

STRENGTHENING RELIGIOUS MODERATION AMONG MUSLIM CONVERTS THROUGH PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH: A CASE STUDY IN ACEH, INDONESIA

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Abstract

Religious moderation is a vital foundation for maintaining social harmony in Aceh, particularly among Muslim converts who often struggle with religious and social adaptation. This study aims to describe how converts understand and practice moderation, to explore mentoring strategies carried out by the Aceh Da'wah Council (DDA) through a *Participatory Action Research* (PAR) approach, and to assess the changes in attitudes and social interactions that occurred during the program. The mentoring program was implemented over eight weeks (October–December 2024) with 35 participants, including DDA leaders and converts from different districts. Activities were organized into three stages: education and socialization, focus group discussions, and monitoring and evaluation. Data were collected through FGDs, semi-structured interviews, and participant observation, then analyzed qualitatively through data organization, coding, summarizing, and interpretation, with triangulation and member checking applied to strengthen credibility. The study found clear improvements in both the understanding and practice of religious moderation values. Converts demonstrated greater openness, respect for diversity, avoidance of extreme attitudes, and more active participation in community life. At the same time, the program reinforced the institutional role of the DDA, enhancing its capacity to provide sustained guidance for converts. The PAR approach proved relevant for fostering moderate religious attitudes among Muslim converts in Aceh by integrating Indonesia's nine values of moderation into daily practice. While limited to the DDA setting, the study offers evidence that community-based mentoring can serve as a practical model for religious institutions and policymakers seeking to strengthen moderation and social harmony in comparable contexts.

Keywords: *Religious moderation, Muslim converts, Participatory action research, Community empowerment, Aceh*

Abstrak

Moderasi beragama menjadi faktor penting dalam menjaga kerukunan sosial di Aceh, terutama bagi mualaf yang kerap menghadapi persoalan adaptasi keagamaan dan sosial. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menggambarkan pemahaman serta praktik moderasi beragama di kalangan mualaf, menelusuri strategi pendampingan berbasis *Participatory Action Research* (PAR) yang dijalankan Dewan Da'wah Aceh (DDA), dan menilai perubahan sikap maupun pola interaksi sosial yang muncul selama proses pendampingan. Program pendampingan dilakukan dengan pendekatan PAR selama delapan minggu (Oktober–Desember 2024) melibatkan 35 partisipan, terdiri atas pengurus DDA dan mualaf dari berbagai daerah. Kegiatan berlangsung dalam tiga tahap—edukasi dan

sosialisasi, diskusi kelompok terarah (FGD), serta pemantauan dan evaluasi. Data dikumpulkan melalui FGD, wawancara semi-terstruktur, dan observasi partisipatif, kemudian dianalisis secara kualitatif melalui pengorganisasian, pengodean, peringkasan, dan interpretasi, dengan triangulasi serta validasi partisipan untuk menjaga keabsahan temuan. Penelitian menemukan peningkatan nyata dalam pemahaman dan penerapan nilai-nilai moderasi beragama. Mualaf menunjukkan sikap lebih terbuka, menghargai keberagaman, menghindari perilaku ekstrem, serta berpartisipasi lebih aktif dalam kehidupan sosial. Program ini juga memperkuat kapasitas kelembagaan DDA, menjadikannya lebih siap dalam memberikan pendampingan berkelanjutan bagi komunitas mualaf. Pendekatan PAR terbukti relevan untuk menumbuhkan sikap moderat di kalangan mualaf Aceh dengan mengintegrasikan sembilan nilai moderasi beragama ke dalam praktik sehari-hari. Meskipun penelitian ini terbatas pada konteks DDA, hasilnya memberikan gambaran bahwa model pendampingan berbasis komunitas dapat menjadi rujukan bagi lembaga keagamaan maupun pembuat kebijakan dalam mengembangkan program serupa di wilayah lain.

Kata Kunci: *Moderasi beragama, mualaf, Participatory Action Research, pemberdayaan komunitas, Aceh*

A. Introduction

Religious moderation has become increasingly significant in contemporary discussions about Islam, particularly as Muslim societies navigate the delicate balance between maintaining authentic faith practices and fostering harmonious relationships across diverse communities. The concept of *wasathiyah* (moderation) in Islam offers a compelling framework that allows believers to practice their religion with dedication while remaining open to dialogue and cooperation with those of different beliefs (Inayatillah et al., 2022; Sidqi et al., 2023). This balanced approach has gained renewed attention as societies worldwide grapple with rising religious tensions and the challenge of preventing both secular extremism and religious radicalism (Alvian & Ardhani, 2023; Subchi et al., 2022).

