing ecosystem rather than as isolated actors (Abellana et al., 2025).

Based on the foregoing discussion, this study aims to develop a community-based Islamic education model for strengthening religious moderation values among young children in Tanjung Alam Village, Asahan Regency. More specifically, the study seeks to identify existing practices for promoting religious moderation values, examine the roles of families, educational institutions, religious leaders, and local communities within the child's broader socio-ecological environment, identify the constraints resulting from fragmented implementation, and formulate the components of the SAHABAT Model as a framework for community-based Islamic education in early childhood.

It is important to clarify that the SAHABAT Model presented in this study is an analytic-conceptual model formulated inductively from qualitative findings in the field, rather than a pre-existing model that is being rebuilt, piloted, or tested through a developmental (Research and Development) procedure. The model represents the researcher's synthesis of practices, values, and gaps observed in the community, organised into a coherent framework that can subsequently be examined empirically in future action-oriented or developmental research.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to gain an in-depth understanding of community-based Islamic education practices within a specific social context. A case study design was selected because the study sought to examine a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life setting, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context cannot be clearly distinguished (Yin, 2018). The qualitative approach was also considered

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appropriate because the study explored the experiences, meanings, interactions, and social practices of educational actors (Creswell & Poth, 2022). More specifically, the study investigated community-based Islamic education practices, the experiences of educational stakeholders, local socio-religious dynamics, and the process of strengthening religious moderation values among young children in Tanjung Alam Village, Asahan Regency. Concretely, a case study was chosen because the phenomenon under investigation the fragmented, unstructured practice of religious moderation habituation across family, institutional, and community settings could not be adequately captured through a single-source or single-method design; it required tracing the same set of value-practices as they appeared in different, bounded settings within one village.

The study was conducted from January to June 2026. The research sites included Anaya Private Kindergarten, RA Al-Azzam, the family environments of the participating children, mosques or other places of worship serving as centres for children's activities, and community spaces used for local socio-religious activities. Informants were selected through purposive sampling based on their involvement, experience, and knowledge of early childhood education and religious activities within the village community.

Table 1. Characteristics of Research Informants

No	Informant Code	Role	Number	Selection Criteria
1	KS	Head of Kindergarten/RA	2	Understands the institution's policies and programmes
2	G	Kindergarten/RA Teacher	8	Teaches and assists children on a daily basis
3	OT	Parent	10	Has a child aged 4–6 years enrolled in Kindergarten/RA
4	TA	Religious Leader	3	Involved in community religious guidance
5	PD	Village Official	2	Understands village social and educational programmes
6	KP	Manager of Children's Activities	2	Manages TPA, mosque activities, or children's community activities
7	A	Young Child	10	Aged 4–6 years and included with parental consent
	Total		37	

Data were collected through four techniques. First, participant observation was conducted during learning activities, teacher child interactions, religious activities, play activities, children's behaviour when sharing, cooperating, and dealing with conflict, as well as adults' responses to children's behaviour. Second, in-depth interviews were conducted with heads of educational institutions, teachers, parents, religious leaders, village officials, and managers of children's religious activities. Third, focus group discussions were conducted to explore shared perceptions regarding children's needs, existing programmes, implementation barriers, and proposed forms of collaboration in community-based Islamic education. Fourth, documentation was used. The documents analysed included institutional programmes, activity

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schedules, photographs of activities, teaching materials, communication books, child development records, materials for children's religious learning, and village activity documents.

Table 2. Observation Focus for Strengthening Children's Religious Moderation

Value Dimension	Indicators of Children's Behaviour	Observation Setting
Tolerance	Does not mock peers; is willing to play with anyone; respects differences in habits	Play and learning activities
Care	Is willing to help; shares toys or food; pays attention to a sad friend	Classroom and social activities
Non-violence	Does not hit; does not use harsh language; resolves conflicts with teacher assistance	Free play and group activities
Justice	Is willing to take turns; accepts task distribution; does not take away the rights of others	Play and project-based learning
Mutual cooperation	Is willing to cooperate; maintains cleanliness together; actively participates in group activities	Classroom and environmental activities
Respect	Exchanges greetings; listens when others are speaking; respects teachers and peers	Routine activities and daily interactions

The data collection instruments consisted of observation focuses and interview guidelines. Although the total number of informants (37) is relatively large for a qualitative study, this number reflects the ecological, multi-actor design of the research rather than an attempt to achieve statistical representativeness. Because the study sought to trace how religious moderation values are enacted across seven interrelated stakeholder categories (institutional leaders, teachers, parents, religious leaders, village officials, activity managers, and children), a minimum breadth of representation within each category was necessary to capture cross-actor patterns; depth within each stakeholder group was still maintained through in-depth interviews and prolonged observation. Coding was conducted manually and iteratively following the data condensation procedure of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña: transcripts and field notes were first open-coded within each stakeholder category, then axially coded across categories to identify recurring value-practice themes, and data collection within each category continued until no new themes emerged (thematic saturation).

