

Internalizing Muwāṭanah Values to Strengthen National Spirit in Akidah Akhlak Learning

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ABSTRACT

Globalization and digital media can complicate the relationship between religious identity and national belonging among adolescents. This study examines how muwāṭanah values love of homeland, tolerance, responsibility, and social participation are internalized through Akidah Akhlak learning in Grade VIII G at MTsN 1 Ponorogo. Using a qualitative case study, data were collected from interviews with the principal, vice principal for curriculum, teacher, and one student, supported by non-participant observation and documents. Analysis followed the Miles and Huberman interactive model with triangulation. Students' national spirit was initially uneven in ceremony participation, collective responsibility, solidarity, and social concern. Internalization combined Islamic-civic reasoning, stories and reflection, discipline, mixed-group work, care for school facilities, social projects, and teacher modeling. These practices were associated with improved discipline, responsibility, tolerance, cooperation, respectful participation in national ceremonies, and social involvement. Constraints included limited time, peer tensions, and polarizing social-media content. Akidah Akhlak can integrate religious and civic character when values are contextualized, modeled, and practiced consistently.

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INTRODUCTION

Globalization and digital communication have widened young people's access to knowledge, identities, and transnational communities. At the same time, these processes can weaken local attachments when religious, cultural, and political narratives are consumed without critical mediation. In Indonesia, where citizenship is lived within extensive religious and cultural diversity, education is expected to develop both religious integrity and commitment to the nation. The national policy

discourse on religious moderation therefore places national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and accommodation of local culture among the central indicators of balanced religious life (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2019). Empirical research likewise indicates that religious moderation is related to inclusive attitudes and the capacity to live constructively in a plural society (Subchi et al., 2022).

Within Islamic educational discourse, the concept of *muwāṭānah* provides a useful bridge between faith and citizenship. In this article, *muwāṭānah* refers to a religiously grounded form of citizenship expressed through love of homeland, recognition of equal civic dignity, responsibility for the common good, respect for difference, and active participation in national life. It is not a narrow or exclusionary nationalism. Rather, it frames loyalty to the country as an ethical responsibility that must remain consistent with justice, compassion, and peaceful coexistence. This understanding is especially relevant for adolescents who may encounter online narratives that falsely present Islamic identity and Indonesian nationality as competing commitments (Anwar et al., 2022; Hanif et al., 2025).

Madrasahs occupy a strategic position in addressing this challenge because they combine religious instruction with the national curriculum. The Merdeka Curriculum for madrasahs strengthens the Pancasila Student Profile and the Rahmatan lil-'Ālamīn Student Profile, including values related to citizenship, social responsibility, tolerance, and balanced religiosity (Directorate General of Islamic Education, 2022; Mufid, 2023). Among the subjects taught in a madrasah, Akidah Akhlak is particularly significant. Akidah provides the theological basis of belief, whereas akhlak translates belief into conduct. Consequently, the subject can connect religious convictions with concrete civic habits, such as respecting national symbols, fulfilling collective responsibilities, caring for shared facilities, cooperating across differences, and resolving conflict peacefully.

National spirit in school settings should therefore not be reduced to memorizing patriotic slogans or attending ceremonial events. It includes cognitive understanding of the nation, emotional attachment to the homeland, and consistent social behavior that prioritizes shared interests. Participation in a flag ceremony is meaningful when it is accompanied by discipline and respect; pride in national identity becomes credible when it is reflected in tolerance, solidarity, and responsibility. Research on Islamic education has shown that the integration of religious moderation can support tolerance, civic commitment, and national identity, particularly when learning is contextual and participatory rather than purely doctrinal (Aderibigbe et al., 2023; Solechan et al., 2024; Wardi et al., 2023).

Previous studies provide important foundations but also reveal a gap. Research has discussed the incorporation of moderation values in Islamic education, the design of moderate learning strategies, and the role of institutional culture in forming moderate character (Huda, 2024; Ma'arif et al., 2022; Umar et al., 2024). Other studies have examined curriculum content, student-profile projects, and models for learning religious moderation values (Mufid, 2023; Salamudin & Nuralamin, 2024; Zulfatmi, 2023). However, fewer studies have closely examined how the more specific value of *muwāṭānah* is enacted in everyday Akidah Akhlak instruction at the Madrasah Tsanawiyah level and how teachers and school leaders interpret observable changes in students' national spirit.