In Indonesia, the government has taken concrete steps toward institutionalizing religious moderation since 2019, when the Ministry of Religious Affairs established comprehensive strategies and policies for implementation across all institutions under its authority (Azis & Anam, 2021; Mahamid, 2023). The ministry outlined nine essential values of religious moderation that should guide Muslim communities in their interactions at societal, national, and state levels. However, translating these policy frameworks into meaningful practice across Indonesia's diverse regional contexts

presents ongoing challenges, particularly in areas with strong religious identities and among vulnerable populations who may lack adequate support systems.

Aceh Province offers a particularly fascinating case for examining how religious moderation can be implemented in practice. As Indonesia's only province governed by Islamic law, Aceh occupies a unique position that makes it both a symbol of Islamic governance and a test case for religious tolerance (Indainanto et al., 2023; Mardhiah et al., 2025; Sabil et al., 2025). Despite Aceh's reputation for maintaining relative peace and inter-religious harmony through proactive leadership that emphasizes tolerance and the Islamic principle of *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (mercy for all creation), underlying tensions and occasional disagreements between religious communities continue to surface (Prasetya & Persada, 2022; Sahrasad et al., 2023; Halim & Faisal, 2024; Husna & Zulkarnain, 2024; Riza & Mulasi, 2024). These challenges become particularly pronounced when examining the experiences of Muslim converts, a growing but often overlooked population within Aceh's religious landscape.

The phenomenon of conversion to Islam in Aceh reflects the province's cultural reputation for hospitality and its demonstration of moderate Islamic behavior that aligns with Islamic law principles (Sartina & Hanif, 2023; Usman et al., 2024). This welcoming environment, combined with positive interactions between Muslims and non-Muslim communities, has attracted individuals from various backgrounds to embrace Islam in this historically and culturally rich region (M. A. Amin et al., 2025; Zulfatmi, 2023). According to recent data from Baitul Mal Aceh, 444 individuals from various regions converted to Islam in 2022, and interviews with leadership from the Aceh Da'wah Council (DDA) confirm that converts continue to arrive from districts and cities across Aceh and even from other provinces.

Yet the growing population of Muslim converts in Aceh faces complex challenges that existing support systems have struggled to address adequately. Research conducted by Misbah (2023) revealed that coaching and mentoring programs for converts remain insufficiently effective, a concerning finding given Aceh's status as a region governed by Islamic law where such populations should receive priority attention. Syahputra (2023) highlighted similar concerns, noting that not all converts and their children receive adequate Islamic education in Aceh. Perhaps most troubling, Kader et al. (2024) found that many converts possess limited knowledge of *aqeedah* (creed), religious teachings, and religious moderation principles, creating risks of misunderstanding Islamic principles and potential development of intolerant attitudes.

These challenges can be understood through the lens of dependency theory as applied to convert communities, which identifies two primary forms of dependency that require systematic intervention (Soedjiwo et al., 2023). Religious dependency refers to converts' need for comprehensive knowledge about Islamic practices, including understanding of moderation principles, while economic dependency relates to their reliance on community support for material well-being. Addressing both forms of

dependency represents not merely a practical necessity but a fundamental Islamic obligation of mutual assistance among believers.

From a broader research perspective, while numerous studies have examined religious moderation concepts and their application within established Muslim communities, relatively few have focused specifically on convert populations, particularly in Sharia-based contexts like Aceh (Maisura et al., 2023; Mulasi et al., 2023; Subchi et al., 2022; Zakiyah et al., 2023). Previous community service programs implemented in Aceh have generally emphasized enhancing religious literacy, strengthening *aqidah* and morality, and promoting productive economic development. However, these programs have not specifically integrated comprehensive approaches to religious moderation based on the nine values outlined by Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs, nor have they been adapted to address the particular socio-cultural context of convert communities in Aceh (Machzumy & Ihsan, 2024).

