



## Islamic Ethnopedagogy and Religious Moderation: Lessons from the Kajang Indigenous Community in Indonesia

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**KEYWORDS:** Ethnopedagogy; Religious moderation; Indigenous knowledge; Islamic education; Kajang community.

**ABSTRACT:** Moderate Islam (*wasatiyyah*) has become a crucial paradigm in addressing religious radicalism and promoting social harmony in plural societies, particularly in Indonesia. This study explores how the indigenous Kajang community in South Sulawesi transmits moderate Islamic values through a localized ethnopedagogical system embedded in everyday cultural practices. Employing a qualitative critical ethnographic approach, the research draws on in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis involving traditional leaders, families, and youth, with data analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model. The findings indicate that educational practices in the Kajang community are deeply rooted in cultural rituals, oral traditions, and daily social interactions. Core Islamic values, such as *tauhid* (monotheism), honesty (*lempu*), simplicity (*kamase-masea*), and ecological responsibility, are conveyed through role modeling by elders, communal participation in *adat* (customary) practices, and continuous reinforcement within the family. These mechanisms foster lived expressions of religious moderation aligned with the principles of *tawassuth* (moderation), *tawazun* (balance), and *ta'adul* (justice). The study concludes that the Kajang ethnopedagogical model offers a culturally grounded framework for nurturing moderate Muslim identities and provides valuable insights for Islamic education reform in pluralistic contexts.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of religious moderation, or *wasatiyyah*, has emerged as a central theme in contemporary Islamic discourse, particularly in Southeast Asia, where socio-religious diversity demands a dynamic and inclusive religious outlook. This paradigm seeks to counteract religious extremism while promoting harmony in pluralistic societies. In Indonesia, *wasatiyyah* Islam has gained both government support and public resonance, reflecting the country's longstanding pluralistic ethos and its history of moderate Islamic traditions. Notably, Indonesian Islam's foundations were laid by peaceful missionary efforts (such as those of the *Wali Songo* in 13th-century Java) that emphasized cultural adaptation and community engagement. These historical precedents established an Islam that integrates spiritual devotion with cultural inclusivity, allowing it to flourish peacefully across the archipelago.

In recent years, the urgency to reinforce religious moderation has grown, driven by the rise of global religious extremism and the spread of conservative ideologies via digital media. Indonesia, home to the world's largest Muslim population, has been at the forefront of developing policies and educational reforms that promote *wasatiyyah* values as a bulwark against radicalization (Musyahid, 2023). These efforts extend beyond theological discourse and into school curricula and public diplomacy. Educational institutions, formal and informal alike, play a pivotal role in disseminating moderate Islamic values, which are increasingly seen as essential for nurturing civic tolerance and social cohesion in multicultural settings.

A key challenge, however, lies in putting these values into practice within educational frameworks that remain sensitive to Indonesia's cultural diversity. Major Islamic organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah have championed Islamic moderation through concepts like *Islam Nusantara* and *Islam Berkemajuan*, respectively. Despite their efforts to incorporate local wisdom and even leverage digital platforms (Nasruddin & Muliana, 2023), much of the mainstream reform focuses on

institutional, urban-centered models. This often overlooks indigenous systems of knowledge transmission that could offer valuable insights into character education and the cultivation of moderate attitudes. Indeed, the growing influence of ultraconservative ideologies among youth highlights the limitations of current pedagogical approaches and the need to consider alternative models.

Local cultural practices present a fertile ground for instilling moderate religious values, especially when these practices are already woven into community norms. Numerous studies have shown the effectiveness of integrating local customs into Islamic education to strengthen students' moral development and sense of identity (Isdiana et al., 2024; OK et al., 2023). Culturally grounded approaches like these foster belonging and communal responsibility, essential components of religious moderation. By validating students' lived experiences and cultural backgrounds, such pedagogies can also guard against feelings of alienation and reduce vulnerability to extremist narratives (Bahansubu et al., 2023).

