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Religious Moderation Based Academic Culture Transformation for Kampus Merdeka: A Mixed-Methods Study at IAIN Curup

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the transformation of academic culture based on religious moderation to support the implementation of Kampus Merdeka at IAIN Curup. An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was employed. The quantitative phase involved 39 lecturers and students of the Master's Program in Islamic Religious Education, selected through cluster sampling. The qualitative phase involved purposively selected informants through observations, interviews, focus group discussions, and documentation. The findings indicate that 97.4% of respondents supported the academic culture development policy. Agreement on transformation indicators reached 92.3% for religious moderation, 94.9% for anti-violence, 92.3% for national commitment, and 97.4% for local cultural accommodation. Internal and external supporting factors were acknowledged by 94.9% of respondents, while internal and external inhibiting factors reached 69.2% and 74.4%, respectively. Qualitative findings identified inclusivity, student participation, leadership support, and training as supporting elements, while resistance to change, limited funding, and weak external support hindered implementation. The limited sample restricts generalizability.

Keywords: *Academic Culture; Religious Moderation; Transformation; Independent Campus.*

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Abstract & Indexing

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INTRODUCTION

The Ministry of Education and Culture launched the Merdeka Belajar (Freedom to Learn) policy in late 2019 and extended it to higher education as Kampus Merdeka (Independent Campus) on 24 January 2020 (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2020a).The policy starts from the premise that freedom of thought must first exist among teachers before it can be realized among students (Hatmanto et al., 2023), and that teachers must be able to translate the basic competencies required by the curriculum into learning (Dewi et al., 2023). Kampus Merdeka seeks to make learning in higher education more autonomous and flexible, to foster an innovative learning culture that fits students' needs, and to improve graduate quality for the demands of the 21st century (Juwaini et al., 2025). It was implemented under Ministerial Regulation No. 3 of 2020 on the National Standards of Higher Education (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2020b) and, for state Islamic higher education institutions (PTKIN), under guidelines issued by the Directorate General of Islamic Education, the latest being Decree No. 1591 of 2022 on technical guidelines for implementing Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka at Islamic higher education institutions (Direktur Jenderal Pendidikan Islam, 2022). In 2025, the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, and Technology positioned Kampus Berdampak (Impactful Campus) as the continuation and strengthening of MBKM (Kementerian Agama RI, 2019) The cultural foundations of Kampus Merdeka therefore remain relevant to the current policy direction.

Previous studies show that Indonesian higher education institutions, particularly state Islamic institutions, have been positioned as strategic arenas for mainstreaming religious moderation through the curriculum, academic policy, and campus based programs (Afwadzi & Miski, 2021).The policy was launched by the Ministry of Religious Affairs in 2019 and incorporated into the 2020–2024 national medium term development plan (Qoumas et al., 2024),and in Islamic education moderation is understood as a middle path (wasathiyyah) that is cultivated through socialization, acculturation, and internalization (Rahmadi & Hamdan, 2023). Its urgency is reinforced by findings that universities have become fertile ground for the regeneration of groups that challenge the unitary state (Ulumuddin et al., 2024), that radicalism has extended its influence within Islamic universities (Afwadzi et al., 2024),and that radical groups now operate covertly, including through extra-campus organizations (Kanafi et al., 2024). In response, state Islamic universities have established Religious Moderation Houses and strategic plans (Muhsin et al., 2024), and the practice of moderation on campus is commonly framed through four pillars, namely national commitment, anti-violence, tolerance, and accommodation of local culture (Kementerian Agama RI, 2019; Kanafi et al., 2024). These pillars largely correspond to the indicators examined in the present study (religious moderation in general, anti-violence, national commitment, and accommodation of local culture).

However, the results of this agenda are mixed. Two state Islamic universities were reported to have succeeded in promoting moderate attitudes, tolerance, and dialogue, with lecturers, staff, and training programs playing a significant role, although skepticism and negative perceptions of moderation remained obstacles (Baba et al., 2023). Moderation education has also been criticized for remaining superficial when it is delivered through top down policies and textual learning with limited integration into institutional culture (Chotimah et al., 2025). A study of state Islamic universities in Aceh reports that institutionalization is constrained by the exclusion of moderation from strategic planning, inadequate funding, and varied reception among academics (Razak et al., 2025), while human resource development efforts have mostly reached the internalization stage only (Hanif et al., 2024).

