

RESEARCH

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Theo-Anthropocentric Religious Moderation Education in an Indonesian Islamic Boarding School

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This study examines the theo-anthropocentric approach as a model of religious moderation education at Askaril Ikhlas Blower Islamic Boarding School, Aceh, Indonesia. The study is grounded in the need to strengthen students' moral character, religious commitment, tolerance, and social responsibility amid moral decline, social conflict, and the challenges of globalization and digital transformation. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observation, and documentation involving foundation administrators, boarding school leaders, religious teachers, dormitory supervisors, and students. The findings reveal that religious moderation is internalized through learning activities, worship habituation, student coaching, exemplary behavior, social interaction, and daily boarding school culture. The theo-anthropocentric approach is reflected in three main dimensions: divine awareness, humanitarian values, and environmental responsibility. Divine values are developed through Qur'anic learning, prayer discipline, dhikr, and religious guidance; humanitarian values are strengthened through tolerance, cooperation, compassion, and social care; while environmental responsibility is practiced through cleanliness, water conservation, and care for nature. The study also identifies tazkiyatun nafs through takhalli, tahalli, and tajalli as a spiritual strategy for transforming religious moderation from a cognitive concept into moral and social practice. This study contributes a holistic framework for religious moderation education that integrates faith, humanity, social ethics, and ecological awareness within Islamic boarding school life.

Keywords: theo-anthropocentrism; religious moderation; Islamic boarding school; moral education; tazkiyatun nafs

Introduction

Moral decline, deviant student behavior, student brawls, and the use of prohibited substances among young people reflect the weakening of moral control, religious commitment, and character formation in social life (Hardy & Taylor, 2024; Krettenauer, 2022). This condition is influenced by weak religious internalization, peer pressure, digital culture, family conflict, and low parental supervision (Walker, 2024; Xu, 2022). In this context, Islamic boarding schools have a strategic role in strengthening students' morals through religious habituation, discipline, exemplary leadership, and value-based education (Mujahid, 2021; Nasir & Rijal, 2021; Zaluchu et al., 2025). Pesantren also contribute to religious moderation by internalizing tolerance,

balance, non-violence, and respect for diversity in students' daily lives (Kubro & Ali, 2021; Thoriquattyas & Hanun, 2020). However, globalization and digital transformation require pesantren to adapt their educational strategies while maintaining their identity as centers of Islamic morality and moderate religious understanding (Nasir & Rijal, 2021; Zaluchu et al., 2025).

Several previous studies have shown that pesantren play an important role in forming moderate religious attitudes through character education, religious habituation, kiai example, and the internalization of Islamic values in the lives of students (Mujahid, 2021; Nasir & Rijal, 2021). Other studies affirm that religious moderation in Islamic boarding schools is strengthened through an understanding of *Islamic wasatiyyah*, tolerance between religious communities, local cultural accommodation, and prevention of radicalism and violent extremism (Kubro & Ali, 2021; Wildan & Muttaqin, 2022). Recent research also shows that pesantren are able to develop moderation education through local culture, institutional policies, curriculum, and learning practices that instill the values of tolerance, balance, non-violence, and respect for diversity (Athoillah et al., 2024; Burga & Damopolii, 2022). In addition, studies of public school and pesantren students show that the religious education environment has an effect on the formation of tolerant attitudes and moderate religious behavior (Basri et al., 2022; Mappiasse & Hayadin, 2022). However, these studies have not specifically examined religious moderation education through a theo-anthropocentric approach that integrates divine values, human dignity, social ethics, and the moral experience of students in the life of Islamic boarding schools.

Although previous research has extensively discussed the role of pesantren in strengthening religious moderation through character education, religious habits, kiai examples, curriculum, local culture, and the prevention of radicalism, the study still dominantly sees moderation as an institutional and socio-cultural practice. There have not been many studies that specifically place the theo-anthropocentric approach as the basis for religious moderation education in Islamic boarding schools. Therefore, the gap in this research lies in the unexplained integration between divine consciousness, human dignity, social ethics, and moral experience of students as the foundation for the formation of moderate attitudes. This research is important to offer a model of religious moderation education that balances human relationships with God, fellow humans, and pluralistic societies.