The case addressed in this study emerged from preliminary concerns in Grade VIII G at MTsN 1 Ponorogo. Some students were reported to participate in flag ceremonies without sufficient solemnity, show inconsistent responsibility for collective assignments, prefer particular peers during group work, and display limited solidarity or social concern. These conditions did not indicate an absence of national spirit; rather, they showed uneven depth and consistency. The central educational question was how classroom learning could move students from knowing civic values to feeling responsible for them and practicing them in daily interaction. This study consequently aimed to: (1) describe the condition of students' national spirit in Grade VIII G; (2) analyze the process through which *muwāṭānah* values were internalized in Akidah Akhlak learning; and (3) interpret the reported and observed effects of that

process. The article contributes a classroom-level account of how Islamic citizenship can be translated into pedagogical practices and identifies the institutional and digital conditions that support or constrain its sustainability.

METHODS

This research employed a qualitative single-case study design. A case-study approach was selected because the study sought to understand a bounded educational process in its natural context rather than test a variable through experimental control (Yin, 2018). The case was Grade VIII G at MTsN 1 Ponorogo, a state Islamic junior secondary school in Jetis, Ponorogo, East Java, during the 2025/2026 academic year. The madrasah was considered relevant because it implemented the Merdeka Curriculum and institutional programs associated with the Pancasila and Rahmatan lil-'Ālamīn student profiles.

Participants were selected purposively because of their direct involvement in curriculum policy, classroom implementation, and student experience. They consisted of the principal, the vice principal for curriculum, the Akidah Akhlak teacher, and one Grade VIII G student. The small number of informants was consistent with the intensive nature of the case, although it also limits the breadth of student perspectives represented. Institutional documents, classroom observation, and cross-role interviews were therefore used to strengthen contextual interpretation.

Data were collected through in-depth, open-ended interviews, non-participant observation, and document analysis. Interviews explored the condition of students' national spirit, curricular provisions for muwāṭānah, teaching strategies, perceived changes in behavior, and implementation barriers. The observation focused on classroom interaction, discipline, grouping practices, care for shared facilities, and students' responses to learning activities. Documents included the madrasah profile, curriculum and instructional materials, records of institutional programs, and supporting photographs. The principal field interviews and observation were conducted on May 26, 2026, while institutional documentation was reviewed during the same fieldwork period. Research permission was obtained from the madrasah, as documented in the study records.

Data analysis followed the interactive model of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification (Miles et al., 2014). The analysis began by organizing interview, observation, and documentary evidence around the three research objectives. Initial categories included national ceremony participation, responsibility, tolerance, solidarity, social concern, curriculum integration, teaching practices, teacher modeling, behavioral effects, and constraints. The categories were then compared across sources. In the final interpretive stage, the observed practices were organized into four interconnected mechanisms: cognitive-religious framing, affective engagement, behavioral habituation, and exemplary modeling with institutional reinforcement.

Trustworthiness was pursued through source triangulation across school leaders, teacher, and student; technique triangulation across interviews, observation, and documents; and repeated checking of convergent or divergent statements. The findings are interpretive and context-specific. No standardized pre-test and post-test of national spirit was administered, and the design does not support a causal claim. The reported changes should therefore be understood as credible patterns within this case rather than generalizable effect estimates.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Students' National Spirit: Positive Tendencies with Uneven Depth

The evidence showed that Grade VIII G students did not begin from a uniformly weak position. School leaders and the teacher described the general condition as reasonably positive, but all emphasized that it required reinforcement. Some students already followed the flag ceremony

seriously, maintained classroom cleanliness, completed shared tasks, and participated in social activities. Others were less solemn during national ceremonies, tended to be selective in choosing group members, or demonstrated inconsistent solidarity and responsibility. Thus, national spirit appeared as a spectrum rather than a fixed characteristic.

Four dimensions were particularly visible. The first was symbolic-national participation, represented by respect for the flag, the national anthem, and Monday ceremonies. The second was relational citizenship, visible in tolerance, mutual respect, and the willingness to work with classmates from different social backgrounds or friendship circles. The third was civic responsibility, expressed through punctual task completion, compliance with agreed rules, and care for school facilities. The fourth was social participation, including voluntary involvement in cleaning, mutual assistance, and community-oriented activities. These dimensions confirm that national spirit in a madrasah is not limited to public symbols; it also concerns the ethics of living together.