The gap between policy frameworks and practical implementation becomes even more apparent when considering that converts face challenges extending beyond their ability to adapt to Islamic teachings. Social integration within communities governed by Islamic norms presents additional difficulties, and without targeted mentoring strategies that improve social skills, provide spiritual guidance, and enhance economic resilience, there remains significant risk of misunderstandings arising in social interactions, including within convert communities themselves. This situation creates an urgent need for research and intervention programs specifically designed to meet the needs of converts participating in training programs at institutions like the DDA.

The present study addresses these gaps by applying a Participatory Action Research (PAR)-based mentoring program with the Aceh Da'wah Council (DDA), focusing specifically on Muslim converts. The research seeks to: (1) describe how converts currently understand and practice religious moderation in their daily lives and social interactions, (2) identify the PAR-based mentoring strategies implemented to strengthen moderate attitudes, and (3) examine the observable changes in attitudes and community interactions of converts during the mentoring process.

This research contributes to existing scholarship in several important ways. Theoretically, it expands discourse on religious moderation by demonstrating that moderation functions not merely as a normative concept but as a social practice whose tangible outcomes can be measured through changes in attitudes and community interaction patterns (Gufron, 2019). Practically, it demonstrates how strengthening religious moderation can serve as an effective instrument of social empowerment, particularly for converts in Aceh who may be vulnerable to social exclusion. The study's integrated approach, which simultaneously addresses academic understanding and practical application, offers a novel contribution to designing inclusive and sustainable religious empowerment programs that align with the specific needs of Acehnese society.

The findings presented here hold significance for multiple stakeholders, from policymakers seeking evidence-based approaches to religious harmony promotion, to

community organizations working with vulnerable populations, to scholars interested in understanding how religious moderation can be fostered effectively in diverse contexts. By focusing specifically on convert communities within Aceh's unique Islamic legal framework, this research provides insights that may prove valuable for similar contexts elsewhere while contributing to broader conversations about religious diversity, social integration, and community empowerment in contemporary Muslim societies.

B. Methods

This study employed Participatory Action Research (PAR) as the most appropriate framework for strengthening religious moderation among Muslim converts in Aceh Province. PAR was chosen because it emphasizes community-oriented research designed to foster meaningful social and community change while building bridges between academic inquiry and community needs (Creswell, 2012; Haryono, 2020). This methodology proved particularly suitable for working with convert communities, who often face marginalization and require interventions that respect their agency while providing necessary support. The participatory nature ensured that converts themselves became active contributors to both the research process and the development of solutions to challenges they identified as most pressing (Muhid et al., 2021). The intervention was conducted in collaboration with the Aceh Da'wah Council (DDA), selected as the primary partner institution due to its central role in convert guidance and established relationships with convert communities across the province. A total of thirty-five participants were purposively recruited, including one DDA chairman, four administrators, and thirty Muslim converts from various districts and cities across Aceh Province who were actively participating in DDA coaching programs. All participants provided informed consent, and ethical principles were maintained by protecting confidentiality through pseudonym use and safeguarding participants' rights throughout the process.

The program was implemented over eight weeks, from October to December 2024, through three structured stages that built systematically toward comprehensive religious moderation strengthening. Stage 1: Education and Socialization involved comprehensive delivery of educational materials on religious moderation through seminars and workshops targeting both converts and DDA administrators, establishing shared understanding of moderation concepts and their relevance to daily life in Aceh's unique Islamic legal context. Stage 2: Focus Group Discussions facilitated structured discussions that explored integration of moderation values, strategies for strengthening moderate attitudes, and policy support mechanisms, allowing participants to share experiences and develop collectively supported approaches to addressing identified needs. Stage 3: Monitoring and Evaluation provided systematic assessment of program effectiveness through continuous observation and post-intervention evaluation, while establishing foundations for ongoing support beyond the formal research period. These stages were designed to address different aspects of knowledge, understanding, and

practical application while ensuring both individual learning and institutional development advanced in parallel.