Based on the background and research gap, the formulation of the problem in this study is how the theo-anthropocentric approach is applied as religious moderation education in boarding schools. This formulation is directed to examine the concept of a theo-anthropocentric approach, the process of internalizing divine values, human dignity, social ethics, and the moral experience of students, as well as the educational strategies used by boarding schools in forming moderate religious attitudes. In line with this formulation, the purpose of this study is to analyze the application of the theo-anthropocentric approach as religious moderation education in boarding schools, explain the integration of theological and humanitarian values in the lives of students, identify strategies for forming moderate attitudes, and formulate the contribution of the theo-anthropocentric approach in strengthening religious moderation in the pesantren education environment.

The contribution of this research lies in the development of a theo-anthropocentric perspective in religious moderation education in boarding schools. Theoretically, this study enriches the study of religious moderation by placing the integration of divine and humanitarian values as the basis for the formation of moderate attitudes of students. Practically, this research

can be a reference for pesantren managers, kiai, ustaz, and educators in designing moderation education that not only emphasizes tolerance and non-violence, but also builds spiritual awareness, respect for human dignity, social ethics, and the responsibility of living in a pluralistic society. Academically, this research offers a conceptual framework that can be used to develop a model of religious moderation education based on theological values and the moral experience of students in pesantren life.

Method

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to investigate the theo-anthropocentric approach as a model of religious moderation education at Askaril Ikhlas BLOWER Islamic Boarding School, Aceh, Indonesia. A qualitative descriptive design was considered appropriate because it enables researchers to describe educational phenomena, social practices, participants' experiences, and institutional processes in their natural context without excessive theoretical abstraction (Hall & Liebenberg, 2024; Sullivan-Bolyai & Bova, 2021). This approach allowed the researchers to explore how theological awareness, human dignity, ethical conduct, tolerance, and social responsibility were integrated into daily educational activities and institutional culture. In this study, the qualitative descriptive approach was used to produce a clear, contextual, and practice-oriented understanding of religious moderation education in the Islamic boarding school environment (Ayton, 2023; Villamin et al., 2025).

Research Site and Time

The study was conducted at Askaril Ikhlas BLOWER Islamic Boarding School, Aceh, Indonesia. This site was selected because it represents an Islamic boarding school environment that integrates religious learning, moral habituation, student discipline, and social values in the formation of students' character. The research was carried out over six months, from December 2024 to May 2025. The focus of the study was directed toward the process and practice of religious moderation education through a theo-anthropocentric approach in the boarding school environment.

Participants and Informants

The informants in this study were selected purposively based on their knowledge, involvement, and experience in religious education and moderation programs at Askaril Ikhlas BLOWER Islamic Boarding School. The study involved 18 informants, consisting of two foundation administrators, two boarding school leaders, four religious teachers, two dormitory supervisors, and eight students. They were considered relevant because they were directly involved in policy formulation, learning activities, student supervision, religious habituation, and the practice of religious moderation in daily boarding school life.

Data Collection

Data were collected through interviews, observation, and documentation. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore informants' understanding of the theo-anthropocentric approach and its role in religious moderation education, while observation captured learning activities, student-teacher interactions, religious habituation, discipline, and daily boarding school practices. Documentation was conducted by reviewing curriculum documents, teaching materials, institutional records, and activity reports related to religious education and moderation programs. These

techniques were used to obtain rich, contextual, and triangulated qualitative data (Busetto et al., 2020; Jamieson et al., 2023).

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data condensation was conducted by selecting, simplifying, coding, and categorizing interview, observation, and documentation data according to themes related to theo-anthropocentric values, religious moderation, and boarding school practices. Data display was used to organize the findings in a structured form so that patterns and relationships could be interpreted clearly. Finally, conclusion drawing was carried out by synthesizing the findings to explain how the theo-anthropocentric approach contributes to religious moderation education at Askaril Ikhlas Blower Islamic Boarding School. This analytical procedure is relevant for qualitative studies because it helps researchers manage field data systematically, interpret meanings, and construct credible findings (Busetto et al., 2020; Miles et al., 2020).

Trustworthiness

To ensure data trustworthiness, this study applied source triangulation, technique triangulation, and member checking. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information from foundation administrators, boarding school leaders, religious teachers, students, and institutional documents, while technique triangulation was carried out by comparing data from interviews, observations, and documentation. Member checking was used to confirm key findings with selected informants to ensure the accuracy of the researchers' interpretations. These procedures strengthened the credibility, dependability, and validity of the qualitative findings (Busetto et al., 2020; Motulsky, 2021; Stahl & King, 2020).

Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted by observing ethical principles in qualitative research. The researchers explained the purpose of the study to the informants and ensured that their participation was voluntary. The identities and personal information of informants were treated confidentially. Data obtained from interviews, observations, and documents were used only for academic purposes. During the research process, the researchers also respected the norms, values, and institutional culture of the Islamic boarding school.