Sufism in particular has long promoted a moderate, inclusive form of Islam throughout Indonesia. Sufi traditions stress inner purification, love, and harmony, which historically facilitated peaceful coexistence among diverse religious and ethnic communities. Expressive Sufi practices, such as *dhikr* (remembrance of God) rituals and spiritual poetry, have historically served as vehicles for transmitting Islamic values in ways that are non-confrontational and culturally resonant. These practices illustrate how spirituality and cultural expression can reinforce religious moderation without relying on formal institutions (Tahir et al., 2025).

Given this background, there is a growing interest in how indigenous communities practice religious moderation through culturally embedded educational models. One such community is the Kajang indigenous group of South Sulawesi, known for its commitment to simplicity, honesty, and environmental harmony. The Kajang adhere to a customary value system called *Pasang ri Kajang*, which governs social conduct, environmental stewardship, and spiritual beliefs. Their approach to learning is informal and experiential, relying on oral traditions, moral exemplars, and communal rituals to transmit ethical and religious values across generations. This form of community-driven ethnopedagogy aligns closely with *wasatiyyah* principles, suggesting that indigenous knowledge systems can serve as viable models for promoting religious moderation in modern contexts.

Despite the extensive literature on Islamic education reform and cultural integration, few studies have examined the intersection of ethnopedagogy and religious moderation in indigenous Muslim communities. Most research focuses on formal schooling or the influence of large Islamic organizations, leaving a significant gap in understanding how informal, community-based teaching shapes character and social harmony. Addressing this gap is critical for developing more holistic educational frameworks that resonate with diverse cultural contexts and respond effectively to the challenges posed by radical ideologies.

This study examines the ethnopedagogical practices of the Kajang indigenous community as a model of character education rooted in local wisdom and Islamic moderation. It looks at how values such as honesty, simplicity, and environmental responsibility are transmitted through non-formal means, aiming to uncover pedagogical insights that can inform national education policy and Islamic education reform. The novelty of this research lies in its focus on a living, community-based educational model that operates outside conventional institutions yet has proven effective in fostering moderate religious values. Through a qualitative ethnographic lens, the research explores how the Kajang community internalizes *wasatiyyah* principles in everyday life and offers a culturally grounded alternative to mainstream Islamic pedagogy.

## II. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a critical ethnographic research design to examine the Kajang community's indigenous educational practices and their relationship to moderate Islamic values. A critical ethnography is well-suited for capturing the cultural and symbolic dimensions of indigenous education, providing insight into local pedagogical strategies and socio-spiritual constructs. In a community like Kajang, which maintains distinct traditions and cosmology, this approach allows for a nuanced understanding that foregrounds marginalized voices and situates educational phenomena within their socio-political and spiritual context (Hasbiyallah et al., 2024). In essence, critical ethnography is ideal for exploring how cultural wisdom, for example, the principles contained in *Pasang ri Kajang*, aligns with broader frameworks of religious moderation.

Fieldwork was conducted in Kajang Dalam, a settlement in Bulukumba Regency, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. This site was purposefully selected because it is the cultural and spiritual heart of the Kajang people. Kajang Dalam remains largely untouched by modernization and is renowned for preserving its adat (customary law) and ecological ethics. The community's educational practices are deeply embedded in its spiritual cosmology and social structure, providing a rich context for examining how indigenous knowledge intersects with Islamic values. Informants for the study were chosen through purposive sampling and included adat leaders (such as the Amma Toa), local religious figures, parents, informal educators, and youth who have directly participated in the community's ethnopedagogical processes.

Data collection employed three primary methods: in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. In-depth interviews were conducted with key informants to explore their perceptions and lived experiences regarding value transmission, the role of spiritual figures, and the function of customary education in Kajang. The interview questions delved into specific rituals, moral teachings, and intergenerational stories that embody the community's ethos.

Participatory observation allowed the researcher to immerse themselves in the daily activities, rituals, and communal gatherings of Kajang life. This immersive engagement provided insight into the tacit aspects of learning and socialization that cannot

be captured through interviews alone. By observing community practices such as Pa'nganro (a traditional ritual), various ecological taboos, and customary dispute resolution processes, it was possible to see how educational values are enacted in situ.