Table 3. Main Interview Guidelines

Informant	Focus of Questions
Head of Kindergarten/RA	Programmes for strengthening religious and social values; parental involvement; evaluation of child development
Teacher	Learning strategies; habituation; children's conflicts; storytelling and play methods
Parent	Habituation patterns at home; environmental influences; involvement in community activities

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Religious Leader	Role of the mosque/TPA; children's religious learning materials; socio-religious role modelling
Village Official	Policy support; child-friendly facilities; spaces for community collaboration
Manager of Children's Activities	Types of activities; children's participation; implementation barriers; programme needs

Data were analysed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña through three stages. The first stage was data condensation, which involved selecting, focusing, coding, and categorising data according to the research focus. The second stage was data display, which involved presenting the data in matrices, thematic tables, informant quotations, and maps of relationships among themes. The third stage was conclusion drawing and verification, which involved formulating patterns, examining data consistency, and constructing a proposed community-based Islamic education model. Data trustworthiness was established through source triangulation, technique triangulation, time triangulation, member checking, and peer discussion.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

Community-Based Islamic Education Practices in Tanjung Alam Village

The findings indicate that Islamic education for young children in Tanjung Alam Village takes place not only in PAUD/RA institutions but also within families, mosques/TPA, village communities, and children's play environments. This finding demonstrates that Islamic education in early childhood is ecological in nature because children acquire religious and social experiences from various interrelated environments. The family serves as the first setting for developing manners and basic habits. Educational institutions strengthen these values through more structured learning and habituation. Mosques/TPA provide socio-religious spaces, while the village community offers children direct experiences of mutual cooperation, social care, and togetherness.

Table 4. Community-Based Islamic Education Practices in Tanjung Alam Village

Educational Setting	Forms of Activities	Emerging Moderation Values	Main Findings
Family	Collective prayer, greetings, eating together, sharing, daily advice, respecting parents	Affection, responsibility, empathy, respect	The family serves as the initial setting for habituating children to moral and social behaviour
PAUD/RA	Stories of the prophets, group games, habituation of greetings, queuing,	Tolerance, justice, discipline, non-violence	Educational institutions strengthen values through routine

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	tidying toys, collective prayer		habituation and guided play activities
Mosque/TPA	Qur'anic learning, collective prayer, charity, Ramadan activities, commemoration of Islamic holidays	Care, togetherness, respect, religiosity	Mosques/TPA serve as socio-religious spaces that introduce children to religious practices and solidarity
Village community	Mutual cooperation, charitable assistance, community service, social activities, commemoration of Islamic holidays	Cooperation, solidarity, social care, mutual cooperation	The village community provides concrete examples of togetherness and social responsibility
Play environment	Playing together, sharing play equipment, taking turns, resolving simple conflicts	Tolerance, non-violence, justice	The play environment serves as a natural setting in which children learn to accept rules and manage conflict

The data presented in Table 4 show that community-based Islamic education in Tanjung Alam Village is supported by relatively strong cultural capital. Values such as greeting others, praying, sharing, respecting parents, participating in mosque activities, and helping others are already embedded in everyday practices. However, these values are not yet fully understood by all stakeholders as part of religious moderation education. Most practices are still interpreted as manners, morality, politeness, or religious habituation. Therefore, the main issue is not the absence of value-based practices, but the lack of a conceptual and operational framework that integrates these practices into religious moderation education for young children.

This finding indicates that religious moderation education in early childhood cannot be limited to formal learning activities. Children learn from adult behaviour, family communication patterns, school routines, religious activities, and social experiences in their surrounding environment. When children observe adults cooperating, sharing, speaking politely, and resolving differences without violence, they gain direct experience of moderation values. Conversely, when children witness harsh communication, mockery, or unfair behaviour, the values taught at school may become inconsistent with their social experiences.

Religious Moderation Values Developing in Early Childhood

Religious moderation values in early childhood are not reflected in children's ability to conceptually explain moderation, tolerance, justice, or non-violence. Rather, these values are more clearly demonstrated through concrete behaviours when children play, share, take turns, help their peers, follow rules, and resolve simple conflicts. Therefore, this study maps children's religious moderation values into six main dimensions: tolerance, care, non-violence, justice, mutual cooperation, and respect for differences.

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Table 5. Mapping Religious Moderation Values in Early Childhood

Moderation Value	Manifestation in Children's Behaviour	Supporting Activities	Observed Condition	Strengthening Needs
Tolerance	Children are willing to play with peers who have different habits, do not excessively select friends, and accept others in the group	Heterogeneous group play, Islamic stories about brotherhood, role-playing activities	Beginning to emerge, but still requires guidance from teachers and parents	Strengthening through stories, role play, and habituation in accepting peers
Care	Children help friends, share food, lend play equipment, and respond to peers experiencing difficulties	Sharing programmes, children's charity boxes, simple group work	Relatively easy to develop because it is closely related to children's concrete experiences	Consistent habituation between home and school
Non-violence	Children do not hit, mock, or forcibly take toys and are willing to apologise after conflict	Simple conflict mediation, positive language, peaceful games	Still fluctuates, particularly when children compete for toys or insist on winning	Support for emotional regulation and role modelling of non-violent communication
Justice	Children are willing to queue, take turns, accept game rules, and give opportunities to their peers	Rule-based games, group tasks, queuing activities	Not yet fully consistent because children are still strongly influenced by personal desires	Consistency of shared rules at home, school, and in play environments
Mutual cooperation	Children help tidy toys, clean the classroom, and assist teachers or peers in simple activities	Classroom community service, cleaning activities, simple social projects	Easily develops when teachers or adults provide direct examples	Routine, simple, and child-friendly social activities
Respect for differences	Children listen when others speak, do not mock peers,	Morning circle, child dialogue, family stories,	Develops through habituation of	Consistent role modelling by adults