In parallel, the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) policy has been implemented in state higher education institutions through programs such as student exchange, internships, and teaching assistance (Salim & Wahidah, 2023), yet barriers such as curriculum adjustment, funding, partnership, and academic information system readiness (Dewirahmadanirwati & Agustina, 2024), as well as inadequate infrastructure and limited policy understanding (Tobondo, 2024), have been reported. Moreover, the implementation of moderation faces political and religious polarization, the spread of hoaxes, and low public understanding (Fawaid, 2024). Therefore, research that links the transformation of academic culture based on religious moderation with the realization of an independent campus, and that identifies its supporting and inhibiting factors in a specific institution, is still needed. This study addresses that gap by examining how the transformation is implemented at IAIN Curup and which factors support or inhibit it.

Academic Culture, Religious Moderation, and Theoretical Framework

Academic culture, one of the foundations of Kampus Merdeka, is an educational atmosphere in a diverse, pluralistic, multicultural scientific society in an institution that is based on the values of scientific truth and objectivity (Zakkiyah et al., 2023). Academic culture is built on the principles of freedom of thought, opinion and a dynamic, open and scientific academic rostrum. Academic involvement in the implementation of the teaching-learning process is an important factor in improving learning achievement. The vision of the leadership of educational institutions and the academic climate can encourage teachers to use more time for learning activities, guiding students to use their time to learn. In academic culture, transformation is needed so that in realizing an independent campus, namely by transforming academic culture based on religious moderation (Destriani, 2022; Yanto et al., 2022).

Considering the many cultures that exist in Indonesia. Indonesia as a country with the largest Muslim population in the world is an important highlight in terms of Islamic moderation. Moderation is the core teaching of Islam (Burhanuddin & Ilmi, 2022). Moderate Islam is a religious understanding that is very relevant in the context of diversity in all aspects, both religions, customs, tribes and the nation itself in the transformation of academic culture based on religious moderation is very important, especially in manifesting an independent campus without discrimination against certain groups. October 8, 2019 can be said to be the "day of religious moderation". Falling on Tuesday, this is the moment of the launch of the book "Religious Moderation", whose *leading sector* is at the Center for Research and Development of Religious Guidance and Services, Research and Development and Training Agency of the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia (Kementerian Agama RI, 2019). Therefore, the understanding of religious moderation must be understood contextually, not textually, meaning that moderation in religion in Indonesia is open to a moderated Indonesia, but a way of understanding religion that must be moderate because Indonesia has many cultures, cultures and customs (Destriani, 2022).

This religious moderation can answer various problems in religion and global civilization. What is no less important is that moderate Muslims are able to respond loudly accompanied by peaceful actions with radical, extremist and puritan based groups that do everything with violent acts. Religious moderation intended in this context is to bring society in a moderate understanding, not extreme in religion, and also not deify the ratio of free thinking without limits. Religious moderation is discussed, recited, interpreted, and echoed as *a framing* in managing the lives of the muticultural Indonesian people. The need for a moderate religious narrative is not only a personal or institutional need, but in general for citizens of the world. Based on this description, this study further discusses the transformation of academic culture based

on religious moderation in manifesting an independent campus.

Academic culture is understood here as the shared values, norms, beliefs, and practices that shape how members of a higher education institution think and act in teaching, research, and community life (Kuh & Whitt, 1988; Tierney, 1988). Following Schein , organizational culture operates at three levels: visible artifacts (policies, rituals, and programs), espoused values, and basic underlying assumptions (Schein, 2010). Cultural transformation is therefore not complete when a policy is issued; it is complete when espoused values are enacted in everyday practice and gradually become taken for granted. Change-management perspectives add that such transformation moves from unfreezing existing habits, through moving toward new behavior, to refreezing it as a new norm (Lewin, 1947), and that it depends on leadership vision, communication, and the consolidation of early gains (Kotter, 1996).

In this study, the transformation is examined through (a) the academic culture development policy, which represents the artifacts and espoused values; (b) the implementation of a moderation-based academic culture, assessed through religious moderation in general, anti-violence, national commitment, and accommodation of local culture, which are adapted from the indicators of religious moderation defined by the Ministry of Religious Affairs (national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence, and accommodation of local culture; Kementerian Agama RI, 2019), although tolerance was not measured as a separate indicator; and (c) the internal and external factors that support or inhibit the process.

Research Questions

Based on this framework, the study addresses three research questions. RQ1: How is academic culture transformation based on religious moderation implemented at IAIN Curup in support of Kampus Merdeka, in terms of the academic culture policy and the four indicators? RQ2: What internal and external factors support the transformation? RQ3: What internal and external factors inhibit it?