In addition, document analysis was conducted on textual and symbolic sources, including *Pasang ri Kajang* manuscripts and local *adat* records. These materials provided foundational insights into the Kajang community's epistemology and moral philosophy. Integrating textual evidence with interview and observational data enabled systematic triangulation, strengthening the validity of the findings and facilitating cross-verification of key themes such as *tauhid*, *kamase-masea* (simplicity), *lempu* (honesty), communal responsibility, and ecological stewardship.

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (2018), which involves three concurrent activities: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. During data reduction, field notes, interview transcripts, and document excerpts were inductively coded to identify recurring themes and patterns. These codes were then organized into key analytical domains such as *religious moderation*, *value transmission*, and *cultural resilience*. For data display, visual maps and charts were created to examine the relationships among these themes, which helped in identifying the core mechanisms underlying Kajang's ethnopedagogical model. Finally, conclusions were drawn and repeatedly verified through member-checking sessions with community members.

Throughout the research, strict ethical considerations were observed. Informed consent was obtained from all participants after clearly explaining the study's purpose, methods, and intended use of the findings. Cultural sensitivity was maintained by respecting local customs in both attire and behavior, this included following appropriate dress codes, using proper forms of address, and observing etiquette during rituals and gatherings.

### III. RESULTS

#### A. Manifestations of Islamic Ethnopedagogy in the Kajang Indigenous Community

This study found that Islamic ethnopedagogy in the Kajang community is not delivered through formal curricula or classroom instruction; rather, it is woven into the everyday fabric of communal life. Educational practices are embedded in daily social interactions, ritual participation, and exemplary conduct, all of which are deeply rooted in cultural tradition and religious belief. The Kajang people internalize the value of *tauhid*, their belief in the One Almighty God (reverently referred to as "Turie' A'ra'na" in their local language), as the foundation of their spiritual and moral life. In Kajang understanding, there is an inseparable blend of *adat* (custom) and Islam, where *adat* is viewed as being in harmony with divine law rather than in conflict with it.

A key dimension of Kajang's ethnopedagogy is the principle of *kamase-masea*, which embodies simplicity and modesty in lifestyle and serves as a moral guard against materialism and consumerism. Another core value is *lempu*, meaning honesty, which the community upholds through strong social oversight and the enforcement of customary sanctions when norms are violated. These values are not taught through formal lessons or textbooks; instead, they are instilled via *pappasang*, or oral moral teachings, that are passed down within families starting from early childhood. As Tahir et al. (2025) note, such oral traditions in Muslim communities are crucial for transmitting values of social cohesion, moral integrity, and spiritual awareness across generations.

Educational activities in Kajang take place in both domestic and communal settings, for example, during family gatherings, village meetings, communal work, and traditional rituals. The Amma Toa, who is the community's spiritual and customary leader, plays a central role in this process as both a moral authority and a pedagogical role model. The words and actions of the Amma Toa provide primary ethical guidance for community members, effectively teaching by example. This finding is consistent with research by Hurnawijaya et al. (2024), who emphasize the symbolic significance of leaders like the Amma Toa as moral educators in non-formal indigenous systems. In Kajang, education through example and storytelling is both informal and profound: it relies on modeling, symbolism, and communal reinforcement rather than on structured, institutional instruction.

**Table 1. Elements of Islamic Ethnopedagogy in the Kajang Community**

Aspect	Form of Practice in the Kajang Community
Monotheism (Tauhid)	Demonstrating reverence for Turie' A'ra'na as the central source of values
Simplicity	Practicing the <i>kamase-mase</i> lifestyle in everyday life
Honesty ( <i>lempu</i> )	Enforcing honesty through community oversight and customary sanctions for any violations
Family Education	Instilling values through <i>pappasang</i> (oral advice)
Role Model of Figures	Amma Toa's role as a moral and spiritual exemplar for the community

The values of moderate Islam in Kajang are transmitted through three main channels. First is the moral authority of traditional leaders (such as the Amma Toa and other elders), whose personal conduct sets a living example for others. Second is participation in communal cultural practices, through involvement in rituals, ceremonies, and mutual aid activities, community members actively reinforce and relearn their shared values. Third is the family unit, where values are continuously reinforced in everyday life. For instance, parents teach children principles of modesty, social solidarity, and peaceful coexistence not through

formal religious classes, but through consistent behavior, storytelling, and guidance at home. This informal yet holistic approach to education aligns with global observations on indigenous pedagogy: studies worldwide have found that community-grounded education can effectively shape inclusive and resilient values (Islam & Yussof, 2024).