Result And Discussion

Result

The Urgency of Theo-anthropocentrism in Internalizing Religious Moderation

The findings show that the theo-anthropocentric approach at Askaril Ikhlas Blower Islamic Boarding School is internalized through learning activities, worship habituation, student coaching, and daily boarding school culture. This approach emphasizes the balance between divine consciousness and human values, so that students are guided to strengthen their faith while developing tolerance, empathy, social responsibility, and respect for differences.

The Mudir explained that religious education at the boarding school is not only directed toward strengthening faith, but also toward shaping students' ability to respect others. He stated:

“Educational activities here are based on moderation. Religious teaching is not only about faith,

but also about how students can accept different views and respect others.”

This statement was reinforced by one ustadz who explained that students are taught to respect differences as part of faith in God:

“We focus on building students with Islamic teachings, emphasizing tolerance and understanding. Our goal is to teach students that we must respect and appreciate one another, despite our differences, because we are all creations of God.”

Observation data showed that the internalization of moderation was visible in students’ daily interactions. During group discussions, students expressed different opinions on religious and social issues, but they were guided to speak politely, listen to others, and avoid mocking different views. In informal activities, students were also observed helping friends, maintaining discipline in worship, and participating in community service programs. Documentation data supported these findings, as curriculum documents and activity reports showed that values such as tolerance, respect, discipline, social care, and responsibility were included in religious learning, student coaching, and extracurricular activities.

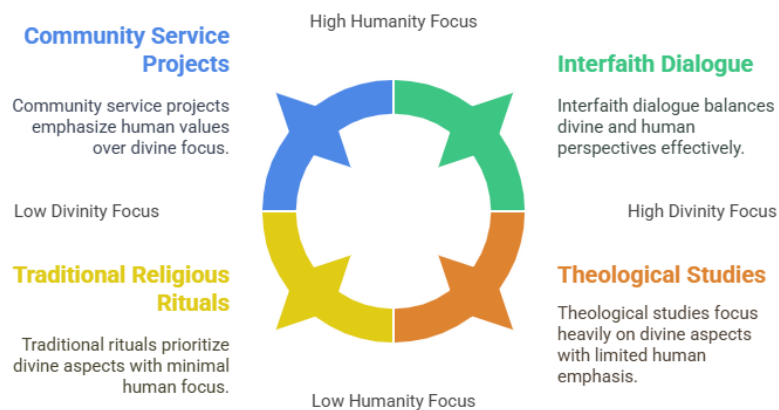


Fig 1. Integrating Theoanthropocentrism in Islamic Education

The Application of the Theo-anthropocentric Approach in Religious Moderation Education

The application of the theo-anthropocentric approach is reflected in three main values: divinity, humanity, and love for nature. These three values connect students’ relationship with God, fellow humans, and the environment.

The value of divinity is internalized through Qur’anic learning, prayer discipline, dhikr, religious advice, and Islamic guidance. The Mudir explained that the purpose of education is to build students’ awareness of God while encouraging them to contribute positively to human life. He stated:

“The aim is to develop a dual consciousness in students: one that continuously remembers Allah while fostering a contribution to human civilization.”

One ustadz also explained that faith must be reflected in social behavior:

“Faith is reflected not just in words, but in actions that show respect for others and the environment. Our students must learn that their relationship with God influences how they interact with the world around them.”

Observation data showed that students were accustomed to praying on time, reading the Qur’an, participating in dhikr, and attending religious guidance sessions. In these activities, teachers often reminded students that worship should make them humble, patient, and respectful toward others. The researcher also observed that students were guided not to feel superior to others because of differences in religious understanding or practice.

The value of humanity is internalized through tolerance, mutual respect, cooperation, social care, compassion, and love for the homeland. The Mudir stated:

“Here, students learn that their humanity is connected to their relationship with God and with each other.”

One ustadz added:

“Our students are not only learners; they are also part of a community that values humanity above all.”

Observation data showed that humanitarian values were practiced in daily boarding school life. Students helped each other in cleaning activities, shared responsibilities in dormitory life, respected teachers and senior students, and participated in social service activities. In classroom and non-classroom settings, teachers encouraged students to avoid harsh speech, respect differences, and maintain brotherhood among friends.

The value of love for nature was reflected in environmental care, cleanliness, saving water, maintaining dormitory facilities, and protecting the beauty of the boarding school environment. The Mudir stated:

“Moderation in Islam extends beyond religious practices. It encompasses the duty to protect and nurture the natural world, which is also part of Allah’s creation.”