METHODS OF RESEARCH

Research Design

This study used a mixed-methods approach with an explanatory sequential design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Ivankova et al., 2006). The quantitative phase was conducted first to describe the perceptions of the academic community, and the qualitative phase followed to explain and deepen the quantitative results. The two sets of results were integrated at the interpretation stage through a joint display (Table 4).

Setting, Population, and Sample

The study was conducted in 2023 over a six-month period at IAIN Curup, specifically in the Master's Program in Islamic Religious Education (PAI), as part of the institution's 2023 DIPA basic research program. The population comprised the academic community of the program, namely lecturers and students. Respondents were selected through cluster sampling (Sugiyono, 2022). which yielded 39 respondents. Given the small sample and the single study program, the quantitative results are treated as descriptive and are not generalized to the whole IAIN Curup academic community.

Instrument

The questionnaire was a survey on the transformation of academic culture based on religious

moderation in realizing Kampus Merdeka at IAIN Curup. It was developed from the dimensions and indicators in Table 1, and its validity and reliability were tested before data collection. Responses used a five-point Likert scale: 5 = Strongly Agree, 4 = Agree, 3 = Somewhat Disagree (Kurang Setuju), 2 = Disagree, and 1 = Strongly Disagree. The scale has no neutral midpoint.

Table 1. Dimensions and Indicators of the Questionnaire

Dimension	Indicator
Academic culture policy	Policy on the development of academic culture for the entire community
Implementation of transformation	Religious moderation (general); anti-violence; national commitment; accommodation of local culture
Supporting factors	Internal; external
Inhibiting factors	Internal; external

Source: Primary data processed, 2026

Qualitative Phase

Informants were selected purposively, that is, on the basis of specific considerations in order to obtain more representative data (Sugiyono, 2022) (Sugiyono, 2022), from three groups: a professor, lecturers, and students of the Master's PAI Program. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, focus group discussion, and documentation of archives and books related to the implementation of academic culture transformation. Transcripts were coded following the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, data reduction, data display (grouping codes into themes), and conclusion drawing. Informants are identified by role (Professor, Lecturer, Student). Quotes were translated from Indonesian by the authors (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics: frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. The credibility of the qualitative data was tested through source and technique triangulation, peer discussion, and member checking. Time triangulation was not used because the study followed a fixed, approved schedule.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

The results are organized by research question. Table 2 summarizes the descriptive statistics for all questionnaire items (n = 39), and Figures 1–4 display the response distributions. The qualitative themes are summarized in Table 3 and integrated with the quantitative results in Table 4. Percentages may not sum to exactly 100% because of rounding.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Questionnaire Items (n = 39)

Item	SA n (%)	A n (%)	SwD n (%)	D n (%)	SDis n (%)	Agree (%)	M	SD
Academic culture policy	17 (43.6)	21 (53.8)	1 (2.6)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	97.4	4.41	0.55
Religious moderation (general)	16 (41.0)	20 (51.3)	2 (5.1)	1 (2.6)	0 (0.0)	92.3	4.31	0.69
Anti-violence	16 (41.0)	21 (53.8)	2 (5.1)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	94.9	4.36	0.58
National commitment	17 (43.6)	19 (48.7)	2 (5.1)	1 (2.6)	0 (0.0)	92.3	4.33	0.70
Accommodation of local culture	18 (46.2)	20 (51.3)	1 (2.6)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	97.4	4.44	0.55
Supporting factors: internal	12 (30.8)	25 (64.1)	2 (5.1)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	94.9	4.26	0.55
Supporting factors: external	11 (28.2)	26 (66.7)	2 (5.1)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	94.9	4.23	0.54
Inhibiting factors: internal	7 (17.9)	20 (51.3)	7 (17.9)	4 (10.3)	1 (2.6)	69.2	3.72	0.97
Inhibiting factors: external	7 (17.9)	22 (56.4)	6 (15.4)	3 (7.7)	1 (2.6)	74.4	3.79	0.92

Note. SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; SwD = Somewhat Disagree (Kurang Setuju); D = Disagree; SDis = Strongly Disagree. Agree (%) = SA + A. M and SD (sample standard deviation) were computed on a 1–5 scale (5 = Strongly Agree). Source: Primary data processed, 2026

RQ1. Implementation of Academic Culture Transformation Based on Religious Moderation

