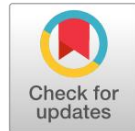


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Internalizing the Values of Religious Moderation through Narrative Education: A Study among Madrasah Aliyah Students in Pekalongan

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ABSTRACT

Background. The rise of exclusive and radical religious narratives among Indonesian students, driven by globalization and digitalization, poses a serious threat to social cohesion. Madrasah in Pekalongan, as strategic Islamic educational institutions, face the challenge that a purely cognitive approach to learning is insufficient to foster deep awareness of anti-extremism among students.

Purpose. This research analyzes the process of internalizing religious moderation values through narrative education and its implications for fostering anti-extremist awareness among madrasah students in Pekalongan.

Methods. This study employed a qualitative case study design involving purposively selected teachers and students in Pekalongan madrasah. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation. Data analysis was conducted thematically through data reduction, categorization, interpretation, and conclusion drawing. Data validity was ensured through triangulation and member checking to strengthen credibility.

Results. Findings show that narrative education through experiential stories, role modeling, and reflective dialogue engages both emotional and cognitive dimensions of students more effectively than cognitive approaches alone. Students are able to construct their own understanding of moderation values (*tawasuth, tasamuh, tawazun, i'tidal*) through lived experiences rather than passive acceptance. This process strengthens anti-extremist awareness and builds resilience against radical influences in the learning environment.

Conclusions. Narrative education is an effective pedagogical strategy for internalizing religious moderation values and developing anti-extremism awareness. It integrates reflective dialogue and exemplary storytelling to foster meaningful understanding and can be adopted as an innovative approach in madrasah education.

KEYWORDS

Extremism, Internalization of Values, Narrative Education, Madrasah, Religious Moderation

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INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of increasing religious-based extremism in recent decades has become a serious concern in the study of education, especially in the context of

education, especially in the context of character formation of the younger generation (Obulemire, 2025). In Indonesia, a country known for its religious, cultural, and ethnic diversity, these challenges are increasingly complex due to social dynamics influenced by globalization, digitalization, and unverified information flows. This condition fosters the emergence of diverse, even radical, religious narratives that can shape how students think and behave. In this context, educational institutions, especially madrasah, have a strategic role in instilling the values of religious moderation as a preventive effort against the development of extremism (Damanhoury, 2023).

The integration of narrative education facilitates the internalization of the values of religious moderation through stories, experiences, and reflections that instill the attitudes of *tawasuth*, *tasamuh*, *tawazun*, and *i'tidal* in a contextual manner. Through inspirational stories and social experiences, students come to understand the importance of tolerance, justice, balance, and moderation in daily life. The reflective and emotional nature of narrative education makes it an ideal approach for building moral awareness and deepening and sustaining the appreciation of the values of religious moderation (Mufi et al., 2023). Religious moderation is a concept that emphasizes middle (*tawasuth*), balance (*tawazun*), tolerance (*tasamuh*), and justice (*i'tidal*) in understanding and practicing religious teachings. This concept not only serves as a theological foundation, but also as an ethical framework in plural social life (Haidar et al., 2023). Religious moderation education in madrasah is very important because students are in cognitive and affective developmental phases that are vulnerable to narrow ideological influences. Therefore, the internalization of moderation values cannot be done through a cognitive approach alone, but requires a pedagogical strategy that can touch the dimensions of students' experiences and reflections in depth (Mukhibat et al., 2024).

Narrative education is one of the relevant approaches in this context because narrative education emphasizes the use of stories, life experiences, and reflection as learning mediums that allow students to build meaning personally and contextually (Z. Y. Zhou et al., 2023). Through narrative, students not only receive information but also internalize values through identification, empathy, and critical reflection on the experiences conveyed. This approach is considered effective in shaping moral and social awareness because it involves the emotional and imaginative dimensions of students (B. Yang et al., 2022).