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	respect adults, and accept differences in habits	adult modelling	role politeness and daily interactions

Table 5 shows that care and mutual cooperation tend to develop more easily because both values are closely connected to children's concrete experiences. Children find it easier to understand actions such as helping friends, sharing food, or tidying toys together than to understand tolerance as an abstract concept. Meanwhile, tolerance, justice, and non-violence require more intensive guidance because they are related to children's ability to regulate personal desires, wait for their turn, accept shared rules, and understand the needs of others.

These findings demonstrate that religious moderation education in early childhood should be based on direct experience. Values should not merely be explained through advice or lectures but should be presented through activities that children can see, feel, and perform. Therefore, group play, storytelling, queuing routines, sharing activities, simple community service, and child conflict mediation constitute important settings for strengthening religious moderation.

Barriers to Strengthening Religious Moderation in Early Childhood

Although community-based Islamic education practices have been implemented, this study identified several barriers to strengthening religious moderation values in early childhood. These barriers are not limited to learning activities in PAUD/RA institutions but also involve conceptual understanding, collaboration among stakeholders, learning methods, child development evaluation, the social environment, and the sustainability of community activities.

Table 6. Barriers to Strengthening Religious Moderation in Early Childhood

Aspect	Barrier	Impact on Children's Education	Strengthening Needs
Conceptual understanding	Religious moderation is still narrowly understood as tolerance	Moderation values have not been fully integrated into children's activities	Child-friendly religious moderation training for teachers, parents, and community leaders
Collaboration	Communication among homes, schools, mosques/TPA, and communities has not been structured	Value habituation is inconsistent across environments	Family school community communication forums and shared agendas
Learning	Methods are still dominated by lectures, memorisation, and verbal advice	Children have limited opportunities to experience values concretely	Storytelling, role play, social projects, and collaborative games
Evaluation	No observation instrument is available to assess children's	Children's value development is difficult to monitor systematically	Observation sheets for monitoring children's religious moderation development

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	moderation-related behaviour		
Social environment	Children may still be exposed to verbal conflict, harsh communication, or aggressive behaviour	Children may imitate unfriendly communication patterns	Positive parenting education and non-violent communication
Community activities	Children's activities have not been designed sustainably	Programmes remain ceremonial and have not developed into long-term habits	A community-based calendar of socio-religious activities

Although each stakeholder group already fulfils certain roles individually, the most fundamental barrier is the absence of a collaborative design that integrates families, PAUD/RA institutions, religious leaders, managers of children's religious activities, village officials, and local communities. Children's education is still generally regarded as the responsibility of schools. In fact, moderation values will become stronger when children receive consistent experiences at home, school, Qur'anic learning centres, and in their play environments.

Another barrier is the absence of an evaluation instrument specifically designed to monitor the development of children's religious moderation values. Teachers and parents have observed children's behaviour in everyday activities, but these observations have not been systematically documented. Consequently, children's development in sharing, taking turns, refraining from mockery, apologising, helping peers, and following rules has not yet been transformed into data that can be used to plan educational follow-up. This condition highlights the need for a simple and child-friendly observation instrument that can be jointly used by teachers and parents.

Development of the SAHABAT Model

Based on the field findings, this study formulated the SAHABAT Model as a community-based Islamic education model for strengthening religious moderation values in early childhood. The model was developed to address the main problems identified in the study, namely, value education practices that have already been implemented but remain fragmented, unstructured, unsupported by shared guidelines, and lacking an instrument for evaluating children's development.

SAHABAT is an acronym for Synergy, Analysis of Needs, Habituation, Applied Experience, Behavioural Guidance, Active Collaboration, and Thoughtful Review. These seven components are designed as an integrated educational process involving families, educational institutions, religious leaders, managers of children's activities, village officials, and local communities.

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Table 7. Components of the SAHABAT Model

Component	Objective	Forms of Activities	Main Actors	Indicators of Success
Synergy	To unify the commitment of families, PAUD/RA institutions, religious leaders, and communities	Family school community forums, shared agreements on values, activity calendars	Heads of PAUD/RA institutions, teachers, parents, religious leaders, village officials	The availability of shared agendas and agreed values to be consistently habituated
Analysis of Needs	To understand children's characteristic, developmental needs, and social environments	Mapping children's behaviour, communicating with parents, observing play environments	Teachers and parents	The availability of profiles describing children's developmental needs
Habituation	To establish moderation values as daily habits	Greeting others, queuing, sharing, apologising, helping friends, tidying toys	Teachers and parents	Children repeatedly demonstrate positive behaviour
Applied Experience	To provide children with concrete experiences	Storytelling, role play, group games, simple social projects	Teachers and managers of children's activities	Children are able to practise values through play and social activities
Behavioural Guidance	To ensure consistency in adult behaviour	Positive communication, conflict mediation, modelling apologies, respecting differences	Parents, teachers, religious leaders, local community members	Children imitate polite language and respectful behaviour
Active Collaboration	To connect moderation values with social life	Children's charitable activities, child-friendly community service, social visits, mosque/TPA activities	Village communities, religious leaders, village officials	Children participate in simple socio-religious activities