Policy on academic culture development. Table 2 and Figure 1 show that the academic community responded positively to the policy: 43.6% strongly agreed, 53.8% agreed, and 2.6% (n = 1) somewhat disagreed, with no respondents disagreeing or strongly disagreeing (M = 4.41, SD = 0.55). This is in line with the results of the interview which explained that the determination of policies related to the development of academic culture has helped increase inclusivity and respect diversity in the academic environment. Through this policy, we strive to ensure that every voice is heard and valued, regardless of a person's background, identity, or beliefs. (Professor; Theme 1, Table 3)

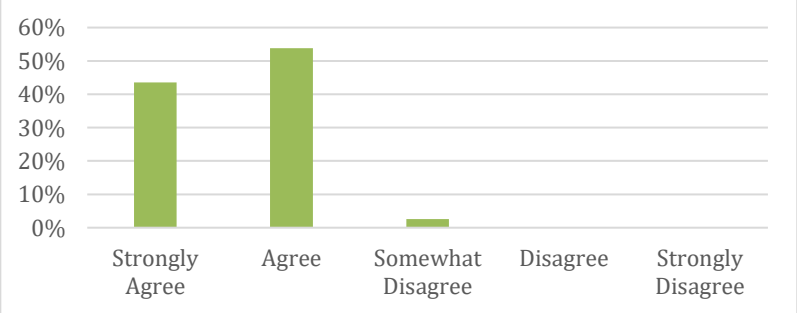


Figure 1. Policy determination related to the development of academic culture for the entire community
Source: *Primary data processed, 2026*

Implementation of the transformation. Responses on the four indicators are shown in Figure 2 and Table 2. For religious moderation in general, 41.0% strongly agreed, 51.3% agreed, 5.1% somewhat disagreed, and 2.6% disagreed (92.3% agreement). For anti-violence, 41.0% strongly agreed, 53.8% agreed, and 5.1% somewhat disagreed (94.9%). For national commitment, 43.6% strongly agreed, 48.7% agreed, 5.1% somewhat disagreed, and 2.6% disagreed (92.3%). For accommodation of local culture, 46.2% strongly agreed, 51.3% agreed, and 2.6% somewhat disagreed (97.4%). Mean scores ranged from 4.31 to 4.44 on the 5-point scale.

This is in line with the results of the interview which stated that the implementation of Cultural Transformation of Religious Moderation in manifesting an independent campus at the State Islamic Institute (IAIN) Curup can be a significant step in encouraging pluralism (Lecturer; Theme 2, Table 3). A student described training programs and workshops that encourage interfaith dialogue and awareness of social issues (Theme 3, Table 3).

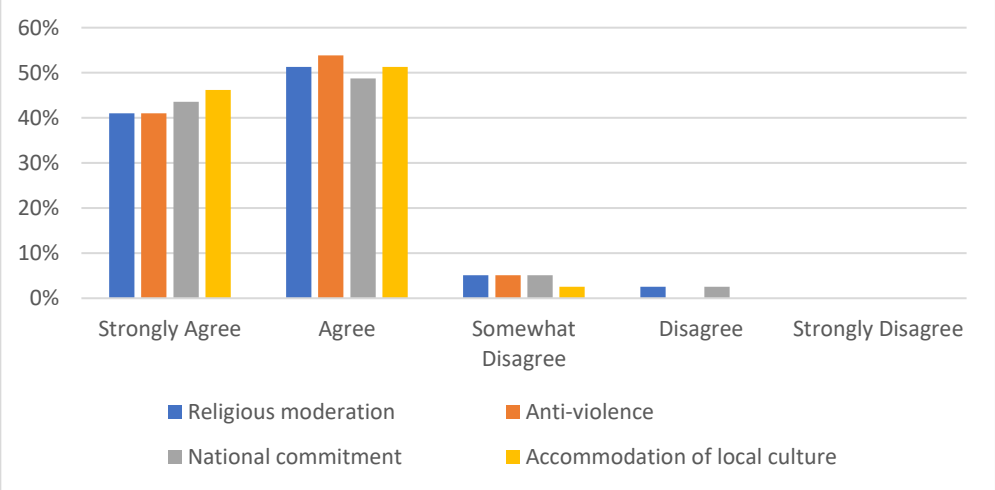


Figure 2. Implementation of Cultural Transformation of religious moderation in manifesting an independent campus at IAIN Curup
Source: *Primary data processed, 2026*

RQ2. Supporting Factors

Supporting factors. As shown in Figure 3 and Table 2, 30.8% of respondents strongly agreed, 64.1% agreed, and 5.1% somewhat disagreed that internal supporting factors affect the implementation of the transformation (94.9% agreement). For external supporting factors, the figures were 28.2%, 66.7%, and 5.1% (94.9% agreement). No respondent disagreed or strongly disagreed.