Several studies show that narrative-based education has great potential to foster inclusive and tolerant attitudes among students. For example, research conducted by Tran et al. (2024) shows that the narrative approach can improve students' ethical reflection skills in dealing with social dilemmas. Meanwhile, a study by Huth et al. (2021) confirms that the use of stories in religious education can strengthen the understanding of values and encourage deeper internalization. In the Indonesian context, research on religious moderation has also developed, as demonstrated by Sinaga et al. (2024), who emphasize the importance of moderate Islamic education in maintaining social harmony. A bibliometric study of 71 Scopus publications (2020–2024) reveals religious moderation in Indonesia as a multidimensional construct encompassing socio-religious, cultural, and implementation dimensions. Dominant themes include the role of education, local cultural values, and moderation as a counter-radicalization strategy aimed at fostering social harmony based on tolerance and national commitment (Zaluchu et al., 2025). However, most research still focuses on curriculum and policy aspects and has not studied in depth pedagogical practices grounded in narrative experiences at the micro level, especially in madrasah. Normative approaches and macro-level policies still dominate research on religious moderation in madrasahs, while narrative-based pedagogical practices at the micro level have not yet been studied in depth. This gap is crucial to

address because the process of internalizing values of tolerance, empathy, and anti-extremism occurs through daily classroom interactions. Understanding narrative practices enables the identification of effective learning strategies to foster moderate attitudes among students while also strengthening a contextual, preventive educational model to counter the spread of extremist ideologies within the madrasah environment.

The research gap is evident in the lack of studies that specifically link the practice of narrative education to the internalization of the value of religious moderation to foster anti-extremism awareness among students. In fact, the narrative approach has great potential to bridge the gap between normative knowledge and students' subjective experiences in understanding religious values (Riyadi et al., 2026). In addition, local contexts, such as madrasah in Pekalongan, have not been explored much in the literature, even though they have unique socio-cultural characteristics that warrant study. The sociocultural characteristics of Pekalongan are marked by the religious traditions of Islamic boarding schools, ethnic and cultural diversity, and values of tolerance and cooperation, which support the instillation of moderate religious values in madrasah students.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze how the internalization of religious moderation values is achieved through narrative education practices and how this process contributes to the development of anti-extremism awareness among madrasah students in Pekalongan. This goal is important because it not only contributes to the development of Islamic educational theory but also provides practical implications for strengthening effective, context-based learning strategies in the face of extremist challenges.

The significance of this research lies in its contribution to integrating the narrative education approach with the concept of religious moderation in Islamic education. This research is expected to provide a new perspective on pedagogical practice that is not only oriented to knowledge transfer but also to the transformation of values and the development of students' critical awareness. In addition, the results of this research can be a reference for educators, policy makers, and education practitioners in designing learning models that are more inclusive and responsive to contemporary socio-religious challenges (Syamsuni et al., 2025).

To what extent does the socio-cultural ecosystem of madrasah in Pekalongan—including the influence of families, local pesantren traditions, and exposure to digital narratives—shape, reinforce, or even renegotiate the internalization of religious moderation values fostered through narrative-based educational practices in the classroom?. This research is expected to make a significant contribution to the study of religious moderation education, especially by employing the narrative approach as an effective pedagogical strategy. In addition, this research is also expected to enrich the literature on Islamic education that is responsive to global challenges, as well as provide an empirical basis for the development of more inclusive and civilized education policies.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative case study design to gain a deeper understanding of the process of internalizing the values of religious moderation through narrative educational practices that foster anti-extremism awareness among madrasah students in Pekalongan. This approach was selected for its ability to capture subjective experiences, social interactions, and pedagogical dynamics within an educational environment. This research uses a qualitative case study design, which allows researchers to explore in depth students' learning experiences, teachers' pedagogical practices, and the dynamics of social interaction in the madrasah environment. In this study, several key terms need to be defined operationally. Religious moderation refers to religious attitudes and practices that prioritize balance, tolerance, and justice in social life. Narrative education is a

learning approach that uses stories, experiences, and reflection as the main means in the learning process. Meanwhile, anti-extremism awareness refers to individuals' ability to recognize, reject, and criticize radical and exclusive religious beliefs.