## B. Contribution of Ethnopedagogy to Strengthening Religious Moderation

The study also found that the Kajang community's concept of religious moderation is not articulated as a formal doctrine or slogan, but is instead deeply embedded in daily life practices. The Kajang do not display overt religious symbolism to declare their piety; rather, they uphold Islam's core values through inclusive social behavior and communal harmony. In essence, they live out the principles of moderation (*tawassuth*), balance (*tawazun*), and justice (*ta'adul*) in their everyday interactions. This lived embodiment of moderation is evident in how they interact with one another, how they steward the environment, and how they perform spiritual rituals.

One reflection of this ethos is the community's openness and hospitality toward outsiders. The Kajang people welcome new residents or visitors into their area, so long as those newcomers respect local norms and customs. The community does not insist on religious uniformity, nor does it partake in sectarian conflicts. In fact, it maintains an anti-discriminatory social ethic rooted in the customary law known as *pasang*. This means that rather than drawing rigid boundaries, Kajang society emphasizes mutual respect and cultural accommodation. As observed by Cahyo & Tri (2021), such culturally embedded tolerance and peaceful coexistence are quintessential expressions of religious moderation.

Environmental ethics form an integral part of Kajang's religious worldview and educational system. The community enforces strict rules against any unauthorized exploitation of their forest and natural resources. Preserving the environment is regarded not just as a social responsibility but as a spiritual duty. This creates an eco-Islamic paradigm in Kajang, where caring for nature is seen as part of fulfilling God's mandate for humans to be stewards (*khalifah*) of the earth. Such practices echo contemporary Islamic teachings on environmental stewardship (Haulid & Syukri, 2023). In Kajang, protecting the forest and living sustainably are viewed as acts of faith, intertwining ecological conservation with religious devotion.

Despite growing exposure to formal education systems and digital technology, the Kajang have largely preserved their indigenous values as the core of their identity formation. However, the community acknowledges emerging challenges, especially concerning the younger generation. Some Kajang youth have shown signs of being swayed by outside influences that promote individualism or materialism, values that run counter to Kajang's collective and modest way of life. Traditional leaders in Kajang have thus voiced the need for formal education systems to integrate local values and wisdom. They argue that schools should include and reinforce cultural teachings like those of Kajang, rather than ignoring them.

The insights from the Kajang community contribute significantly to the broader discourse on Islamic education. They demonstrate the effectiveness of informal, community-based, value-laden education in cultivating a moderate religious identity. The Kajang model shows that character education and the inculcation of values need not be confined to formal schools or government programs; they can flourish organically through community traditions, respected local leadership, and the lived experiences of individuals. This observation aligns with Bahansubu et al. (2023), who stress the power of local narratives and indigenous wisdom in reinforcing tolerance and ethical behavior. It underlines the idea that education reformers should look beyond formal institutions and consider empowering communities to take an active role in value transmission.

**Table 2. Values of Religious Moderation in the Practices of the Kajang Community**

Dimension of Moderation	Practice in the Kajang Community
<i>Tawassuth</i> (moderation)	Rejection of extremism and avoidance of an excessive emphasis on religious symbols
<i>Tasamuh</i> (tolerance)	Acceptance of outsiders, provided that they respect local norms
<i>Ta'adul</i> (justice)	Social relations founded on equality and justice within the community
<i>Tawazun</i> (balance)	Environmental conservation and the maintenance of spiritual–ecological balance
Non-Formal Education	Ethnopedagogy rooted in role modeling, <i>pappasang</i> (oral advice), and traditional rituals

In many ways, the Kajang case exemplifies that religious moderation is not merely a top-down policy or an abstract goal, but a lived experience. In Kajang, moderation is rooted in local culture and sustained through intergenerational transmission of wisdom. This community provides a working pedagogical paradigm that could inspire other Muslim communities to enhance their own cultural resilience and ethical integrity, especially when facing the pressures of globalization and the allure of extremist ideologies. In short, Kajang's ethnopedagogy offers a potentially replicable model for others seeking to strengthen moderation and tolerance from the ground up.