In line with the results of the interview which stated that there are several supporting factors for the implementation of academic culture transformation, namely the support and active participation of students in activities that encourage tolerance and pluralism, as well as their commitment to practice the values of religious moderation in campus life (Student; Theme 4, Table 3). A lecturer also pointed to the active involvement and commitment of leaders, lecturers, and administrative staff (Theme 5, Table 3).

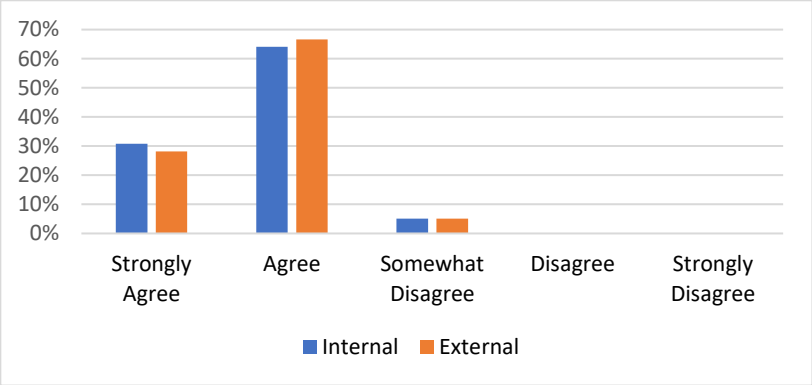


Figure 3. Supporting Factors for Religious Moderation Based on Academic Culture Transformation in Manifesting an Independent Campus at IAIN Curup
Source: *Primary data processed, 2026*

RQ3. Inhibiting Factors

Inhibiting factors. Figure 4 and Table 2 show that 17.9% strongly agreed, 51.3% agreed, 17.9% somewhat disagreed, 10.3% disagreed, and 2.6% strongly disagreed that internal inhibiting factors affect the transformation (69.2% agreement). For external inhibiting factors, the figures were 17.9%, 56.4%, 15.4%, 7.7%, and 2.6% (74.4% agreement). Between 25.6% and 30.8% of respondents therefore did not agree that these factors have an effect. Interviews identified resistance to change, limited financial resources, and lack of support from external parties as the main inhibiting factors (Themes 6–8, Table 3). The distribution of responses on inhibiting factors is shown in Figure 4.

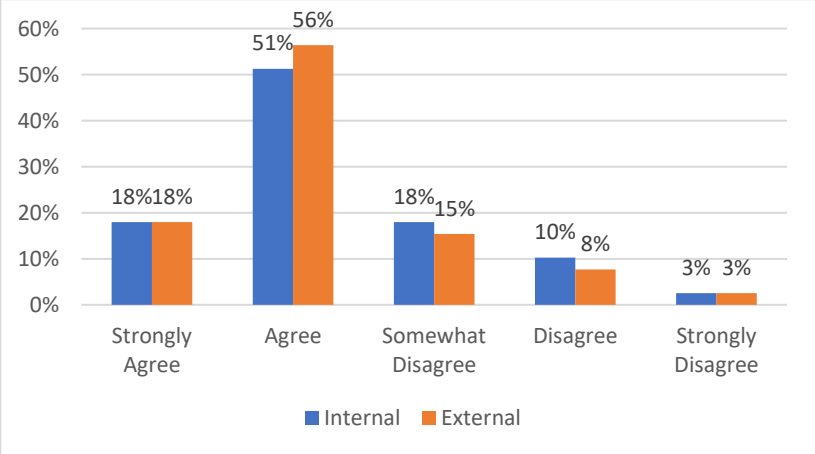


Figure 4. Factors Inhibiting Academic Cultural Transformation Based on Religious Moderation in Manifesting an Independent Campus at IAIN Curup
Source: *Primary data processed, 2026*

Qualitative themes and integration of findings

Interview, focus group, observation, and document data were coded into eight themes (Table 3). Themes 1–3 relate to the implementation of the transformation (RQ1), Themes 4–5 to supporting factors (RQ2), and Themes 6–8 to inhibiting factors (RQ3). Table 4 integrates the qualitative themes with the quantitative results, following the explanatory sequential design.