The research population comprised all students of Madrasah Aliyah in Pekalongan involved in the learning process, with religious education teachers and secondary-level students as the primary subjects. This study employed purposive sampling based on informants' active involvement in narrative educational practices and their capacity to reflect on their learning experiences. Informants included teachers who implemented a narrative approach in their teaching and students who participated intensively in the process. The sample of teachers was selected through purposive sampling based on the following criteria: having taught for at least 5 years at a madrasah, having implemented a narrative educational approach in religious education for at least 2 years, and being involved in a program to promote religious moderation at the school. Meanwhile, students were selected based on their active involvement in narrative learning activities, their ability to reflect on the values of tolerance and religious moderation, and their representation of diverse grade levels and religious organizational backgrounds. This selection aimed to obtain rich data regarding the process of internalizing the values of religious moderation through daily learning experiences.

The research instruments included in-depth interview guides, participatory observation sheets, and learning documentation. In-depth interviews were used to explore the informants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of the values of religious moderation and narrative practices. The interview guide and observation focus were directed toward the process of internalizing the value of religious moderation through narrative education in madrasahs, including teacher strategies, student responses, learning interactions, attitudes of tolerance, respect for diversity, and the implementation of the value of moderation in students' daily behavior within the madrasah environment at MAN 1 Pekalongan, MAN 2 Pekalongan, and MA Rifa'iyah Kedungwuni. Participatory observation was conducted to directly observe learning interactions, pedagogical strategies, and student responses in the classroom. Documentation was used to supplement the data through analyses of instructional materials, student reflection notes, and classroom teaching materials. The research procedure was conducted in stages, beginning with a pre-fieldwork phase for site and informant identification, followed by data collection in the field for approximately two to three months. The researchers were directly involved in the research to establish rapport with the informants and obtain authentic data. All data were collected simultaneously and continuously until data saturation was reached. This study also compared pre-test and post-test results on 48 students using moderate religious attitudes as an indicator. Percentages indicate the proportion of students who responded positively to each dimension before and after the intervention. The Δ Changes value was calculated by subtracting the pre-intervention percentage from the post-intervention percentage.

Data analysis was carried out using thematic analysis techniques, which included data reduction, categorization, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Atkinson et al., 2012). The interview data were coded based on students' narrative meanings and grouped into themes such as tolerance, inclusivity, and non-violence to explain the internalization of the value of religious moderation at MAN 1 Pekalongan, MAN 2 Pekalongan, and MA Rifa'iyah Kedungwuni. The researcher identified the patterns of meaning that emerged from the informants' narratives and connected them to the theoretical framework of religious moderation and narrative education. To strengthen the analysis, the researcher also conducted a contextual interpretation of the social and cultural dynamics surrounding the learning process. This study employed strategies to ensure data validity and reliability through source triangulation, method triangulation, and member checking.

Triangulation was carried out by comparing data from various informants and data collection techniques. Member checking was conducted by confirming the findings with the informants to ensure the accuracy of the interpretations. In addition, the researchers also maintained data traceability through audit trails and continuous self-reflection during the research process (Vyhmeister et al., 2023).

Subjectivity was minimized through data triangulation, member checking with informants, peer discussion, the use of structured interview guidelines, and cross-verification among sources and field observation findings. This approach enabled the researchers to identify both common trends and the unique characteristics of the context under study. The scope of this study is limited to a single madrasah in the Pekalongan area, so the results are not intended to be broadly generalized, but rather to provide a deep contextual understanding. A further limitation is the potential for researcher subjectivity in data interpretation, though this has been minimized through rigorous validation procedures. Nonetheless, the methods used provide a strong foundation for comprehensively and meaningfully addressing the research objectives.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Patterns of Internalizing Religious Moderation Values in Narrative Education Practices

Based on observation, the internalization of religious moderation values in madrasah in Pekalongan occurs through structured, contextually oriented narrative education practices that engage students' lived experiences. Key findings indicate that teachers consistently employ experiential stories, exemplary narratives, and reflective dialogue as pedagogical tools to convey the values of religious moderation. This practice serves not only as a medium for delivering content but also as a means of fostering students' critical awareness of diversity and the potential for extremism (Riki Astafi et al., 2024). In this context, narrative education becomes a dialogical space that enables students to construct meaning through active engagement with the narratives presented.

The implementation of narrative education is evident in the use of inspirational stories drawn from the real-life experiences of teachers, religious leaders, and social events relevant to students' lives. Teachers do not simply present stories linearly; rather, they connect them to contemporary issues students face, such as intolerance on social media or religion-based conflicts. This process encourages students to engage in critical reflection on the values embedded in the narratives. These findings align with Johnston et al.'s (2023) view that narratives can shape how individuals understand reality and construct moral identities.