The teacher used classroom indicators to assess these dimensions informally: students' respect for difference during discussion, responsibility in group work, concern for peers, and pride in being Muslim Indonesians. The vice principal acknowledged that character assessment was recorded through observation of discipline, responsibility, and social concern, but no standardized instrument specifically measured national spirit. This finding is important because affective civic outcomes are often discussed broadly while classroom assessment remains implicit. A clear rubric could help teachers distinguish between ceremonial compliance, temporary enthusiasm, and sustained value internalization.

The case supports the view that religious moderation and nationalism are best understood as related but multidimensional dispositions. National commitment becomes educationally meaningful when it is connected to tolerance and social responsibility rather than merely stated as loyalty. Research in other Indonesian contexts has similarly found that Islamic education based on religious moderation can strengthen nationalism and that tolerance-oriented madrasah practices influence students' knowledge, attitudes, and skills (Solechan et al., 2024; Wardi et al., 2023).

Internalization as an Interconnected Pedagogical Cycle

The internalization of *muwāṭanah* was not implemented as a single lesson or a strictly linear sequence. It emerged through repeated connections between curriculum content, teacher explanation, emotional engagement, classroom management, school routines, and social practice. Analytically, these activities can be grouped into four mutually reinforcing mechanisms.

Cognitive-Religious Framing

The first mechanism involved helping students understand why love of homeland and responsible citizenship are consistent with Islamic belief. The vice principal explained that the learning trajectory for *Akidah Akhlak* explicitly incorporated love of country, tolerance, and civic responsibility. At Grade VIII level, students were expected not only to recognize the concept but also to analyze its application in social life. This curricular framing reduced the risk that *muwāṭanah* would be treated as an unrelated addition to religious instruction.

In classroom practice, the teacher connected commendable character, gratitude, social responsibility, and the history of Muslim contributions to Indonesian independence. Stories of Muslim national heroes were memorable for the student participant because they demonstrated that religious commitment and national struggle could coexist. The pedagogical function of these stories was not simply historical recall. They provided a religiously meaningful explanation for respecting national symbols, protecting public order, and contributing to the community. This type of integrative reasoning is consistent with studies that advocate combining theological foundations with moderation values in the formation of commendable character (Basuki, 2024; Huda, 2024).

Affective Engagement and Personal Meaning

Knowledge alone did not guarantee internalization. The teacher therefore sought to create emotional attachment and personal commitment. Storytelling about sacrifice, reflection on the meaning of independence, and discussion of students' identity as Muslim Indonesians were used to cultivate pride without hostility toward others. Students were also asked to write personal commitments concerning how they would practice muwāṭānah in everyday life. Such reflective tasks moved the lesson from an external moral rule toward an individually articulated intention.

The affective dimension was evident in the student's account that learning had changed the way national ceremonies and differences among peers were perceived. The flag ceremony was no longer understood only as a repetitive school obligation, and respect for difference became linked with religious ethics. Action research on religious moderation education similarly shows that character formation is strengthened when learning addresses moral feeling and not only conceptual knowledge (Saepudin et al., 2023).

Behavioral Habituation and Social Practice

The most concrete aspect of internalization was habituation. The teacher enforced classroom discipline, assigned heterogeneous or randomly formed groups, encouraged students to care for facilities, and used a point or reward system to reinforce responsibility. Random grouping was especially significant because it interrupted friendship-based exclusivity and required students to cooperate with classmates they might not otherwise choose. In this way, tolerance and equality were practiced as classroom behavior rather than discussed only as abstract ideals.

Students also received small social projects, including creating posters about love of homeland, interviewing community figures, participating in social activities, and maintaining environmental cleanliness. These tasks linked muwāṭānah to visible contributions at school and in the surrounding community. The emphasis on practical engagement addresses a weakness identified in values education: students may understand moderation cognitively but remain unable to resolve value conflicts or apply the values in daily life (Zulfatmi, 2023). Contextual assignments, cooperative learning, and repeated practice create opportunities for values to become habitual responses.