Table 3. Qualitative Themes, Codes, and Representative Quotes

Theme	Codes	Representative quote (informant)
1. Inclusivity and respect for diversity (RQ1)	Every voice heard; respect for background, identity, and belief	"The policy on academic culture development has helped increase inclusivity and respect for diversity in the academic environment. Through this policy, we strive to ensure that every voice is heard and valued, regardless of a person's background, identity, or beliefs." (Professor)
2. Encouraging pluralism (RQ1)	Pluralism; tolerance; development of knowledge	"The implementation of the cultural transformation of religious moderation … can be a significant step in encouraging pluralism, tolerance, and the development of knowledge on campus." (Lecturer)
3. Training and workshops (RQ1)	Interfaith dialogue; cross-cultural understanding; social awareness	"The cultural transformation is carried out through training and workshop programs that encourage interfaith dialogue, cross-cultural understanding, and awareness of social and humanitarian issues." (Student)
4. Student participation and commitment (RQ2)	Active participation; tolerance activities; practice of moderation values	"…the support and active participation of students in activities that encourage tolerance and pluralism, as well as their commitment to practice the values of religious moderation in campus life." (Student)
5. Leadership and staff support (RQ2)	Commitment of leaders, lecturers, and administrative staff	"…the active involvement and commitment of leaders, lecturers, and administrative staff to support and encourage a more inclusive and tolerant cultural change on campus." (Lecturer)
6. Resistance to change (RQ3)	Resistance; established ways of working	"Resistance to change from some faculty members, staff, or students can hinder steps to implement the cultural transformation." (Student)
7. Limited financial resources (RQ3)	Budget constraints	"We also experience limited financial resources that limit our ability to carry out the programs needed to support the cultural transformation." (Lecturer)
8. Lack of external support (RQ3)	External parties	"…the lack of support from external parties also makes this transformation process more challenging." (Lecturer)

Source: Primary data processed, 2026

Table 4. Joint Display of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

Domain	Quantitative result (n = 39)	Qualitative themes	Integration
Academic culture policy	97.4% agreed or strongly agreed (M = 4.41)	Theme 1: inclusivity and respect for diversity	Confirming: broad acceptance of the policy, described as inclusive
Implementation	92.3%–97.4% agreed across four indicators	Themes 2–3: pluralism; training and workshops	Confirming: positive reception, with activities cited as the channel
Supporting factors	94.9% (internal) and 94.9% (external) agreed	Themes 4–5: student participation; leadership and staff support	Expanding: interviews specify who supports the transformation
Inhibiting factors	69.2% (internal) and 74.4% (external) agreed; 25.6%–30.8% did not	Themes 6–8: resistance to change; limited funds; weak external support	Explaining: the themes name the obstacles; uneven experience of obstacles may explain lower agreement

Source: Primary data processed, 2026

Discussion

This study aimed to examine how the transformation of academic culture based on religious moderation is implemented to realize an independent campus at IAIN Curup, and to identify the factors that support and inhibit it. The findings show that the academic community responded positively to the policy on academic culture development (97.4% agreed or strongly agreed; 2.6% somewhat disagreed) and to the implementation of the transformation on all four indicators: religious moderation (92.3%), anti-violence (94.9%), national commitment (92.3%), and accommodation of local culture (97.4%). Internal and external supporting factors were each acknowledged by 94.9% of respondents, whereas inhibiting factors were acknowledged by 69.2% (internal) and 74.4% (external) of respondents, with a considerably larger share (25.6%–30.8%) not expressing agreement.

These findings support previous research. (Mukhibat et al., 2024) found that a religious moderation curriculum at a state Islamic institute produced students with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes related to the same pillars, namely religious moderation, national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and local cultural accommodation. Ainissyifa and Nasrulloh likewise reported that nearly all of the 315 student respondents in their study agreed that moderation values shape inclusive, tolerant, and peaceful religious attitudes (Ainissyifa & Nasrulloh, 2025). Baba et al. reported that two state Islamic universities succeeded in implementing moderate attitudes, tolerance, and dialogue, and that training programs were effective in increasing the understanding of the academic community (Baba et al., 2023), while Wahidin et al. assessed universities in West Java using comparable indicators and concluded that their carrying capacity for moderation was good (Wahidin et al., 2023). The role of institutional support suggested here also corresponds with Razak et al.(Razak et al., 2025), who concluded that successful implementation of religious moderation in higher education depends on integrating policy with institutional will and cultural engagement, and with Burhanuddin and Ilmi (Burhanuddin & Ilmi, 2022), who identified institutional and cultural integration as one of the models of moderation practice on campus.