The exemplary narratives used in instruction are not limited to classical religious figures but also include contemporary figures who embody moderate values. This reflects a pedagogical adaptation responsive to changing times. Students demonstrate high emotional engagement when narratives resonate with their personal experiences. Such engagement serves as an entry point for deeper value internalization, as students not only understand the concepts cognitively but also perceive their relevance in everyday life. This finding supports Tengler et al.'s (2022) argument that storytelling in education enhances ethical reflection and social awareness among students.

Teachers play a central role in this process, not merely as transmitters of information but as narrators who bridge values and students' experiences. They act as facilitators, guiding reflective dialogue, posing open-ended questions, and cultivating an inclusive classroom environment. Rather than dominating discussions, teachers provide space for students to express their perspectives freely and critically. This role signifies a shift from a teacher-centered paradigm to a more participatory, student-centered approach. S. Yang (2024) emphasizes that in narrative education, teachers function

as co-constructors of meaning, collaboratively building understanding with students through shared experiences.

The media and strategies employed in narrative education also demonstrate considerable variation. Teachers utilize diverse media, including short videos, narrative texts, and dialogue simulations, to enrich the learning experience. These media not only enhance engagement but also broaden students' perspectives on religious issues. Narrative strategies such as role-playing, group discussions, and reflective writing enable students to express their understanding personally. This approach has proven effective in promoting active engagement and strengthening value internalization. These findings are consistent with Rodrigues (2023), who argues that pedagogical approaches involving active student participation enhance the effectiveness of value-based learning in religious education.

The values of religious moderation conveyed through these practices include *tawasuth* (moderation), *tasamuh* (tolerance), *tawazun* (balance), and *i'tidal* (justice and proportionality). The principle of *tawasuth* is reflected in the emphasis on a balanced, non-extreme approach to religious understanding. *Tasamuh* is manifested in respect for differences and the ability to coexist peacefully. *Tawazun* emphasizes the balance between spiritual and social dimensions of religious life, while *I'tidal* is reflected in fair and proportionate responses to differences. Students demonstrate a more mature understanding of these values after participating in narrative education, as evidenced by shifts in attitudes and perspectives on religious issues (Huda, 2024).

These findings suggest that narrative education holds strong potential as an effective strategy for internalizing religious moderation values. The narrative process enables students to connect abstract values with concrete experiences, thereby strengthening both understanding and commitment. This is particularly important in preventing extremism, as awareness developed through reflective experience tends to be more resilient to radical influences. These results support Fauzi et al.'s (2024) view that moderate Islamic education must address not only cognitive dimensions but also affective and practical ones. Compared to previous studies, these findings are consistent with the view that contextual and participatory approaches are more effective in value education. However, this study contributes new insights by demonstrating how specific narrative practices can be applied to internalize religious moderation values within the madrasa context. The local context of Pekalongan adds a distinctive dimension, shaped by strong religious culture and traditions of moderation. Nevertheless, alternative explanations should be considered. Changes in students' attitudes may not be solely attributable to narrative education practices but may also be influenced by family and social environments that promote moderate values. Additionally, individual student characteristics, such as openness and prior experiences, may affect the internalization process. Therefore, these findings should be interpreted within a broader context that acknowledges external contributing factors.

The implications of this study are significant for the development of educational practices in madrasah. Teachers should be encouraged to develop competencies in applying narrative approaches as effective instructional strategies. Curricula should also provide greater opportunities to integrate moderation values through contextual and reflective methods. Furthermore, teacher training in narrative education and religious moderation is essential to ensure the sustainability of these practices. The internalization of religious moderation values through narrative education represents an effective and relevant approach within contemporary Islamic education. This approach not only facilitates the transmission of value but also fosters students' critical and reflective awareness in addressing the challenges posed by religious extremism.

Student Learning Experiences in Constructing the Meaning of Religious Moderation among Madrasah Students

Students’ learning experiences in narrative-based learning contribute significantly to the process of constructing the meaning of religious moderation (Hao, 2023). Field findings indicate that students are not merely recipients of information but also active participants, emotionally, cognitively, and socially engaged in the learning process. This engagement is reflected in their enthusiastic responses to storytelling, active participation in reflective discussions, and their ability to relate the values of moderation to their personal experiences and social realities.