Data collection employed a multi-method strategy consisting of Focus Group Discussions, semi-structured interviews, and participant observation to ensure comprehensive understanding of both process dynamics and outcome achievements. FGDs were conducted with DDA leadership, administrators, and converts to explore integration of moderation values and strategies for strengthening moderate attitudes among Muslim converts. Interviews with the DDA chairman and administrators focused on institutional approaches to fostering converts and observed changes during coaching periods, while interviews with converts investigated their understanding of religious moderation concepts, application in social contexts, and knowledge changes following coaching participation. Participant observation involved systematic documentation of moderate Islamic attitude applications during convert interactions throughout the coaching period, providing insights into how theoretical knowledge translated into practical behavior and social interaction patterns. Data analysis followed a systematic three-step process: organizing (data reduction and systematic coding to identify patterns and themes), summarizing (systematic review and grouping of data with focus on objective observations), and interpreting (collaborative derivation of meanings and insights from organized data). Triangulation across multiple data collection methods, member checking with participants, and the extended eight-week engagement period enhanced credibility and minimized researcher bias while ensuring findings contributed meaningfully to both scholarly and practical audiences.

C. Results and Discussion

The implementation of the PAR-based intervention yielded rich insights into both the current state of religious moderation among Muslim converts in Aceh and the contributions of community-driven approaches to strengthening moderate attitudes. The findings reveal a complex landscape where converts demonstrate resilience and adaptability while facing ongoing challenges that require sustained community support. The results presented here are organized according to the three-stage implementation framework outlined in methodology, allowing the study to trace the evolution of understanding and practice throughout the intervention period.

1. Current State of Religious Moderation Among Convert Communities in Aceh Province

The initial assessment revealed that converts in Aceh continue to navigate multifaceted challenges that extend well beyond simple religious knowledge acquisition. These challenges encompass limited understanding of Islamic teachings, insufficient grasp of Islamic *aqeedah* (creed), ongoing social integration difficulties, and most importantly for this study, inadequate awareness of religious moderation principles and their practical applications. The complexity of these challenges underscored the necessity

of the PAR-based community service initiative, which was specifically designed to address the interconnected nature of religious, social, and cultural adaptation processes.

The intervention results demonstrate that converts participating in coaching programs at the DDA institution developed improved understanding of religious moderation concepts and their practical applications. This enhanced understanding manifested through several observable indicators that emerged consistently across data collection methods: increased demonstration of mutual respect for differences among community members, deeper appreciation for ethnic and cultural diversity within Acehese society, more thoughtful and wise application of Islamic teachings in daily interactions, active contributions to maintaining social harmony in their communities, engagement in more open and constructive communication patterns, and sustained commitment to continuous learning aimed at enhancing their religious knowledge base.

Focus Group Discussion data with DDA management provided compelling evidence of these improvements, as one administrator explained: “The community of converts currently undergoing guidance at DDA has shown significant progress, particularly in their understanding of religious moderation and in demonstrating attitudes of moderation toward one another throughout the course of this program. The converts have displayed openness both among themselves and toward the supervising ustadz at DDA” (FGD, 2024). This observation aligns with broader research findings about the potential for structured interventions to foster positive attitude changes among religious communities (Manan et al., 2022; Sulaiman et al., 2023).

The coaching process itself was implemented through carefully designed seminars and workshops that served as concrete efforts to educate and promote religious moderation principles among converts in Aceh. These educational activities were enhanced through collaboration with respected institutions, including speakers from the Center for Spirituality and Religious Moderation (PKMB) at UIN Ar-Raniry and the Aceh Provincial Religious Education and Training Center. The workshops simultaneously addressed convert education and professional development of DDA administrators, reflecting the systemic approach that characterized the PAR methodology.

Evaluation results indicate this comprehensive approach proved effective in increasing both understanding and practical application of religious moderation among converts. Furthermore, the mentoring program contributed meaningfully to strengthening the institutional role of DDA in guiding and supporting convert communities throughout Aceh Province. This institutional strengthening represents a crucial component of sustainable community development, as it establishes ongoing capacity for continued support beyond the immediate intervention period.

The broader context of religious diversity in Aceh provided important background for understanding these findings. According to official data, Aceh’s population of 5,515,839 includes 5,438,906 Muslims, 63,997 Christians, 5,913 Catholics, 96 Hindus, 6,672 Buddhists, and 255 individuals of other religions, creating a complex social environment where religious moderation takes on particular significance. Despite this

diversity, Aceh's reputation as a region practicing Islamic law within a welcoming cultural and religious environment continues to attract non-Muslims to embrace Islam (Misbah et al., 2023).