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Thoughtful Review	To monitor children's development and improve the programme	Observation sheets, teacher–parent reflection, activity evaluation	Teachers, parents, heads of educational institutions	The availability of developmental records and data-based follow-up actions

The SAHABAT Model differs from religious learning approaches that focus only on content transmission. The model positions early childhood religious moderation as an ecological process shaped by interactions among children, families, educational institutions, religious environments, and communities. It shifts the orientation from a school-centred approach toward a collaborative educational ecosystem in which multiple settings support consistent value formation.

Implementation Stages of the SAHABAT Model

The implementation of the SAHABAT Model consists of seven interconnected stages. First, Synergy establishes a shared commitment among teachers, parents, religious figures, community leaders, and other relevant stakeholders. This initial stage creates a common foundation for understanding child-friendly religious moderation and clarifies the roles of each actor in supporting children's development. Second, Analysis of Needs involves mapping children's initial behaviours, developmental characteristics, family practices, learning environments, and the social and cultural potential of the surrounding community. This stage ensures that the programme is responsive to children's actual needs rather than based solely on predetermined educational content. Third, Habituation focuses on consistently embedding the values of tolerance, respect, empathy, cooperation, fairness, and peaceful interaction into children's everyday routines. Habituation is implemented across interconnected settings, including the home, PAUD/RA institutions, mosques or TPA, and children's play. Fourth, Applied Experience provides children with opportunities to experience these values directly through developmentally appropriate activities, such as storytelling, role play, cooperative games, sharing activities, simple dialogue, and social projects. Through these concrete experiences, abstract values are transformed into meaningful practices that children can recognise and apply in their daily lives.

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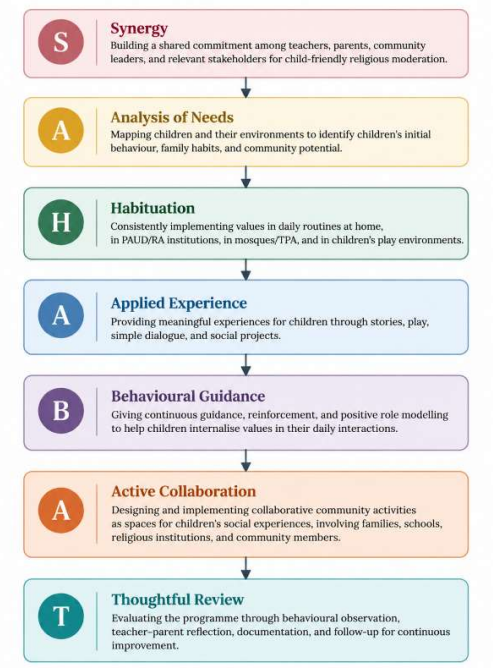


Figure 1. Implementation Stages of the SAHABAT Model

Fifth, Behavioural Guidance involves continuous guidance and reinforcement from adults as children encounter various social situations. Teachers, parents, and community members serve as role models and facilitators who help children understand appropriate ways of responding to differences, resolving simple conflicts, showing empathy, cooperating with others, and demonstrating respectful behaviour. Guidance at this stage is not intended as rigid control but as age-appropriate support that enables children to gradually internalise positive social and religious values.

Sixth, Active Collaboration extends learning beyond individual settings by engaging children, families, educational institutions, religious institutions, and community members in collaborative activities. Community-based projects, shared celebrations, environmental activities, acts of caring, group play, and other participatory programmes provide authentic social spaces in which children can interact with others and practise the values they have learned. Seventh, Thoughtful Review involves systematic reflection on children's behavioural development and the effectiveness of programme implementation through behavioural observation, teacher parent reflection, documentation of children's experiences, and feedback from relevant community actors.

The sequence demonstrates that the SAHABAT Model does not begin with content delivery, but with the identification of children's needs and their social environments. This is important because early childhood education should be grounded in children's concrete lives. After children's needs have been mapped, teachers, parents, and community leaders need to develop a shared understanding so that the values being habituated are not implemented separately. Value learning is subsequently carried out through activities appropriate to children's world, such as storytelling, role play, group games, sharing activities, and simple social projects.

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One-Semester Implementation Plan for the SAHABAT Model

The SAHABAT Model can be implemented over one semester through a gradual focus on specific values. Each month has a particular value focus, children's activities, parent or community involvement, and observable evidence of development.