Classroom observations show that when teachers present stories about religion-based social conflicts and their resolution through a moderate approach, students respond in diverse yet constructive ways. Some students ask critical questions, while others share relevant personal experiences. One student from MA Rifa’iyah Kedungwuni stated, *“I have come to understand that not all differences need to be debated; sometimes we must respect one another even when we disagree”* (Interview, Student A). This statement reflects the internalization of *tasamuh* (tolerance) values emerging from narrative learning experiences. Student engagement in narrative learning is also evident in both personal and social reflection activities. Students not only comprehend stories at a literal level but also reflect on their deeper meanings and relate them to everyday life. In one written reflection session, a student from MA Rifa’iyah Kedungwuni wrote, *“I once had a disagreement with my friend about how to worship, but after this lesson, I tried to understand that everyone has their own way of practicing their faith.”* This reflection demonstrates a transformation in understanding that leads to a more moderate and inclusive attitude.

The process of social reflection is further observed in group discussions, where students exchange perspectives and build mutual understanding. The dynamics of student interaction reveal a constructive negotiation of meaning, where differences of opinion are not seen as sources of conflict, but as opportunities to broaden perspectives. Observations also indicate that students tend to use more inclusive language and demonstrate empathy toward differing viewpoints. This suggests that narrative-based learning not only shapes individual understanding but also fosters a dialogical culture within the classroom.

The following is a summary of the main findings derived from observations and interviews:

Table 1. Research Findings Related to Aspects of the Learning Experience

Aspects of the Learning Experience	Key Findings	Indicator
Student response	Enthusiastic and reflective	Observed through students’ active questioning, spontaneous responses, and sharing of personal experiences during narrative sessions
Engagement	Active and participatory	Identified through students’ involvement in discussions, role-play activities, and collaborative classroom interactions
Personal reflection	In-depth and contextual	Measured through reflective writing, students’ narratives, and verbal reflections connecting lessons to daily life experiences
Social interaction	Inclusive and dialogical	Observed through respectful communication, openness to differing opinions, and willingness to engage in cross-perspective dialogue

Table 1 shows that narrative-based learning experiences play an important role in shaping awareness of religious moderation. Active student involvement in the learning process enables them to construct meaning independently and contextually. This aligns with constructivist theory, which posits that knowledge is built through interaction between individuals and their environment (Fahrozi et al., 2024). In this context, narrative serves as a stimulus that triggers reflection and meaning construction.

The reflection process undertaken by students indicates that narrative learning can reach affective and moral dimensions that are often overlooked by conventional learning approaches. Narrative experiences enable individuals to understand themselves and the world more deeply through meaningful stories (Shin et al., 2023). These findings reinforce the argument that value education (particularly religious moderation) requires an approach that integrates cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions. The integration of findings with theory also demonstrates that social interaction in learning plays a crucial role in shaping inclusive understanding. Learning occurs through social interaction and cultural mediation (X. Zhou, 2024). In this study, group discussions and reflective dialogue serve as spaces where students mediate their understanding of moderation values. This process generates richer, more contextually meaningful content by incorporating diverse perspectives.

These findings are further supported by previous research indicating that narrative approaches are effective in fostering tolerant and inclusive attitudes. Ryan and Aasetre (2021) found that storytelling can enhance students' ethical awareness and reflective skills. Similarly, Hidayati (2024) shows that religious learning that involves active student participation is more effective at shaping values than purely instructional approaches. In the Indonesian context, Nurdalia (2023) highlights the importance of moderate, context-specific Islamic education in addressing the challenges posed by extremism. However, this study also found that not all students respond to narrative learning in the same way. Some students exhibit lower engagement, particularly those with limited experiential backgrounds or less familiarity with reflective methods. This suggests that individual factors, such as learning readiness and prior experience, also influence the meaning-making process. Therefore, teachers need to adapt instructional strategies to effectively reach all students.