#### IV. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study underscore the pivotal role that ethnopedagogical traditions play in sustaining moderate Islamic values within the Kajang indigenous community. In Kajang, education is not simply the transfer of knowledge; it is a cultural practice embedded in daily routines, rituals, and symbolic actions. This reality supports the concept of ethnopedagogy, which emphasizes tailoring educational processes to fit the local cultural framework (Nursima et al., 2022). The seamless integration of religious teachings with cultural values in Kajang demonstrates how a community can develop a sustainable model of religious moderation that remains resilient against external pressures and is adaptable to social changes.

Examining the Kajang community's approach reveals a dynamic interplay between oral tradition, symbolic leadership, and environmental ethics. Together, these elements form the foundation for character building and spiritual development in Kajang. This pattern is consistent with studies of other indigenous Muslim communities, where oral narratives and the presence of moral exemplars (figures like the Amma Toa) transmit values such as honesty (*lempu*), simplicity (*kamase-masea*), and communal responsibility (Tahir et al., 2025; Hurnawijaya et al., 2024). In Kajang, the informal and omnipresent nature of these educational methods allows for deep internalization of values. The community avoids rigid, lecture-based teaching, yet it maintains continuity and coherence in its moral instruction across generations. Moreover, this character-driven pedagogy resonates with Sufi educational traditions that emphasize learning through the teacher's example and living out ethical principles, rather than through strict textual study (Islam & Yussof, 2024).

This form of community education not only upholds religious moderation but also reinforces environmental stewardship. The Kajang community's strict ecological norms, rooted in Islamic concepts of *khilafah* (stewardship of the earth), reflect a broader trend of integrating environmental ethics into Islamic education (Haulid & Syukri, 2023). By linking environmental practices with spiritual obligations, the Kajang strengthen the moral authority of their local educational system. Conservation of nature is framed as a divine mandate, not just a practical necessity. Anchoring environmental care in religious doctrine helps communities like Kajang achieve both ecological sustainability and spiritual integrity, as caring for God's creation becomes an act of worship and moral responsibility.

Importantly, the Kajang experience highlights the power of non-symbolic religious expression in reinforcing a moderate Islamic identity. In Kajang, everyday acts, such as helping neighbors, communal work, and inclusive decision-making, speak louder than overt religious symbols or slogans. These routine behaviors reflect a deep commitment to values like moderation, balance, and fairness without the need for constant verbal or visual reminders of religion. This finding echoes the literature suggesting that subtle, lived expressions of faith often have a greater impact on shaping moral behavior and community harmony than do conspicuous displays of piety (Alqhaiwi et al., 2023). It challenges the common notion that strong religiosity must be outwardly performative, instead shifting the focus towards the substance of one's behavior over its form.

The resilience of Kajang's pedagogical traditions, even as formal education and digital media become more influential, illustrates the enduring strength of culturally rooted education models. This resilience is not unique to Kajang. Other indigenous Muslim communities, such as the Towani Tolotang in Sulawesi or certain Batak Muslim communities in Sumatra, exhibit similar patterns where spiritual and moral values are effectively transmitted through informal, localized mechanisms (Tahara, 2023; Ulumuddin et al., 2023). Many of these communities have shown a remarkable ability to adapt, carefully incorporating modern tools (like technology or elements of formal schooling) in ways that enhance rather than erode their traditional educational practices. These examples suggest that there is significant potential in learning from indigenous models when considering reforms in Islamic education more broadly.

However, integrating indigenous ethnopedagogical models like Kajang's into national education systems poses significant challenges. Common issues include a lack of representation of indigenous cultures in curriculum, a shortage of educators who are culturally competent, and insufficient infrastructure in remote areas (Wantik et al., 2024). Additionally, national curricula often prioritize a standardized content that can marginalize local languages and knowledge systems, exacerbating cultural marginalization (Wilson, 2024). The Kajang case advocates for more inclusive educational policies that respect and incorporate local wisdom. Steps toward this could include engaging directly with communities in developing curriculum content, training teachers to be sensitive to local culture, and ensuring that educational materials reflect Indonesia's cultural diversity. Respectful community engagement, participatory curriculum development, and sustained dialogue between policymakers and indigenous communities are crucial in this process.