One ustadz explained:

“Our students are taught that environmental responsibility is part of their faith. Protecting nature is an act of worship.”

Observation data showed that students were involved in routine cleaning activities, maintaining classrooms and dormitories, saving water, caring for plants, and keeping the boarding school environment clean. These activities show that religious moderation is not only related to tolerance among humans, but also to responsibility toward nature as part of God’s creation.

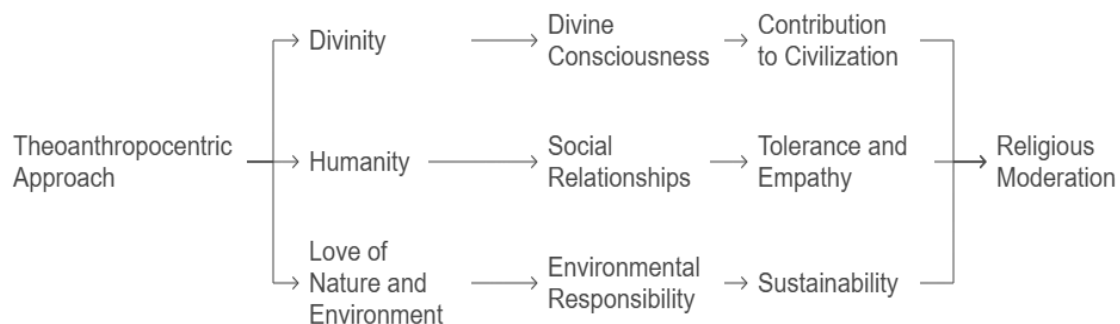


Fig 2. Implementation of Theanthropocentric Approach in Religious Moderation Education

The Strategy for Strengthening the Theo-anthropocentric Approach

The findings show that the strategy used to strengthen the theo-anthropocentric approach is based on tazkiyatun nafs, or purification of the soul. This strategy is implemented through takhalli, tahalli, and tajalli. The Mudir explained:

“In implementing the theo-anthropocentric approach as religious moderation education, we use the tazkiyatun nafs strategy. It has three stages: takhalli, tahalli, and tajalli.”

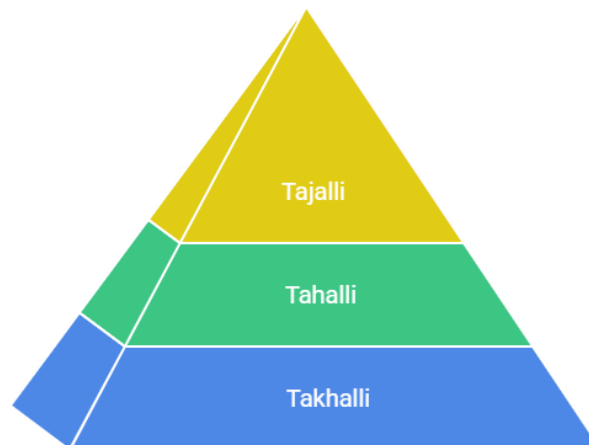


Fig 3. Theo-anthropocentric Education Strategy

Figure 3 illustrates the gradual process of theo-anthropocentric education strategy through three stages of spiritual and moral formation. Takhalli is placed at the foundation because it represents the initial stage of cleansing students from negative traits and harmful behavior. Tahalli occupies the middle stage as the process of internalizing noble values such as sincerity, humility, patience, tolerance, and compassion. Tajalli is placed at the top as the highest stage, where divine values are reflected in students' character, social behavior, and religious moderation. This model shows that religious moderation education at Askaril Ikhlas Blower Islamic Boarding School is developed progressively from self-purification to moral formation and spiritual maturity.

Takhalli refers to the process of cleansing students from negative traits and bad behavior. At the boarding school, this stage is implemented through prayer discipline, dhikr, Qur'anic learning, and religious advice. Observation data showed that students were guided to control anger, avoid arrogance, reduce selfishness, and stay away from disrespectful behavior. Teachers reminded students that religious moderation begins with self-control and purification of the heart.

Tahalli refers to the process of filling the self with noble values after negative traits are reduced. This stage is implemented through the cultivation of sincerity, humility, patience, tolerance, compassion, and cooperation. Observation data showed that students were encouraged to help friends, respect teachers, maintain politeness, participate in positive activities, and show concern for others. These practices demonstrate that moderation is built not only by avoiding harmful behavior, but also by developing good character.