Interviews with DDA leadership highlighted the council's proactive role in supporting converts through comprehensive coaching programs. Each year, the DDA welcomes new converts to participate in structured guidance programs, covering all associated costs and typically conducting three to four batches annually, with approximately 35 participants in each group (MD, 2024). The focus of these programs encompasses both foundational Islamic knowledge and explicit religious moderation training, as one program administrator explained: "The DDA's community development programs for converts primarily focus on foundational Islamic knowledge and practices... initial coaching emphasized aspects such as *aqidah* (creed), Islamic morals, prayer practices, and Quranic recitation. Additionally, broader Islamic teachings, including Islamic history, social interactions, and religious moderation, are incorporated to enhance understanding, foster tolerance, and cultivate mutual respect" (DRA, 2024).

Data collection revealed that converts in Aceh generally exhibit positive attitudes toward religious moderation, with no documented instances of intolerant behavior recorded during the study period. Individual interviews with converts provided deeper insights into their understanding and application of moderation principles. One participant articulated their perspective: "Religious moderation is a foundation for building societal harmony amidst diversity. They noted that embracing Islam involves adopting its teachings, which promote respect for religious differences and encourage moderate behavior characterized by mutual respect" (MJS, 2024).

Additional interview data reinforced these positive trends, with another convert explaining: "Our understanding of religious moderation includes avoiding extreme attitudes in their daily lives. They emphasized the importance of continually seeking knowledge and learning about Islam as a religion of *rahmatan lil alamin* (a mercy to all creation), which advocates balance in worship, social interactions, and relationships with fellow human beings" (HY, 2024). These responses demonstrate sophisticated understanding of moderation concepts that extends beyond superficial knowledge to embrace practical wisdom about balanced religious practice.

Focus Group Discussion findings provided further validation of these individual perspectives: "A portion of the Muslim convert community has, in principle, already demonstrated a moderate attitude in their interactions. However, they sometimes lack detailed knowledge regarding the concept of moderation. Therefore, in this context, to enhance their understanding and to apply moderate attitudes in interactions during their time at the DDA, they were guided in practicing such attitudes. Furthermore, this mentoring activity proved highly beneficial in improving their comprehension and application of moderation in social interactions, such as engaging in dialogue that prioritizes mutual respect" (FGD, 2024).

Based on comprehensive data collection across multiple sources and methods, we identified four key behavioral indicators that demonstrate converts' successful application of religious moderation principles: promotion of mutual respect for differences in beliefs among community members; active participation in social activities within Acehnese society regardless of differing religious backgrounds; consistent avoidance of extreme attitudes, particularly refraining from criticism of religious beliefs held by individuals or other communities; and encouragement of dialogue while maintaining positive communication within communities to preserve harmony throughout Aceh.

These behavioral patterns suggest that converts in Aceh are successfully internalizing Islamic teachings that emphasize moderation, discourage divisive actions, and promote societal balance. The consistency of these applications across diverse social settings indicates that tolerance and harmony remain strong foundational values within Acehnese society, even as religious diversity continues to present ongoing challenges (Machzumy & Ihsan, 2024).

2. Implementation Strategies for Strengthening Religious Moderation Among Convert Communities

The PAR-based community service program was specifically designed to provide targeted assistance for strengthening religious moderation among converts in Aceh Province, with particular focus on those participating in DDA coaching programs. This initiative represents a strategic effort to foster religious moderation, uphold essential religious values, and maintain social harmony—objectives that prove crucial for preserving unity within Aceh's diverse community landscape (A. Amin et al., 2025; AR et al., 2021; Ma'arif et al., 2025).

The implementation process began with comprehensive mapping of needs and challenges faced by converts throughout Aceh. This mapping drew extensively on interview data collected from both converts and DDA administrators who provide ongoing support and guidance to convert communities. The resulting data served as a foundational framework for designing and implementing coaching programs specifically tailored to strengthen religious moderation among converts. Additionally, this mapping process proved essential for identifying factors that could either support or hinder the effectiveness of PKM activities, allowing the team to develop responsive and adaptive implementation strategies.