Table 8. One-Semester Implementation Plan for the SAHABAT Model

Month	Value Focus	Children's Activities	Parent/Community Activities	Evidence of Development
1	Greetings and respect	Morning circle, greeting games, stories about politeness	Agreement on the use of positive language at home and school	Teacher observation records and parent reflections
2	Sharing and care	Sharing box, empathy stories, helping friends	Children's charity programme and habituation of sharing at home	Activity photographs, teacher notes, and children's stories
3	Non-violence	Role play for conflict resolution, practising how to apologise	Parenting activities on non-violent communication	Records of children's conflicts and follow-up actions
4	Justice and turn-taking	Queuing games, group assignments, rule-based games	Agreement on play rules at home and in the surrounding environment	Observation sheets on turn-taking behaviour
5	Mutual cooperation	Classroom community service, tidying toys, cleaning the schoolyard	Joint cleaning activities with residents or community members	Activity documentation and records of children's participation
6	Tolerance and togetherness	Family storytelling festival, group play, stories about diversity	Family community dialogue on the habituation of children's values	Children's portfolios and teacher–parent reflections

The implementation plan demonstrates that religious moderation can be fostered through simple activities that are closely related to children's daily lives and do not burden them with abstract concepts. The values are introduced gradually, beginning with those closest to children's everyday experiences, such as greetings, respect, sharing, and care, and progressing toward more complex values, including non-violence, justice, mutual cooperation, tolerance, and togetherness.

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Observation Instrument for the Development of Children's Moderation Values

To ensure that the strengthening of religious moderation does not remain limited to ceremonial activities, this study developed an observation instrument for monitoring the development of children's moderation values. The instrument uses developmental categories commonly applied in early childhood education, namely BB, MB, BSH, and BSB.

This instrument is not intended to measure religious moderation cognitively. Rather, it is designed to monitor children's socio-religious behaviour in everyday life. Through this instrument, teachers and parents can observe children's development more concretely, particularly in relation to sharing, taking turns, refraining from mocking others, apologising, helping friends, and following shared rules. Because the instrument targets externally observable behaviour rather than an internal, still-maturing psychological construct, its use does not presuppose that children possess a stable psychological understanding of religious moderation itself; it only requires that a behaviour has occurred and can be witnessed, which is methodologically appropriate for the developmental characteristics of early childhood.

Table 9. Observation Rubric for Children's Moderation Values

Indicator	BB	MB	BSH	BSB
Willing to share	The child is unwilling to share even after receiving guidance	The child is willing to share after being persuaded or guided	The child is willing to share in certain activities without being forced	The child shares spontaneously and encourages other children to share
Able to take turns	The child is unwilling to wait for a turn	The child is willing to take turns after repeated reminders	The child is able to wait for a turn in simple games	The child is able to take turns and politely reminds friends to do the same
Does not mock friends	The child continues to mock or laugh at friends	The child stops mocking after being corrected	The child does not mock others and begins to show respect for friends	The child demonstrates respect and defends friends who are being mocked
Willing to apologise	The child is unwilling to apologise after a conflict	The child is willing to apologise after receiving guidance	The child is willing to apologise after recognising a mistake	The child apologises spontaneously and attempts to correct the mistake
Helps friends	The child does not respond when a friend experiences difficulty	The child helps after being directed by a teacher or parent	The child is willing to help friends in certain activities	The child spontaneously helps friends and demonstrates empathy

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Follows shared rules	The child frequently refuses to follow the rules of games or activities	The child follows the rules after being reminded	The child follows the rules in most activities	The child consistently follows the rules and helps friends understand them

The rubric constitutes an important component of the SAHABAT Model because it makes the development of children's moderation values easier to observe and follow up. Teachers and parents do not merely describe a child as "good" or "not yet good"; instead, they can refer to more specific and observable behavioural indicators.

DISCUSSION

Religious Moderation Education in Early Childhood as an Ecological Process

The findings of this study indicate that religious moderation education in early childhood cannot be understood as a process that takes place solely in the classroom. Young children learn through repeated experiences within the family, educational institutions, places of worship, village communities, and play environments. In other words, religious moderation education operates as an ecological process because the values acquired by children are shaped by various interconnected environments.

These findings reinforce the view that early childhood education requires the involvement of multiple actors. Teachers play an important role, but they cannot work independently because the internalisation of values in early childhood requires continuity among children's learning experiences at school, at home, and in their social environment. Parents serve as children's first and primary educators within the family, while teachers are responsible for organising structured learning experiences in PAUD/RA institutions. The strengthening of religious moderation values in early childhood requires collaboration between educational institutions, families, and communities (Lambung Mangkurat et al., 2025).

Recent studies emphasize that effective early childhood education depends on strong partnerships between teachers and families, as collaborative relationships provide consistency between children's experiences at home and school and support their social, emotional, and moral development (Planke et al., 2025; Yamamoto et al., 2022). Furthermore, family involvement and community participation contribute to creating supportive learning environments in which children develop values through daily interactions, shared practices, and meaningful social experiences (Klaas, 2025). Previous studies emphasize that school family community partnerships provide a consistent environment for children's value development, as values introduced in educational settings can be reinforced through family practices and broader social interactions (Epstein, 2018).

Furthermore, religious leaders and village communities can strengthen religious and social values through role modelling, religious activities, local wisdom, and shared social experiences. This finding is consistent with (Abellana et al., 2025), who reported that religious moderation in early childhood is shaped not only through the formal curriculum but also through routines, social relationships, school culture, and family involvement. Limayasa likewise emphasised that families, schools, and communities can facilitate the integration of

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religious moderation values grounded in local wisdom into children's lives (Limayasa Ayu Oktarini, 2025). Therefore, when educational actors operate independently, value education tends to remain fragmented. Conversely, when all actors share a common agenda, religious moderation values are more likely to develop as collective habits (Pusztai et al., 2024).