Narrative education can serve as an effective strategy for internalizing the values of religious moderation and fostering anti-extremism awareness. This approach enables students to understand values contextually and apply them in their daily lives. Moreover, narrative learning contributes to building a culture of dialogue and inclusivity within the madrasah environment, which is a critical foundation for preventing the spread of extremism. These findings demonstrate that students' learning experiences in narrative-based learning play a significant role in constructing the meaning of religious moderation. This process not only shapes cognitive understanding but also cultivates reflective, empathetic, and inclusive attitudes that underpin anti-extremism awareness.

Implications of Narrative Education for the Development of Anti-Extremism Awareness among Madrasah Students

This study was conducted in three state aliyah madrasahs in Pekalongan City and Regency (MAN 1 Pekalongan, MAN 2 Pekalongan, and MA Rifa'iyah Kedungwuni) between October 2023 and March 2024. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and analysis of curriculum documents. In total, the study involved 12 teachers from the subjects of Aqidah Akhlak (Moral Theology), Islamic Cultural History, and Civic Education, as well as six student focus groups comprising 48 students in grades 10-12.

The main findings indicate that the implementation of narrative education, a learning approach that uses stories, historical narratives, and character experiences as a medium for value transmission, significantly contributes to reshaping students' perspectives on religious issues related to extremism. These changes are evident across three key dimensions: cognitive (enhanced understanding of diverse religious interpretations), affective (increased tolerance and empathy toward others), and conative (a stronger tendency to reject violent narratives in the name of religion).

Table 2. Research Informant Profile

No	Informants	Institutions	Job Title/Status	Long Teaching/Learning
1	Ustaz AR	MAN 1 Pekalongan	Teacher of Moral Faith	14 years
2	Mrs. SN	MAN 2 Pekalongan	SKI & PPKn Teacher	9 years
3	Ustaz MF	MA Rifa'iyah	Fiqh & Tafsir Teacher	17 years
4	FN (Student)	MAN 1 Pekalongan	Grade XI Students	2 years
5	A-Z (Student)	MAN 2 Pekalongan	Grade XII Students	3 years
6	RM (Student)	MA Rifa'iyah	Grade XI Students	2 years

Source: Research primary data, 2026

Table 3. Changes in Students' Attitudes Before and After the Implementation of Narrative Education

Attitude Dimension	Before Intervention (%)	After Intervention (%)	Changes
Accepting the diversity of interpretations	41,7	79,2	+37,5
Reject violence in the name of religion	58,3	91,7	+33,4
Be critical of extreme narratives	33,3	72,9	+39,6
Empathy for victims of intolerance	50,0	87,5	+37,5
Trust in cross-faith dialogue	45,8	83,3	+37,5

Source: Focus group pre-test and post-test results, processed by researchers (2026). N = 48 students.

The results of classroom observations indicate that teachers who integrate historical narratives, such as the Prophet Muhammad's tolerance toward non-Muslims in Medina or the stories of the Walisongo in peacefully spreading Islam across the archipelago, can foster a more critical and reflective discussion environment. Students do not merely receive information; they actively engage in dialogue with the values embedded in these narratives and relate them to contemporary realities.

Ustaz AR, a Moral Beliefs teacher at MAN 1 Pekalongan, explained:

"If we only talk about the dangers of radicalism, students quickly lose interest. However, when I tell them how Kiai Ahmad Dahlan or Hadratussyaikh Hasyim Asy'ari responded to religious conflicts with patience and wisdom, they immediately become engaged. They ask questions, debate, and eventually come to realize for themselves that extremism contradicts the true values of Islam." (Interview, November 14, 2023)

The study participants' statements further support these findings. A student identified by the initials FN from MAN 1 Pekalongan stated:

"In the past, when a friend said that people of different religions were enemies, I did not feel confident enough to object. However, after learning about the Charter of Medina and the story of Sunan Kudus, who refrained from slaughtering cows out of respect for Hindus, I was able to respond with arguments. I realized that tolerance is not a weakness, but a strength." (Focus group interview, December 3, 2023)

Table 4. Indicators of the Emergence of Anti-Extremism Awareness Based on Class Observations

Indicator	Frequency of Occurrence (per 10 sessions)	Quality of Expression
Students ask critical questions over a single narrative	7,8	Height
Students reject narratives of violence argumentatively	6,4	Medium-High
Students refer to the value of moderation in responding to issues	8,1	Height
Students show empathy to different groups	7,2	Height
Students identify the characteristics of extremist narratives	5,9	Medium

Source: Researcher observation sheet, October 2024 – March 2026

The table above shows that the challenges in implementation include: (1) not all teachers possess adequate storytelling competence as a pedagogical tool; (2) the influence of extremist digital content, which is easily accessible to students outside of school, remains a counterproductive force that is difficult to control; and (3) not all parents support a dialogical approach, as they believe traditional values should be conveyed dogmatically.