The collaborative relationship established between the PKM team and DDA in Aceh Province proved instrumental in ensuring successful execution of coaching activities. This partnership approach, supported by active engagement from DDA administrators, facilitated meaningful convert participation in the program while ensuring smooth implementation of all PKM initiatives. The effectiveness of cooperation among all stakeholders significantly enhanced the impact of coaching activities, creating

foundations for positive and sustainable outcomes that extend beyond the immediate intervention period.

Three-stage implementation strategy unfolded systematically over the eight-week intervention period, with each stage building upon insights and relationships developed in previous phases.

Stage 1: Education and Socialization of Religious Moderation

The first stage focused intensively on educating and socializing religious moderation concepts to both converts and DDA administrators throughout Aceh Province. These educational activities were conducted through carefully structured seminars and workshops designed to address different aspects of knowledge development and practical application. The seminars aimed primarily at enhancing knowledge and understanding of religious moderation among converts, while workshops focused specifically on developing professional competencies of DDA administrators in guiding convert communities effectively.

The seminar programming featured distinguished speakers who brought diverse expertise to the educational process. The first speaker, a lecturer from the PKMB at UIN Ar-Raniry, specialized in religious moderation instruction and brought deep theoretical knowledge combined with practical experience in moderation education. The second speaker, an Associate Expert (Widyaiswara) from the Aceh Province Religious Education and Training Center, contributed valuable insights from institutional training and development perspectives.

The comprehensive topics addressed during seminars included foundational concepts of religious moderation in Islam, examination of the urgency of religious moderation in contemporary contexts, exploration of specific opportunities and challenges facing convert communities, and detailed discussion of religious moderation practice in societal, national, and state contexts. Additional sessions addressed the historical development of moderation in Islam, its crucial role in strengthening national unity, strategies for maintaining social harmony, approaches to preventing religious conflicts, and religious moderation's function as a cornerstone for achieving sustainable social harmony.

These educational activities were explicitly designed to equip converts with both theoretical knowledge and practical understanding necessary for implementing moderation principles in their daily lives. The systematic approach to education helped ensure that participants developed comprehensive foundations for ongoing application of moderation concepts beyond the immediate intervention period.

Stage 2: Focus Group Discussions

The second implementation stage centered on structured Focus Group Discussions involving the DDA Chairperson, DDA management team, and converts currently participating in coaching programs at DDA throughout Aceh Province. These discussions were facilitated by senior DDA board members who served as resource

persons, providing valuable insights on effective coaching strategies for convert communities. This collaborative approach was designed to enhance the professional competencies of DDA administrators while simultaneously exploring strategies for integrating religious moderation principles into ongoing guidance processes.

The FGD sessions provided rich opportunities for examining integration strategies and developing shared understanding among all stakeholders. DDA leadership used these sessions to explain their perspectives on convert guidance: “The guidance of converts (mualaf) in Aceh is a shared responsibility of the government, society, and academics, as reflected in the ongoing mentoring programs. The most crucial aspects of such guidance are faith, worship, and religious moderation, so that converts may possess a strong foundation of Islamic knowledge as well as an attitude of religious moderation” (FGD, 2024).

Convert participants contributed their own perspectives during FGD sessions, emphasizing their needs and appreciation for the intervention: “We are in great need of mentoring in strengthening our faith (‘aqidah) and attitudes of moderation, in order to improve our understanding of religious moderation and its application in daily life. Our limited knowledge regarding religious moderation has been a significant factor, which is why we are deeply grateful for the implementation of this mentoring program, as it provides us with new insights and knowledge on religious moderation” (FGD, 2024).

The FGD process also contributed significantly to professional development of DDA administrators, reflecting the program’s dual focus on individual empowerment and institutional capacity building. Administrator feedback confirmed these benefits: “This mentoring program has greatly contributed to the development of the competencies of DDA administrators, as its main substance is to provide new knowledge and experiences regarding strategies for fostering religious moderation among converts, as well as other matters related to the guidance of converts in Aceh” (FGD, 2024).

These discussions revealed that mentoring activities focused on strengthening religious moderation address urgent needs while positively impacting both individual knowledge and attitudes of converts and the professional competencies of DDA administrators. The integration of religious moderation values into coaching materials and daily interaction practices emerged as a key strategy for sustainable impact.