Within the context of religious moderation, the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia identifies four principal indicators: national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and accommodation of local culture (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2019). In early childhood, these indicators need to be translated into simpler and developmentally appropriate forms of behaviour. Tolerance may be reflected in children's willingness to play with peers who have different habits (Ismaraidha et al., 2024). Non-violence may be demonstrated by refraining from hitting or mocking others and by being willing to apologise. Justice may be expressed through the ability to queue and take turns. Accommodation of local culture may be reflected in children's participation in child-friendly socio-religious community activities.

Religious Moderation Values in Early Childhood as Concrete and Behavioural

The findings indicate that religious moderation values in early childhood are more appropriately understood as behaviours that children experience and practise habitually rather than as concepts they are required to memorise. Children do not necessarily need to explain the definitions of tolerance, mutual cooperation, or justice verbally. More importantly, they should begin to demonstrate behaviours such as sharing, helping friends, waiting for their turn, apologising, and refraining from mocking others.

This finding is consistent with the characteristics of early childhood education, which emphasise concrete experiences, repetition, role modelling, and meaningful play. The Early Childhood Education Learning Outcomes in the Independent Curriculum also position religious values and noble character as part of the foundational phase. Therefore, value development cannot be separated from children's daily behaviour (Badan Standar, Kurikulum, dan Asesmen Pendidikan, 2024). Religious moderation education is consequently inappropriate when delivered solely through lectures, memorisation, or verbal advice. Children need to experience these values through group games, Islamic stories, sharing activities, simple social projects, and interactions guided by adults.

At this point, habituation becomes a particularly important strategy because young children internalise values more readily through repeated experiences than through conceptual explanations. Aji & Rasidi demonstrated that teachers' roles in instilling religious moderation values in early childhood are reflected in role modelling, positive communication, and the creation of a child-friendly learning environment (Aji & Rasidi, 2024). Reinforced this view by showing that children's religious and moral values can be developed through consistent habituation routines (Wardani et al., 2025). In the context of non-formal religious education, (Kamila et al., 2025) also found that the internalisation of moderation values in TPA institutions occurs through three main strategies: role modelling, habituation, and social participation.If values of moderation, tolerance, and respect for diversity are instilled from an early age, there is great hope that future generations will be capable of upholding unity and harmony in the life of the nation and state (Elis Siti Maria Ulfah, 2024).

The findings from Tanjung Alam Village extend these earlier studies by emphasising that habituation should not be confined to schools but should also involve families,

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mosques/TPA, village communities, and children's play environments. Effective habituation is therefore interconnected across educational settings, enabling children to experience religious moderation values consistently as social behaviour in their everyday lives.

Limitations of a School Centred Approach

One of the important findings of this study is that religious moderation education is still generally regarded as the responsibility of educational institutions. PAUD/RA teachers are positioned as the principal actors, while families and communities are not always involved in a structured manner. This perspective has significant limitations because young children spend a considerable amount of time outside school. Their experiences at home and in the surrounding environment may either reinforce or undermine the values acquired at school.

The integration of religious moderation values in early childhood education has been increasingly explored through institutional learning practices. Previous research has shown that religious moderation can be introduced through thematic learning, activities that strengthen national values, non-violent attitudes, and the appreciation of local cultural traditions (Nurdin & Muqowim, 2023). Nevertheless, the findings of the present study extend this perspective by demonstrating that institutional-based implementation alone is insufficient to ensure the sustainability of religious moderation values among young children. This study reveals that religious moderation requires a broader ecosystem involving early childhood education institutions, families, religious leaders, and local communities. Therefore, educational institutions should not be positioned merely as providers of moderation content, but as collaborative centres that facilitate shared responsibility among social actors. Through community-based collaboration, moderation values can be reinforced consistently across children's learning environments, daily interactions, and social experiences. This perspective highlights that strengthening religious moderation in early childhood requires a shift from a school-centred approach toward an ecological and participatory model of value formation.

Within this ecological perspective, teachers' communication practices represent an important dimension in strengthening religious moderation values among young children. The language used by educators influences children's emotional security, self-confidence, and social behaviour. Research indicates that verbal abuse may negatively affect children's socio-emotional development, including reduced self-confidence, behavioural problems, and psychological distress (Hasanah & Rahman, 2021; Kurniawan et al., 2023). In Islamic early childhood education, the use of harmful verbal expressions contradicts fundamental Islamic values such as rahmah (compassion), 'adl (justice), and karāmah insāniyah (human dignity), which emphasize respect, kindness, and the protection of children's dignity (Nata, 2021). Therefore, inclusive, empathetic, and non-judgmental communication becomes an essential strategy for creating a safe and supportive learning environment. When teachers employ positive and constructive language, children are more likely to feel valued, develop confidence, and participate actively in learning activities (Wiyani, 2022). Integrating Islamic values into teachers' communication practices transforms language into a medium for character formation and spiritual development from an early age.