The data can be interpreted in three ways. First, the 97.4% agreement on the policy suggests that the academic culture policy has legitimacy among the academic community, which is an important precondition for cultural change. Second, the high agreement on all four indicators (92.3%–97.4%), with the highest on accommodation of local culture (97.4%) and the lowest on the general implementation of religious moderation and national commitment (both 92.3%), may indicate that the community more readily accepts values that are visible in everyday practice and local tradition than the broader concept of moderation. This is consistent with Afwadzi et al. (Afwadzi et al., 2024), who found that most students equate religious moderation with religious tolerance, and with the view that moderation is internalized gradually through socialization and acculturation (Rahmadi & Hamdan, 2023). Third, the equal 94.9% agreement on internal and external supporting factors suggests that the transformation is perceived as dependent on both campus actors (leaders, lecturers, administrative staff, and students) and external partners, so it cannot be treated as a purely internal institutional matter.

In the interviews, informants associated the transformation of academic culture based on religious moderation with several benefits for the academic community. The interviews suggest that the policy increased inclusivity and respect for diversity, ensuring that every voice is heard and valued regardless of background, identity, or belief, and that training programs and workshops strengthened interfaith dialogue and awareness of social issues. The transformation also appeared to encourage students' active participation and commitment to practicing tolerance and pluralism in campus life. These benefits correspond to those

reported by Ainissyifa and Nasrulloh (Ainissyifa & Nasrulloh, 2025), namely greater tolerance, a more critical attitude toward religious information, and adaptation to local culture, and by Muhsin et al. who found that moderation programs at IAIN Ponorogo promoted tolerance, reduced social tension, and prepared students for engagement with broader societal diversity (Muhsin et al., 2024). For an independent campus, such benefits may be relevant because the freedom offered by MBKM is expected to broaden students' perspectives (Dewirahmadanirwati & Agustina, 2024) and an inclusive academic climate allows this freedom to be exercised without discrimination against any group.

Nevertheless, the data also show contrary points. A small proportion of respondents disagreed with the policy (2.6%), with the implementation of the transformation (2.6%–7.7% depending on the indicator), and with the existence of supporting factors (5.1%). More importantly, between 25.6% and 30.8% of respondents did not express agreement that inhibiting factors affect the transformation, while the remaining respondents acknowledged them. The qualitative findings identify these obstacles as resistance to change, limited financial resources, and a lack of support from external parties (Themes 6–8, Table 3).

Several contextual explanations can account for these contrary points. First, cultural transformation in a higher education institution is a gradual process, and the respondents come from a heterogeneous community of lecturers, administrative staff, and students who may differ in their exposure to moderation programs and in their understanding of the concept. Muhsin et al. similarly noted that although most members of the academic community reported positive attitude changes after joining moderation programs, some individuals still struggled to grasp and internalize the values (Muhsin et al., 2024). Second, obstacles such as resistance to change and limited funds are likely to be experienced unevenly, for instance more by those who manage programs than by those who only participate in them, so perceptions of inhibiting factors vary across respondents. Third, respondents who report no obstacles may not yet have encountered the difficulties that appear when a policy is translated into routine practice and subjected to periodic evaluation.

Previous research supports these explanations. Chotimah et al. showed that moderation education delivered through top down policy and textual learning, without integration into institutional culture, remains superficial and weakly connected to social realities (Chotimah et al., 2025). Hanif et al. found that human resource development in Islamic higher education through focus group discussions, training, and webinars had only reached the internalization stage, meaning that understanding had been strengthened but had not yet become part of organizational culture (Hanif et al., 2024). In Aceh, Razak et al. reported that institutionalization was limited by the exclusion of moderation from strategic planning, inadequate funding, and varied reception among academics, and that the institution with strong leadership and resource commitment performed better than those with fragmented, ad hoc efforts (Razak et al., 2025). Baba et al. added that skepticism and negative perceptions of moderation persist even where implementation is considered successful (Baba et al., 2023). Ainissyifa and Nasrulloh reported that conservative ideologies, limited religious understanding among students and some lecturers, and misleading content on social media inhibit implementation (Ainissyifa & Nasrulloh, 2025), which is in line with the polarization, hoaxes, and low public understanding noted by Fawaid (Fawaid, 2024) and with the covert infiltration of radical groups through extra-campus organizations described by Kanafi et al. (Kanafi et al., 2024). In the broader MBKM context, Dewi Rahmadani Nirwati and Agustina (Dewirahmadanirwati & Agustina, 2024) reported curriculum adjustment, funding, partner exploration, and academic information systems as the main barriers, and Tobondo (Tobondo, 2024) identified inadequate infrastructure and a lack of policy understanding. Taken together, these studies may help explain why a minority of respondents in the present

study remained unconvinced, and why resistance to change, limited funding, and weak external support emerged as the main inhibiting factors.