Stage 3: Monitoring and Evaluation

The third and final implementation stage involved systematic monitoring and evaluation of program effectiveness in strengthening religious moderation among convert communities at DDA throughout Aceh Province. This evaluation process suggests that the PAR-based assistance program achieved its stated objectives with high levels of effectiveness across multiple dimensions of impact.

FGD interview data with DDA management provided compelling evidence of program success: “The community service program (PKM) on mentoring for strengthening religious moderation has made a significant contribution to the DDA

institution and to converts (muallaf) currently undergoing guidance at DDA in Aceh Province” (FGD, 2024). These institutional-level impacts suggest that the intervention created lasting benefits that extend beyond immediate participant outcomes.

Observational data, monitoring activities, and systematic evaluation of convert knowledge provided additional evidence of program effectiveness. Post-intervention interviews demonstrated measurable increases in converts’ understanding of religious moderation concepts and their practical applications. Individual participant feedback confirmed these improvements: “We are very pleased to participate in the mentoring activities on strengthening religious moderation, as it has enhanced our knowledge of religious moderation, which we hope to apply in our daily lives” (HY, 2024).

Systematic observation throughout the intervention period documented positive behavioral changes among converts, providing concrete evidence of knowledge translation into practice: “There has been a positive shift in the attitudes of the converts. For instance, during the guidance period at DDA, the converts demonstrated mutual respect and appreciation for differences in their interactions” (Observation, 2024).

The evaluation results indicated comprehensive improvements in knowledge, understanding, and attitudes toward religious moderation among converts following the PKM mentoring program. Additionally, the implementation contributed meaningfully to enhancing knowledge and competencies of DDA administrators, thereby supporting more effective implementation of institutional guidance programs for ongoing convert support.

Overall assessment indicates that the PAR-based coaching program was associated with strengthening *aqeedah* (creed) and religious moderation principles, increasing knowledge levels, and fostering moderate attitudes among convert participants. The implementation also contributed to addressing broader social challenges faced by converts in Aceh, with previously reticent and less socially engaged converts showing significant positive attitude changes, becoming more open and actively engaging with others in their communities. These PAR-based coaching activities ultimately fostered enhanced harmony within Aceh’s diverse society, encompassing various beliefs, traditions, and cultural practices.

3. Strengthening Religious Moderation Values Among Muslim Converts

The systematic strengthening of religious moderation values among convert communities in Aceh Province represented a central focus of the PAR-based intervention, recognizing that converts who have recently embraced Islam often possess limited understanding of religious moderation and its practical applications in social contexts (Maisura et al., 2023; Mulasi et al., 2023; Subchi et al., 2022; Zakiyah et al., 2023). The coaching activities concentrated specifically on strengthening religious moderation values for converts participating in DDA programs, guided by the recognition that these individuals require particular attention and targeted support.

DDA Chairperson leadership emphasized that mentoring activities were designed to foster improved understanding and application of religious moderation values in social

life throughout Aceh, reflecting shared commitment to supporting convert communities (MD, 2024). The systematic strengthening of these values drew directly from the nine core principles established by Indonesia's Ministry of Religion, providing a comprehensive framework for moderation development that aligned with national policy while addressing local contextual needs.

The implementation approach integrated these nine values systematically throughout all coaching activities and social interaction practices:

- *At-Tawassuth* (Moderation) formed the foundational principle guiding all other value development. DDA coaches guided converts toward avoiding extremism in Islamic practice while adopting balanced approaches that harmonize worship obligations with social engagement. This guidance emphasized fostering harmony between spiritual development and worldly responsibilities, helping converts understand that moderate practice strengthens rather than weakens religious commitment.
- *Al-I'tidal* (Justice) encouraged converts to develop fair and balanced perspectives when addressing both personal challenges and broader societal issues. This value was emphasized consistently during coaching sessions to help participants internalize justice as a natural aspect of their developing Islamic identity and social behavior patterns.
- *At-Tasamuh* (Tolerance) received particular emphasis given Aceh's diverse social context. Converts received guidance on respecting differences in religion, traditions, culture, and perspectives, particularly within Acehnese society where such differences are encountered regularly. They learned strategies for building harmonious relationships within their immediate communities while maintaining their own religious integrity and commitment.
- *Asy-Shura* (Deliberation) equipped converts with skills for addressing issues and challenges through collaborative consultation, both with broader communities and among fellow converts. This principle proved particularly valuable for developing inclusive decision-making approaches that honor diverse perspectives while achieving mutually acceptable outcomes.
- *Al-Islah* (Reformation) encouraged converts to understand themselves as agents of positive change within their families and communities. Guidance emphasized adopting peaceful approaches to improving social environments while maintaining community harmony and avoiding confrontational or divisive actions.
- *Al-Qudwah* (Role Modeling) helped converts understand their responsibilities to exemplify Islamic values that promote universal benefit and mercy. This principle connected individual spiritual development with broader social responsibilities, encouraging converts to see their personal growth as contributing to community wellbeing.