Islamic early childhood educators consequently hold a significant responsibility as role models in implementing child-friendly and inclusive communication. Teachers' verbal interactions should reflect the Islamic values they seek to cultivate in children. Therefore,

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Islamic early childhood teachers require adequate knowledge and communication competencies that align with child-centred Islamic educational principles. Teacher education programs and Islamic early childhood institutions should provide training related to inclusive communication, positive language practices, and strategies for preventing verbal abuse as part of efforts to strengthen religious character education (Miratul Hayati, 2025).

The limitations of a school-centred approach are also evident in the evaluation process. When evaluation is conducted exclusively at school, children's value development at home and within their social environments cannot be fully understood. A child may demonstrate a willingness to share at school but may not yet be accustomed to doing so at home. Similarly, a child may follow the rules of classroom games but still experience difficulty taking turns in a play environment. Therefore, the SAHABAT Model proposes a reflective evaluation process involving both teachers and parents so that children's development can be observed more comprehensively.

The Village Community as Cultural Capital for Islamic Early Childhood Education

This study found that Tanjung Alam Village possesses significant cultural capital, in (Pierre Bourdieu, 2010) sense of embodied values and dispositions transmitted through everyday socialisation, for strengthening religious moderation in early childhood. This cultural capital is reflected in mutual cooperation, charitable assistance, community service, mosque/TPA activities, children's religious learning, Ramadan programmes, and Islamic holiday celebrations. These activities provide genuine opportunities for children to observe and experience the values of care, togetherness, cooperation, and respect.

This finding is important because religious moderation education is often discussed primarily within the framework of formal curricula and classroom instruction. In village communities, however, children frequently learn religious and social values through traditions, interactions among community members, religious activities, and community participation. Community-based Islamic education is particularly valuable because it encourages community participation, integrates local values, and positions mosques, families, and social environments as spaces for value education (MR et al., 2024). Based on these findings, strengthening religious moderation in early childhood requires intervention programs and educational services that adopt a family-community-centered approach, recognizing that children's value formation is shaped by interactions across home, educational, religious, and social environments. Such programs should consider variations in family conditions and community contexts by providing accessible and context-sensitive support for parents, teachers, religious leaders, and community members. Strengthening community-based support systems, expanding opportunities for collaborative religious and social activities, and providing practical guidance for value habituation at home and within community settings are essential to enhance the sustainability of religious moderation practices among young children (Sutiyah Nova Irawati, Supriyono Supriyono, Endang Sri Redjeki, 2026).

Within local communities, moderation values can be internalised through mutual cooperation, socio-cultural rituals, informal education, and community socialisation (Zubaidi & Jali, 2025). Children therefore learn values not only when teachers provide classroom instruction, but also when they observe adults sharing, helping others, maintaining cleanliness, communicating politely, and living harmoniously (Mastiana Nainggolan, 2023). The findings of this study extend previous research by demonstrating that child-friendly learning strategies

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need to be connected with community activities so that moderation values do not remain classroom simulations but become social practices experienced by children in everyday life (Tabi'in et al., 2025). Thus, children not only learn values through classroom simulations but also witness how these values are practised in community life.

The SAHABAT Model as a Community-Based Islamic Education Framework

The SAHABAT Model represents the principal contribution of this study. The model was developed in response to the need to integrate existing Islamic education practices within families, PAUD/RA institutions, mosques/TPA, village communities, and children's play environments. The model does not replace existing educational practices; rather, it restructures them into a more systematic, contextual, and evaluable framework for strengthening religious moderation in early childhood education.

The Synergy component highlights the importance of establishing shared commitment and coordination among educational actors. Religious moderation cannot be strengthened effectively when families, schools, religious institutions, and communities operate independently without a common vision. This component encourages the development of collective responsibility among stakeholders in creating a supportive environment for children's value formation.

The Analysis of Needs component ensures that educational programmes are developed based on children's developmental characteristics, family conditions, cultural contexts, and community environments. This component prevents the implementation of uniform programmes by encouraging educators and communities to identify specific needs and challenges related to religious moderation education in early childhood.

The Habituation component positions moderation values as daily practices rather than merely conceptual knowledge. Through continuous routines, children are introduced to values such as respect, empathy, cooperation, fairness, and tolerance in meaningful situations. Habituation enables children to internalise these values through repeated experiences in their everyday environments.

The Applied Experience component emphasises learning through direct participation and meaningful activities. Children develop religious moderation values through storytelling, play activities, social interactions, and community-based experiences. This component reflects the principle that early childhood learning occurs effectively when children engage actively with their surroundings.

The Behavioural Guidance component focuses on the role of adults as examples and facilitators of children's moral development. Parents, teachers, religious leaders, and community members are expected to demonstrate consistent attitudes and behaviours that reflect moderation values. Through modelling and guidance, children acquire values not only through instruction but also through observation and imitation.

The Active Collaboration component strengthens the relationship between children's learning environments. It connects families, PAUD/RA institutions, mosques/TPA, religious leaders, and village communities through coordinated educational activities. This collaboration expands the learning space beyond classrooms and encourages communities to become active partners in children's character development.

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The Thoughtful Review component functions as a reflective and evaluative process to monitor children's development and improve educational practices continuously. Through systematic observation and reflection, educators and parents can identify children's progress, challenges, and necessary improvements in strengthening religious moderation values.