The ethnopedagogical insights from Kajang also offer practical ideas for formal Islamic education elsewhere. They highlight the value of culturally relevant pedagogy, an approach where teaching is closely tied to students' cultural backgrounds. For example, similar practices observed in the *Setono Jenangan* community in Java and in various *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) show that when Islamic teachings are rooted in students' lived cultural experiences, learning becomes more meaningful (Gamon & Tagoranao, 2022). Educational models that encourage collaboration and community participation further stress that learning is not just a student-teacher transaction, but a community-wide endeavor. When young people learn from their elders, take part in rituals, and see Islamic values applied in real-life situations, their understanding of those values becomes holistic and transformative.

On a broader level, the Kajang model of community-based education reinforces ideals of religious pluralism and tolerance. Through shared rituals, egalitarian social structures, and an ethos of mutual respect, the Kajang demonstrate that Islamic values can be lived in a way that embraces diversity rather than causing division. This is a powerful message in today's context, where many societies grapple with radicalization and social polarization. Culturally rooted education, by fostering empathy, interfaith dialogue, and moral clarity, provides a grassroots counter-narrative to extremist ideologies (Dasopang et al., 2023). In essence, it builds social cohesion from the ground up.

Additionally, the Kajang experience contributes to global conversations about Islamic education and religious moderation. It shows that maintaining a Muslim identity does not require uniformity or dogmatism. By grounding faith in local culture, engaging symbolic community leaders, and emphasizing communal harmony, the Kajang offer a viable model for other contexts struggling with similar issues of extremism or cultural disconnection. Comparative observations of other indigenous communities in Southeast Asia, such as the Mamanwa of the Philippines or certain Muslim tribes in Papua, indicate that the underlying principles seen in Kajang (like valuing local wisdom and lived practice) have broad relevance. At the same time, these comparisons highlight the need for contextual sensitivity; each community's unique cultural setting must shape how such a model is implemented (Cahyo & Tri, 2021; Oclarit et al., 2023).

In sum, the findings from Kajang illustrate the transformative power of indigenous pedagogies in shaping moderate Islamic identities and practices. They affirm that genuine and sustainable religious moderation is most effectively cultivated from within communities, drawing strength from cultural authenticity, communal leadership, and lived values. The Kajang experience stands as a testament to the potential of ethnopedagogy to guide, enrich, and sustain the moral compass of Islamic education in a rapidly changing world.

## V. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the indigenous Kajang community has successfully preserved and transmitted moderate Islamic values through an ethnopedagogical model rooted in its cultural practices and oral traditions. Values such as tauhid (monotheism), kamase-masea (simplicity), lempu (honesty), and communal responsibility are interwoven with daily life and reinforced by symbolic figures like the Amma Toa. The blending of spiritual, social, and ecological principles into their informal educational process has produced a robust ethical system that operates without any formal schooling infrastructure.

The Kajang approach to religious education is organically participatory, intergenerational, and deeply reflective of Islamic moral values adapted to local wisdom. Rather than relying on classroom instruction or doctrinal lectures, the community emphasizes learning by example, active involvement in communal life, and symbolic religious rituals. This approach has cultivated a resilience in the community against radical ideologies and the homogenizing effects of globalization. Significantly, the Kajang model provides practical insights into how Islamic education can be firmly grounded in local culture while still aligning with broader calls for religious moderation and tolerance.

By highlighting a living example of a community-based educational system that nurtures a moderate Islamic identity, this research adds to the growing body of knowledge on ethnopedagogy, religious moderation, and Islamic education. It prompts further investigation into other indigenous communities that might possess similarly transformative pedagogical traditions. The findings also carry important implications for policymakers in the field of education: there is a clear need to recognize and integrate local pedagogical wisdom into national Islamic curricula. Such integration would contribute to a more inclusive and resilient educational framework, one that respects cultural diversity and strengthens society's defenses against extremism.

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