- *Al-Muwathanah* (Patriotism) fostered love for both Indonesia and Aceh specifically, encouraging converts to view contribution to national and regional development as integral aspects of their faith responsibilities. This principle helped converts understand their religious identity as compatible with and supportive of civic engagement.
- *Al-La Unf* (Non-Violence) equipped converts with skills for adopting peaceful approaches in all forms of interaction, emphasizing dialogue and deliberation over confrontational or aggressive responses to challenges and disagreements.
- *I'tiraf al-Urf* (Respect for Local Traditions) proved particularly relevant in Aceh's context, teaching converts to respect established Acehnese traditions that align with Islamic principles while understanding how local customs can enrich rather than compromise their religious practice.

These values were transmitted through multiple educational approaches including seminars, structured learning processes, and ongoing coaching interactions (MD, 2024). The integration and habituation of these principles into daily life practices proved critical for reinforcing religious moderation beyond formal educational settings (Mahmudah et al., 2025; Muliadi et al., 2025).

Observational data from 2024 confirmed successful integration of religious moderation values into classroom-based coaching sessions for converts throughout the intervention period. Teaching staff, including experienced ustadz, demonstrated patience and skill in instructing converts about both Islamic *aqeedah* (creed) and moderation principles simultaneously. They consistently encouraged converts to prioritize tolerance in societal interactions while promoting wisdom in responding to differences as essential strategies for maintaining peace and harmony within diverse communities.

The strengthening of religious moderation values for converts at DDA throughout Aceh Province emphasized habituation through structured social interaction opportunities. Converts received encouragement and guidance in embodying proportional, fair, honest, and tolerant attitudes when engaging with diverse community members. These coaching activities served dual purposes: enhancing converts' theoretical knowledge and understanding of religious moderation while providing practical training opportunities that enabled them to internalize and apply these values effectively in their daily lives within Aceh's complex social context.

The success of this comprehensive approach to value strengthening reflects the importance of integrating cognitive understanding with experiential learning and ongoing practice opportunities. By combining formal instruction with guided social interaction and systematic habituation practices, the intervention created conditions for sustainable attitude and behavior change that extends well beyond the immediate coaching period.

D. Conclusion

Religious moderation has gained widespread attention in contemporary Islamic discourse globally and has been a practical necessity in the diverse religious landscape of Aceh for centuries. The Muslim converts in this study demonstrated capacity for adopting moderate Islamic attitudes when provided with structured, community-driven interventions, as evidenced by their behavioral changes, social interactions, and sustained commitment to balanced religious practice. Positive changes in understanding and application of moderation principles were observed over the eight-week intervention period.

Through Participatory Action Research methodology and systematic integration of Indonesia's nine religious moderation values, this study was associated with strengthening both individual understanding and institutional capacity for ongoing convert support. The converts developed appreciation for the principles of *At-Tawassuth*, *Al-I'tidal*, *At-Tasamuh*, and other moderation values, applying them in their daily social interactions and community engagements.

This study contributes to the body of literature on religious moderation by providing evidence-based findings of effective community-based interventions in Sharia-based contexts, specifically demonstrating how PAR methodology can address complex challenges faced by vulnerable religious populations. The findings suggest that religious moderation may be cultivated through targeted educational interventions that combine theoretical knowledge with experiential learning and community support. Practically, the intervention model developed through this study offers an adaptable framework for religious institutions and policymakers seeking evidence-based approaches to fostering moderate attitudes among convert populations. Theoretically, the research validates the effectiveness of dependency theory applications in religious education contexts, while demonstrating how transnational Islamic values can be successfully adapted to local community needs and cultural contexts.

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