The novelty of the SAHABAT Model lies in its community-ecological orientation. Previous studies have primarily focused on habituation strategies within educational institutions, teacher approaches, or the integration of religious moderation into early childhood education curricula. In contrast, the SAHABAT Model positions families, educational institutions, religious leaders, and communities as an interconnected ecosystem of value education. Therefore, the model functions not only as a learning framework but also as a social collaboration model for strengthening Islamic early childhood education.

Theoretically, this study expands the discourse on religious moderation in early childhood education from an institutional perspective toward a community-ecological perspective. Religious moderation is not viewed merely as curriculum content or a formal educational programme but as a value system developed through children's interactions across multiple educational environments. These findings reinforce the argument that Islamic early childhood education requires an ecosystem approach involving families, schools, religious institutions, and communities.

Practically, this study provides the SAHABAT Model as a framework for strengthening religious moderation through collaborative implementation between PAUD/RA institutions and local communities. The model can guide the development of educational programmes, communication mechanisms, value-habituation activities, child-friendly socio-religious programmes, and evaluation procedures for monitoring children's behavioural development. The observation instrument developed in this study also provides practical support for teachers and parents to assess children's development of moderation values more systematically. For PAUD/RA institutions, the SAHABAT Model can serve as a reference for integrating religious moderation values into daily learning activities. For parents, it provides guidance for aligning home-based habituation practices with school-based educational programmes. For religious leaders and village communities, the model creates opportunities to contribute to children's education while maintaining the professional role of teachers. For village governments, the model can support the development of child-friendly community programmes based on religious values, cooperation, social responsibility, and mutual respect.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that efforts to strengthen religious moderation in early childhood in Tanjung Alam Village are supported by existing cultural capital. Families, PAUD/RA institutions, mosques/TPA, village communities, and children's play environments have already promoted values of care, cooperation, respect, justice, non-violence, and tolerance. However, these practices remain fragmented, lack integrated guidelines, involve stakeholders inconsistently, and have not been supported by systematic instruments for evaluating children's development of moderation values.

The SAHABAT Model responds to these challenges by organising existing practices into an integrated educational framework. The model positions religious moderation as a value system developed through synergy, needs-based planning, habituation, applied experiences, behavioural guidance, active collaboration, and thoughtful review. By connecting families, educational institutions, religious leaders, and communities, the SAHABAT Model offers a

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contextual, collaborative, humanistic, and sustainable approach for strengthening Islamic education in early childhood.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that community-based Islamic education in Tanjung Alam Village, Asahan Regency, has a strong cultural-capital foundation for strengthening religious moderation values in early childhood. Moderation values, including care, tolerance, mutual cooperation, respect for others, justice, and non-violence, are already embedded in children's everyday experiences within families, kindergarten/ Raudhatul Athfal (RA) institutions, mosques/TPA, village communities, and play environments. However, these practices remain fragmented and have not yet been fully integrated into a coherent educational system involving all relevant actors in a planned and coordinated manner.

The findings indicate that the family serves as the primary setting for value formation through the habituation of prayer, greetings, sharing, respect for parents, and positive social behaviour. Kindergarten/RA institutions strengthen these values through religious learning activities, Islamic storytelling, group games, queuing routines, and social activities. Religious leaders, managers of children's activities, and village communities also contribute through religious programmes, mutual cooperation, charitable activities, and social interaction that introduce children to the values of togetherness and care. Nevertheless, no systematic collaborative mechanism currently exists among families, educational institutions, religious leaders, and communities for designing, implementing, and evaluating religious moderation education in early childhood. This empirical gap is not presented as a final conclusion but as the background rationale that motivated the formulation of the SAHABAT Model in this study.

In response to these conditions, this study proposes the SAHABAT Model synergy, Analysis of Needs, Habituation, Applied Experience, Behavioural Guidance, Active Collaboration, and Thoughtful Review as a community-based Islamic education model for strengthening religious moderation in early childhood. The model positions children as active subjects who learn through concrete experiences, habituation, role modelling, social interaction, and community participation. Unlike institution-centred approaches, the SAHABAT Model offers an ecological perspective that connects families, educational institutions, religious leaders, and communities within an integrated ecosystem of value education.

The primary contribution of this study lies in shifting religious moderation education in early childhood from an institutional model to a community-based model. The findings show that strengthening religious moderation cannot rely solely on the delivery of religious content but must also be realised through children's social experiences, including play activities, sharing, the habituation of positive behaviour, socio-religious activities, and adult role modelling. In addition, this study develops a behaviourally grounded, developmentally appropriate observation-based evaluation framework that can be used to monitor the development of children's moderation values in accordance with the characteristics of early childhood education.

In practical terms, the SAHABAT Model may serve as an alternative framework for PAUD/RA institutions, families, religious leaders, and village governments in designing more collaborative, contextual, and sustainable Islamic early childhood education programmes. The model can be adapted to the social, cultural, and religious characteristics of each community.

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Nevertheless, this study is limited by its focus on a single village context; therefore, the implementation of the model in different social settings requires further examination. Future research should develop quantitative instruments for measuring religious moderation values in early childhood, test the effectiveness of the SAHABAT Model through action research or experimental designs, and apply the model in communities with diverse social and cultural characteristics.

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