Narrative education is not merely a learning strategy but an instrument for transforming values that operates at the deepest levels of students' moral consciousness. Its mechanism is imaginative and empathic: narratives invite students to "step into" a character's experience, feel the moral dilemmas they face, and reflect on them within the context of their own lives. This process effectively cultivates anti-extremism awareness, going beyond mere factual knowledge about the dangers of radicalism (Hamid et al., 2024). The most significant attitudinal change occurred in the cognitive-critical dimension, particularly in students' ability to critically evaluate exclusive religious narratives that contain dehumanizing elements. Students who had previously been inclined to accept a single narrative about the "enemies of Islam" began to question the sources, contexts, and motives behind such narratives after engaging with stories of moderation from historical and local figures.

Mrs. SN, an SKI and PPKn teacher at MAN 2 Pekalongan, explained this dynamic: *"There are students who have been exposed to jihad-related content on social media. At first, he was very withdrawn and defensive. However, after I discussed the historical context of jihad in Islam and the Prophet's never forcing religious conversion, his attitude gradually changed; he began to question whether what he had been reading was actually true."* (Interview, January 21, 2024)

These findings indicate that narrative education operates through a constructive cognitive dissonance mechanism: rich, multidimensional narratives create internal contradictions between students' existing understandings and new, more complex perspectives. This tension drives reflection and ultimately leads to the reconstruction of values. The findings of this study strongly resonate with the theoretical framework of narrative pedagogy developed by Bin Muhammad Yusoff (2023) and later expanded by Soni and Bansal (2025) in the context of value education. From this perspective, narrative functions not only as a medium for conveying information but also as a "container of meaning" that enables students to actively construct meaning through processes of identification, projection, and self-reflection. These findings are also consistent with the transformative learning theory, as formulated by Misawa (2024). Misawa (2024) argues that a profound shift in perspective, what he calls "perspective transformation", occurs when individuals encounter a disorienting experience that compels them to question their underlying assumptions. In

this study, historical narratives of Islamic moderation function as “disorienting dilemmas” that trigger a transformation in students’ perspectives on extremism.

Based on a social psychology perspective, the results can also be explained through the extended contact hypothesis proposed by Nhu Quynh (2026). This theory suggests that awareness of positive intergroup relationships, even when encountered indirectly through stories or narratives, is sufficient to reduce prejudice and enhance intergroup empathy. Narratives about Muslim figures living harmoniously alongside adherents of other religions serve as a form of “extended contact,” expanding students’ empathy boundaries. Within the field of Islamic education, these findings are also relevant to the concept of *tarbiyah nafsiah* (soul education) discussed by Prasetya et al. (2023). According to Prasetya et al. (2023), true Islamization is not merely the transmission of knowledge (*ta’lim*) but the transformation of character and the soul (*tarbiyah*), which can only be achieved through a holistic approach that engages emotional and spiritual dimensions, elements inherently present in narrative. Narrative education in madrasah is therefore epistemologically aligned with the classical Islamic educational tradition, which is rich in storytelling as a vehicle for moral formation.