The reward system was not treated as the final goal. Rather, it operated as an initial external support for discipline and task completion. Students' willingness to remind the teacher about points indicated engagement with the system, but deeper internalization was inferred when responsibility continued in social activities beyond graded tasks. The distinction matters: extrinsic reinforcement can initiate behavior, whereas sustained civic character requires that students eventually recognize the behavior as personally and religiously meaningful.

Table 1. Mechanisms of muwāṭānah internalization and observed indicators

Mechanism	Classroom and school practices	Core values	Observed indicators
Cognitive-religious framing	Linking Islamic ethics with citizenship; stories of Muslim national heroes; curriculum integration	love of homeland, gratitude, civic responsibility	students articulate compatibility between faith and Indonesian identity

Mechanism	Classroom and school practices	Core values	Observed indicators
Affective engagement	Storytelling, reflection, personal commitments, discussion of national identity	pride, empathy, moral concern	greater meaning attached to ceremonies and respect for difference
Behavioral habituation	Discipline, random group work, care for facilities, social projects, point or reward system	cooperation, equality, responsibility, participation	improved task completion, teamwork, cleanliness, and social involvement
Exemplarity and reinforcement	Teacher consistency, non-discrimination, school routines, P5RA, curriculum supervision	integrity, fairness, continuity	more conducive classroom climate and more consistent value practice

Source: Synthesized from interview, observation, and documentary data in the Grade VIII G case.

Teacher Exemplarity and Institutional Reinforcement

The fourth mechanism was exemplarity. The teacher's fairness in forming groups, consistent enforcement of rules, respectful communication, punctuality, and care for the learning environment gave students a visible model of the values being taught. Role modeling is essential because inconsistency between moral language and adult behavior weakens the credibility of character education. Research on effective teacher personality has likewise emphasized that teachers' personal conduct contributes significantly to the strengthening of students' character (Lukman et al., 2021).

Classroom work was reinforced institutionally through the Merdeka Curriculum, the Pancasila and Rahmatan lil-'Ālamīn student-profile project, weekly flag ceremonies, national-day commemorations, subject-teacher meetings, academic supervision, and the review of instructional modules. These structures made muwāṭanah more than the concern of one teacher. They also explain why internalization should be understood as an ecological process: curriculum, teacher conduct, school rituals, peer interaction, and community projects must communicate compatible messages. Multisite research on moderate character education similarly finds that institutional values become effective when embodied across learning and organizational culture (Umar et al., 2024).

Reported and Observed Effects on National Spirit

Participants consistently described positive behavioral changes after muwāṭanah values were reinforced. The most visible change concerned flag ceremonies. Students were reported to stand more respectfully, reduce side conversations, sing national songs with greater pride, and interpret the ceremony as recognition of national struggle rather than an empty routine. The change was also visible in classroom discipline and responsibility, particularly in the timely completion of assignments and participation in group tasks.

Relational outcomes were equally important. The use of mixed groups, repeated discussion of tolerance, and teacher mediation supported more respectful interaction among students. The teacher reported that students became more capable of resolving conflict peacefully, cooperating across friendship boundaries, and avoiding behavior that could develop into bullying. Although the study

did not quantify a reduction in bullying, convergent accounts from school personnel indicated fewer interpersonal tensions and a more conducive classroom climate.

A further effect was increased social and environmental participation. Students showed more initiative in cleaning activities, care for school property, mutual assistance, social service, and community involvement. The student participant associated avoiding littering with *muwāṭānah* because the teacher had framed environmental care as responsibility for the homeland. This illustrates how a broad civic concept can become meaningful through small, repeatable actions. National spirit was therefore expressed not only through grand narratives of sacrifice but also through care for the shared spaces in which citizenship is practiced.

The findings suggest a movement across three levels of value formation. At the first level, students recognized the meaning of *muwāṭānah*. At the second, they developed emotional identification with the values. At the third, they practiced the values through discipline, tolerance, cooperation, and service. This pattern corresponds with research showing that moderation-oriented education is more effective when it integrates knowledge, affect, and action (Aderibigbe et al., 2023; Gunawan et al., 2021; Saepudin et al., 2023). It also supports quantitative evidence that Islamic religious education integrating moderation and national defense is positively associated with student nationalism (Solechan et al., 2024).