Tajalli refers to the stage of spiritual realization, where divine values are reflected in students' character and actions. At this stage, students are expected to become spiritually mature, morally balanced, and socially responsible. Observation data showed that students were trained to connect worship with ethical behavior. They were encouraged to be humble in religious understanding, avoid judging others, respect different opinions, and maintain social harmony. This indicates that the theo-anthropocentric approach helps students understand religion as a source of faith, morality, and social responsibility.

Overall, the findings show that religious moderation education at Askaril Ikhlas Blower Islamic Boarding School is implemented through a theo-anthropocentric approach that integrates divinity, humanity, and environmental responsibility. Interview data indicate that boarding school leaders and teachers understand moderation as a balance between faith in God and ethical relations with humans and nature. Observation data show that this approach is practiced through worship discipline, Qur'anic learning, dhikr, respectful dialogue, social care, dormitory discipline, community service, and environmental cleanliness. Documentation data further confirm that moderation values are embedded

in curriculum documents, institutional programs, and student activities.

Discussion

The internalization of religious moderation at Askaril Ikhlas Blower Islamic Boarding School takes place through learning, worship habituation, student coaching, and the daily culture of the Islamic boarding school. Students not only receive material on tolerance, but are also accustomed to respecting differences of opinion, having a polite dialogue, maintaining worship discipline, helping others, and engaging in social activities. This pattern is consistent with previous research showing that pesantren play a role in shaping the character of moderate Muslims through character education, a 24-hour education system, habituation of Islamic values, and strengthening the attitude of wasatiyyah in the lives of students (Kubro & Ali, 2021; Mappiasse & Hayadin, 2022; Mujahid, 2021; Nasir & Rijal, 2021). Thus, this finding confirms that religious moderation is more effective when internalized as a life practice of students in the pesantren environment, not just normative discourse or learning materials in the classroom.

The balance between divine and humanitarian values is at the core of the theo-anthropocentric approach applied at Askaril Ikhlas Blower Islamic Boarding School. Divine values are seen in the study of the Qur'an, congregational prayers, dhikr, and religious guidance, while human values are seen in mutual respect, social concern, compassion, cooperation, and appreciation for differences. This pattern is in line with previous research that shows that religious moderation needs to be built through the strengthening of non-extreme religious attitudes, inclusive education policies, tolerant social practices, and an institutional environment that supports harmony in diversity (Latifa et al., 2022; Prasetyo, 2025; Qoumas et al., 2024; Subchi et al., 2022). However, these findings give a different emphasis because they show that religious moderation is not only shaped through knowledge, attitudes, policies, and learning practices, but also through the theological relationship between faith in God and ethical responsibility towards man. Thus, the theo-anthropocentric approach expands the study of religious moderation by placing divine and humanitarian values as a unit in the formation of the character of students.

The divine value in religious moderation education in Islamic boarding schools is not directed at exclusivism, but at the formation of a humble, tolerant, and responsible attitude. Data shows that students are guided so that worship does not stop at rituals, but is reflected in social behaviors, such as respecting friends, not feeling the most right, and not demeaning differences in understanding. This pattern is in line with previous research that shows that religious education plays an important role in forming personal faith as well as interreligious harmony, and that the integration of moderation values in Islamic learning can strengthen students' understanding of tolerance, nationality, and inclusive religious attitudes (Danumiharja, 2023; Lukman, 2024; M. Jaedi et al., 2025; Purnomo et al., 2026). Thus, the contribution of this research lies in the affirmation that divine values in the theo-anthropocentric approach are the spiritual foundation for moderation, not a barrier to social openness.

Humanitarian values at Askaril Ikhlas Blower Islamic Boarding School are internalized through the practice of helping each other, respecting teachers and fellow students, maintaining brotherhood, participating in social activities, and building concern for the surrounding environment. Religious moderation in this context not only means accepting differences, but also building civilized social relations. These findings are in line with previous research that showed that the formation of religious tolerance is influenced not only by knowledge, but also by social-affective learning patterns, empirical practices, religiosity, and shared life experiences in educational settings (Junaedi et al., 2023; Muchtar et al., 2024; Thoyib et al., 2024). However, this study expands on these findings by showing that human values are understood as a consequence of faith, so respecting human beings, caring for others, and maintaining social harmony are positioned as part of religious practice.