Several relevant prior studies further support the findings of this study. Yusuf et al. (2023), in their research on Islamic boarding schools and religious moderation in Indonesia, they emphasized that traditional Islamic educational institutions possess strong social capital that can serve as a foundation for moderation, but need to update their methodologies to address the challenges posed by digital radicalism. This study extends Azra’s findings by demonstrating that a narrative approach is an effective method of pedagogical renewal in this context. Research by Hefner (2009), which examined recruitment patterns of Islamist movements among Indonesian students, found that exclusive identity narratives are a primary instrument used to attract adolescents into extremism. Hasan’s findings indirectly support the urgency of this study: countering extremist narratives requires equally strong counternarratives that are emotionally and ideologically compelling, rather than relying solely on normative discourse. Narrative education triggers cognitive dissonance through three specific mechanisms: First, stories based on real-world conflicts (such as intolerance on social media) create a clash between students’ exclusive beliefs and the moderate reality presented. Second, when students emotionally identify with narrative characters, they experience internal tension when the characters’ perspectives conflict with their own biases. Third, reflective dialogue encourages students to uncover contradictions between their held values and actual behavior, as reflected in students’ written reflections acknowledging differences in their friends’ religious practices. It is this cognitive discomfort that actually drives a reconstruction of meaning toward an inclusive attitude.

Umar et al.’s (2024) study on the implementation of Moderate Islamic Education in Central Java madrasah found that learning approaches grounded in the experiences and stories of local figures are more effective at fostering tolerance than purely textual or doctrinal approaches. These findings align with the present study and reinforce the argument that local contextualization in narratives, such as stories of the Walisongo and scholars from Pekalongan, enhances the resonance of values among students. A comparative study by Othman (2006) on school-based counter-extremism programs in three Southeast Asian Muslim countries concluded that successful programs are not those that rely on overt anti-extremism propaganda, but rather those that cultivate students’ critical thinking and empathy through a humanistic approach. This conclusion is consistent with this study’s findings, which show that rejection of extremism develops organically when students are equipped with narratives that broaden their perspectives.

Regarding implementation challenges, the findings of this study are consistent with Aflahah et al. (2023), who highlighted that one of the main challenges in moderation education in madrasah

is the gap between the formal curriculum and classroom pedagogical practices. Some teachers still rely on memorization and indoctrination, resulting in the ineffective transmission of moral values. This study adds a new dimension to Rokhmad's findings by identifying narrative education as a bridge that can close this gap, while also emphasizing the urgent need to enhance teachers' capacity for pedagogical storytelling.

Based on the findings of this study, the research recommends that the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Education and Culture systematically integrate narrative education into the national madrasah curriculum, accompanied by teacher training based on a narrative-reflective approach. The government also needs to develop learning modules on religious moderation, grounded in contextual stories and responsive to local dynamics.

CONCLUSION

This research concludes that narrative-based education in madrasahs is an effective means of internalizing the values of religious moderation and promoting anti-extremism awareness among students. The values of *tawasuth*, *tasamuh*, *tawazun*, and *i'tidal*, delivered through contextual narratives, proved more effective both emotionally and cognitively than purely doctrinal approaches. Teachers acted as facilitators, helping students reflect personally and socially, enabling them to adopt moderation not only as knowledge but also as part of their moral identity. These findings contribute to Islamic education literature by showing that narrative pedagogy can connect normative teachings with students' lived experiences, an area still underexplored in madrasah studies. Practically, this study emphasizes the need for pedagogical reform that prioritizes character development and critical awareness. Integrating narrative approaches and strengthening teachers' storytelling skills are strategic steps toward building moderate, inclusive, and resilient religious consciousness among students. Madrasah stands as an irreplaceable frontier in the battle against extremism: narrative education is not a supplementary pedagogy but a transformative imperative that must be institutionalized across Islamic education systems. By embedding *tawasuth*, *tasamuh*, *tawazun*, and *i'tidal* through contextual storytelling, madrasah students develop a resilient moral identity that doctrinal approaches alone cannot forge. Future research should examine the long-term durability of anti-extremism attitudes cultivated through narrative education and investigate how digital counternarratives can be systematically integrated into madrasah curricula to counter radicalization in the age of social media.

DECLARATION OF AI AND AI ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

During the writing of this work, the author used ChatGPT, DeepL, and Grammarly. ChatGPT was used to help generate ideas, draft the text, and formulate arguments. DeepL was used to translate the text accurately and naturally for international publication. Grammarly was used to improve grammar, style, and clarity. After using these tools and services, the author has reviewed and edited the content as needed and takes full responsibility for the publication's content.

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AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.

Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; Investigation.

Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.

Author 4: Formal analysis; Methodology; Writing - original draft.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known financial conflicts of interest or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this manuscript.

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