Nevertheless, the evidence should not be interpreted as proof of a direct causal effect. The study did not compare students before and after the intervention using a validated scale, and other influences - family, extracurricular participation, peer groups, and school culture - also shaped behavior. The strongest conclusion is that participants and observation identified a credible association between sustained, contextual internalization practices and improvements in several indicators of national spirit within this class.

Constraints, Assessment Needs, and Sustainability

Three practical constraints affected implementation. First, social-media content sometimes presented religion and nationalism as opposing loyalties. Students could arrive in class with simplified or polarizing claims that required patient clarification. Digital media thus functioned both as a source of learning and as a competing curriculum. Studies on moderation in the digital era similarly emphasize the need for critical literacy and credible counter-narratives (Anwar et al., 2022; Hanif et al., 2025). A sustainable program should therefore teach students how to evaluate online religious claims, identify manipulative framing, and compare digital messages with authoritative Islamic and civic sources.

Second, limited instructional time constrained opportunities for extended reflection and social projects. Values cannot be internalized through occasional explanation alone, yet *Akidah Akhlak* teachers must also achieve formal curricular objectives. Cross-curricular coordination offers one solution. Themes such as diversity, national history, environmental responsibility, democratic deliberation, and social service can be aligned across *Akidah Akhlak*, Islamic Cultural History, Pancasila Education, Indonesian language, and student-profile projects.

Third, peer preference and interpersonal conflict sometimes disrupted heterogeneous collaboration. Random grouping was useful, but students also needed explicit skills in listening, negotiation, and conflict resolution. Cooperative tasks should therefore include clearly distributed roles, shared accountability, and reflection on how group members handled differences. The learning model should not assume that putting students in a group automatically produces tolerance; the social process requires guidance.

Assessment was another area requiring development. The madrasah assessed discipline, responsibility, and social concern, but lacked a specific and standardized instrument for national spirit. A practical rubric could include: respect for national symbols; ability to explain the compatibility of Islamic and national identity; responsibility in collective work; willingness to cooperate across

differences; care for public and school facilities; peaceful conflict resolution; and participation in social activities. Evidence could be gathered from observation notes, reflective journals, project portfolios, peer feedback, and student self-assessment rather than relying exclusively on numerical tests.

Sustainability also depends on family and institutional consistency. The teacher noted that students whose families discussed national issues constructively were more receptive to school-based values. The school should therefore communicate the aims of muwāṭānah education to parents and involve community figures in projects or discussions. At the institutional level, regular subject-teacher forums, supervision of instructional modules, and evaluation of P5RA activities can help ensure continuity. The goal is to create a coherent moral environment in which the same values are explained, modeled, practiced, and evaluated across settings.

Finally, this study's narrow participant base, especially the inclusion of only one student informant, limits the diversity of student voices. Future research should involve multiple classes, gender-balanced student groups, parents, and longitudinal observation. Mixed-method studies could develop a validated national-spirit scale and examine whether changes persist beyond a single academic year.

CONCLUSION

The study shows that the national spirit of Grade VIII G students at MTsN 1 Ponorogo was generally developing but uneven in depth and consistency. Students displayed positive tendencies in love of homeland, participation in school activities, and social responsibility, yet some still required support in solemn participation in national ceremonies, collective responsibility, solidarity, and respect across peer differences. Muwāṭānah was internalized through an interconnected pedagogical cycle rather than a one-time transfer of information. Cognitive-religious framing helped students understand the compatibility of Islamic faith and Indonesian citizenship. Affective activities gave personal meaning to patriotism. Behavioral habituation translated values into discipline, mixed-group cooperation, care for shared facilities, social projects, and community participation. Teacher exemplarity and institutional programs reinforced continuity between classroom discourse and school culture.

These practices were associated with more respectful participation in flag ceremonies, improved discipline and task responsibility, stronger tolerance and cooperation, more peaceful conflict management, and greater social and environmental participation. The findings demonstrate the potential of Akidah Akhlak as a strategic field for integrating spiritual, moral, and civic formation. However, the process remains vulnerable to polarizing digital content, limited instructional time, peer tensions, and weak assessment instruments. Madrasahs seeking to strengthen muwāṭānah should combine theological explanation with reflective learning, supervised social practice, consistent adult modeling, digital religious literacy, and cross-curricular assessment. Future studies should test these mechanisms in broader samples and over longer periods so that the durability of changes in national spirit can be evaluated more rigorously.

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