Concern for nature emerged as an important finding in the application of a theo-anthropocentric approach. Students are accustomed to maintaining cleanliness, saving water, caring for pesantren facilities, maintaining plants, and maintaining the beauty of the environment as part of their religious responsibilities. These findings expand the study of religious moderation which has been more often associated with tolerance, anti-violence, prevention of radicalism, and social harmony. A number of previous studies have emphasized that religious moderation in Islamic boarding schools can be built through curriculum, institutional policies, local culture, and extremism prevention strategies (Athoillah et al., 2024; Wildan & Muttaqin, 2022). However, this study shows that moderation also includes ecological responsibility because nature is understood as God's creation that must be protected. Thus, the theo-anthropocentric approach offers a more holistic scope of moderation, that is, man's relationship with God, fellow humans, and nature.

The strategy of tazkiyatun nafs through takhalli, tahalli, and tajalli is the main mechanism in the formation of religious moderation among students. Takhalli is seen in coaching so that students avoid arrogance, anger, selfishness, and impolite behavior. Tahalli appears in the habituation of the values of sincerity, patience, humility, tolerance, care, and cooperation. Tajalli appears to be in an effort to make divine values reflected in the social behavior of students. This pattern reinforces previous research that stated that the formation of moderate Muslims requires character education, a habituation of values, and a consistent institutional culture (Mujahid, 2021; Nasir & Rijal, 2021; Pratama et al., 2025). However, this study adds that religious moderation also requires inner transformation, not just mastery of knowledge or compliance with pesantren rules.

The novelty of this study lies in its formulation of the theo-anthropocentric approach as a holistic model of religious moderation education in Islamic boarding schools. While previous studies have mostly examined religious moderation through tolerance, curriculum, institutional policy, character education, local culture, and counter-radicalism strategies, this study shows that moderation can be built through the integration of divine consciousness, human dignity, social ethics, and ecological responsibility. In addition, this study identifies tazkiyatun nafs through takhalli, tahalli, and tajalli as an internal spiritual mechanism that transforms moderation from a cognitive concept into moral and social practice. Thus, this research contributes a new perspective by positioning religious moderation not only as social tolerance, but also as a theo-anthropocentric process that connects faith, humanity, and care for nature in the daily life of students.

The implication of these findings is that religious moderation education in pesantren needs to be designed as a holistic process that connects faith, morals, social relations, and environmental responsibility. Moderation is not enough to be used as a subject matter or a program to prevent radicalism, but must be a culture of education that lives in learning, worship, coaching, educator examples, dormitory life, and social interaction of students. For pesantren managers, these results can be the basis for strengthening the curriculum and student development programs based on theo-anthropocentric. For academic studies, these results offer an expansion of the concept of religious moderation from mere social tolerance to a model that integrates spirituality, humanity, and ecology.

The limitation of this study lies in the coverage of the location and informants. The research was only conducted at Askaril Ikhlas Blower Islamic Boarding School, Aceh, so the results could not be generalized to all Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia. In addition, more informants come from internal actors, such as foundation administrators, pesantren leaders, ustadz, dormitory caregivers, and students, so that the perspectives of parents, alumni, and the surrounding community have not been explored in depth. The descriptive qualitative approach also has not measured the long-term impact of the theo-anthropocentric approach on changes in the attitude and moderate behavior of students.

Based on these limitations, further research is suggested to involve more pesantren with

different typologies, such as traditional, modern, urban, and rural pesantren. The next research also needs to involve parents, alumni, and the surrounding community so that the impact of religious moderation education can be seen more widely outside the pesantren environment. In addition, longitudinal studies or mixed methods are needed to measure the influence of the theo-anthropocentric approach on tolerance, moral behavior, religious attitudes, and environmental concern of students in the long term.

Conclusion

The theo-anthropocentric approach at Askaril Ikhlas Blower Islamic Boarding School functions as a holistic model of religious moderation education by integrating divine awareness, human values, social ethics, and environmental responsibility into students' daily lives. Religious moderation is not limited to classroom instruction, but is internalized through worship habituation, student coaching, exemplary behavior, social interaction, and boarding school culture. Divine values strengthen students' faith while encouraging humility and respect for differences, humanitarian values foster tolerance, cooperation, compassion, and social care, while environmental values build awareness that caring for nature is part of religious responsibility. Through the strategy of tazkiyatun nafs, religious moderation is developed as a spiritual, moral, and practical process that shapes students into faithful, tolerant, socially responsible, and environmentally aware individuals. Thus, theo-anthropocentrism offers an integrative framework for religious moderation education that connects faith in God, respect for humanity, and care for nature within the lived culture of Islamic boarding school education.

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