These findings have theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, they suggest that the transformation of academic culture based on religious moderation is not only a matter of teaching values but of aligning institutional policy, campus actors, and external partnerships, which may extend the discussion of independent campus implementation beyond curriculum and learning mobility toward campus culture. Practically, the literature reviewed here points to several recommendations for IAIN Curup and similar institutions; these are not findings of the present study. They could (a) include religious moderation targets and funding in strategic planning, as in the strategic plan model of Wulandari and Sari (Wulandari & Sari, 2023), so that the policy does not depend on ad hoc events (Razak et al., 2025) and remains aligned with the national moderation policy (Qoumas et al., 2024); (b) integrate moderation values into the curriculum and semester learning plans, as in the curriculum model developed at IAIN Ponorogo (Mukhibat et al., 2024), and complement them with the hidden curriculum and extracurricular activities (Rahmadi & Hamdan, 2023); (c) develop the capacity of lecturers and staff beyond one-off training toward habituation in organizational culture (Hanif et al., 2024); (d) strengthen digital literacy and partnerships with moderate external parties, and engage extra-campus organizations through clear campus policies, to counter conservative content(Ainissyifa & Nasrulloh, 2025; Hanif et al., 2024); and (e) conduct periodic evaluation and policy control to ensure continuity.

Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, all questionnaire data are self-reported and may be affected by social-desirability bias, particularly on a normatively loaded topic such as religious moderation. Second, the study was conducted in a single study program (the Master's PAI Program) with a small sample (n = 39), so the results are descriptive and cannot be generalized to the whole IAIN Curup academic community. Third, the response distributions show a ceiling effect, with most answers concentrated in the "agree" and "strongly agree" categories, which limits the ability to differentiate between respondents. Fourth, no inferential analysis was performed, so no relationship between variables can be claimed. Future studies should use larger, stratified, or comparative samples across study programs and institutions, validated multi-item scales, and inferential tests of the relationship between a moderation-based academic culture and the outcomes of Kampus Merdeka and its successor, Kampus Berdampak.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how academic culture based on religious moderation is being transformed in the Master's PAI Program at IAIN Curup to support Kampus Merdeka, and which factors support or inhibit the process. In response to the first research question, the descriptive results from 39 respondents show broad agreement with the academic culture development policy (97.4%) and with the implementation of the transformation on the four indicators examined (92.3%–97.4%), and the interviews associate the policy with greater inclusivity, respect for diversity, and stronger interfaith dialogue through training and workshops. For the second question, internal and external supporting factors were each acknowledged by 94.9% of respondents, and the qualitative data point to student participation and the commitment of leaders, lecturers, and administrative staff. For the third question, inhibiting factors were acknowledged less

uniformly (69.2% internal and 74.4% external), and informants described resistance to change, limited financial resources, and lack of support from external parties. Taken together, the findings suggest that the transformation has been well received but remains a work in progress. In relation to Kampus Merdeka, which continues in the 2025 Kampus Berdampak policy, an inclusive and anti-violent campus culture may provide a favorable setting for the freedom and flexibility that the policy offers, although this study did not test that link directly. The study is limited by its small single-program sample, self-reported data, a ceiling effect, and the absence of inferential analysis. Future research should use larger and comparative samples and test the relationship between a moderation-based academic culture and the outcomes of Kampus Merdeka and Kampus Berdampak.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The first author contributed to the conceptualization of the study, development of the research methodology, data collection, data analysis, and preparation of the initial manuscript. The second author contributed to data processing, interpretation of the research findings, and provided substantive input to the manuscript. The third author contributed to the critical review, editing, and refinement of the manuscript. All authors participated in the discussion of the research findings, reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript, and are responsible for the integrity and accuracy of the work.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there are no financial or non-financial conflicts of interest that could have influenced the conduct of the research, data analysis, preparation, or publication of this article.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) USE STATEMENT

The authors declare that no artificial intelligence (AI) technology was used in the research process or in the preparation of this article.

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