BEYOND RELIGIOUS MATURITY: Examining University Students' Understanding and Attitudes Toward Religious Moderation in Eastern Indonesia

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Abstract: This study explores how religious maturity (RM) shapes university students' understanding of religious moderation (RMU) and their attitudes toward it (RMA) in Eastern Indonesia. Using an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, the quantitative phase involved 329 students from Muhammadiyah University Kupang and Citra Bangsa University Kupang. The findings show that RM significantly influences both RMU ($\beta = 0.664$, $p < 0.001$) and has significant direct effect on RMA ($\beta = 0.289$, $p < 0.001$). The total effect of RM on RMA ($\beta = 0.686$) exceeds its direct effect, highlighting the mediating role of RMU. Qualitative findings further suggest that inclusive campus policies and local traditions, including *Nusi*, *Butukila*, and *Suki Toka Apa*, nurture solidarity, kinship, and cooperation. The study highlights the value of integrating local wisdom into university curricula, student activities, and institutional policies to strengthen religious moderation.

Keywords: Religious maturity, religious moderation understanding, religious moderation attitudes, local culture.

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Introduction

Religious moderation has become increasingly important in Indonesian higher education because of persistent problems with religious intolerance, exclusivism, and radicalism among young people. The national counterterrorism agency and research organizations like Alvara Research[1] and the Setara Institute[2] have documented the dissemination of radical ideologies through student-led discussions, religious gatherings, and mosque-based forums. These settings often serve as recruitment grounds where senior students influence younger, more religiously inclined peers, fostering social isolation and distrust of broader societal norms.[3] Radical ideologies are sometimes introduced through campus groups led by senior students or external networks, underscoring the necessity for structured interventions.[4] Reported cases of student involvement in extremist organizations,[5] such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD), further illustrate the urgency of implementing preventive strategies.[6]

This phenomenon indicates that a more comprehensive study is needed on how college students -who are, by definition, educated- can be influenced by ideas and movements that lead to an exclusive or even radical religious orientation, rather than adopting moderate thinking and attitudes toward religion. Therefore, this study focuses on the psychological and social factors that influence their religious moderation understanding (RMU) and religious moderation attitudes (RMA).

One of the psychological factors examined in this study is religious maturity (RM) as defined by Allport. He conceptualizes RM as a religious sentiment that is formed through experience[7]; RM is characterized by cognitive differentiation, a comprehensive worldview, and moral consistency. A religiously mature individual will have a strong belief in the teachings of their religion and be able to apply those teachings effectively in daily life.[8] Allport stated that six criteria indicate a religiously mature life: proper and consistent differentiation; a desire to grow closer to God; consistency in religious matters that leads to a comprehensive view of life; an orderly view of worldly life; efforts to discover values in religious teachings; and a spirit of inquiry and devotion to God. Meanwhile, the social theory applied here is Bourdieu's theory of habitus, which posits that the values or lifestyle habits ingrained in an individual are a result of their social environment.[9]

Previous research has shown that students' religious understanding influences their RMA and that educational environments can play an important role in strengthening these values. The correlation between RMA and academic achievement among university students underscores the impact of RM on behavior and beliefs.[10] Students' views of moderation are greatly influenced by their religious understanding, with topics such as *aqidah* (creed, or the core beliefs and doctrines that Muslims hold firmly and without doubt) having a significant impact on these attitudes.[11]

However, much of the existing literature examines either RM and its relationship with tolerance or religious understanding and its relationship with religious moderation. Individuals with higher levels of RM exhibit positive social behaviors and moral consistency, which are critical in promoting tolerance and ethical standards.[12] As one facet of RM, tolerance is positively influenced by religious maturity. Sabiq's research indicates a strong relationship between RM and tolerance, with every 1% increase in RM associated with a 0.724-point increase in tolerance.[13] An individual's self-concept is positively associated with their level of RM. A person's RM has a significant positive effect on self-control, prosocial behavior, and altruistic attitudes.[14]

Other research indicates that parenting style and RM are associated with fewer inner-child-related difficulties among adolescents, with RM exerting a greater influence than parenting style.[15] RM can also be influenced by the political and ethnic composition, systems, and frameworks of specific demographic or state contexts.[16] These findings primarily highlight the influence of RM on an individual's understanding or attitudes and the factors that influence a person's RM. However, the reviewed studies have not examined the simultaneous influence of RM on RMU and RMA.

This gap becomes particularly significant in East Nusa Tenggara (ENT), a culturally and religiously diverse region that has consistently recorded a high level of religious harmony. The province comprises diverse ethnic groups, languages, and religious communities, while local traditions have historically encouraged people to live together across religious differences. The diversity of ethnic groups, languages, and religions in ENT has become a driving force in shaping a harmonious social environment through various forms of local wisdom and community cultural practices. For instance, in the city of Kupang, people uphold values such as *Nusi,* which signifies cooperation*; Butukila,* which emphasizes strong bonds of brotherhood*; Suki Toka Apa,* which represents the spirit of helping one another*; and Muki Nena*, which reflects a sense of belonging and togetherness among citizens. Interfaith activities during major religious festivals, collaboration in the construction of houses of worship, and the presence of "tolerance villages" that represent peaceful coexistence among various religious communities provide further examples of tolerance in Kupang.[17]

The university context provides an important setting for examining this interaction between individual religious development, religious understanding, institutional practices, and local culture. The first research site is Muhammadiyah University Kupang (MUK), a campus established by Muhammadiyah, a large Islamic organization in Indonesia, in 1986. The second site is Citra Bangsa University Kupang (CBUK), which was founded by the Citra Bina Insan Mandiri (CBIM) Foundation, a non-profit foundation that also manages the Citra Bangsa Mandiri Christian School in Kupang, ENT, which was founded in 2007. Both campuses have multireligious and multicultural student bodies and are open to students regardless of ethnicity, race, culture, and religion. This study tests the hypothesis that RM positively affects RMU and RMA. This setting enables the study to examine RM beyond the boundaries of a single religious institution or community.

The significance of this study lies in its integration of psychological, cognitive, institutional, and cultural dimensions in examining RM within the ENT community. The religious profile of the ENT population comprises Catholics (53.7%), Protestants (36.2%), Muslims (9.4%), and adherents of other religions (0.7%). According to a survey conducted by the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia, ENT's index scores were 81.07 in 2021, 82.86 in 2023, and 84.25 in 2024.[18] Meanwhile, Indonesia's index scores were 72.39 in 2021, 76.02 in 2023, and 76.47 in 2024.[19] In this context, universities reflect the societies in which they are located and simultaneously become agents of societal change. The novelty of this study lies in its examination of how students' level of RM in ENT influences their religious moderation attitudes, as assessed quantitatively. This study further explores how factors beyond RM contribute to shaping their RMA through a qualitative approach.

Method

This study employed a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design. It began with a quantitative analysis of the relationships among RM, RMU, and RMA for students in Kupang. The quantitative phase examined the direct and indirect relationships among Religious Maturity (RM), Religious Moderation Understanding (RMU), and Religious Moderation Attitude (RMA), while the qualitative phase explored institutional and sociocultural factors that helped contextualize the quantitative findings. Integrating both phases enabled the study to explain religious moderation as both an individual-level process and a socioculturally embedded phenomenon. To ensure a representative sample, this study used random sampling to select participants from the entire student population. The study included 329 students from one study program at MUK and two study programs at CBUK, ENT. The instrument was a questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale.

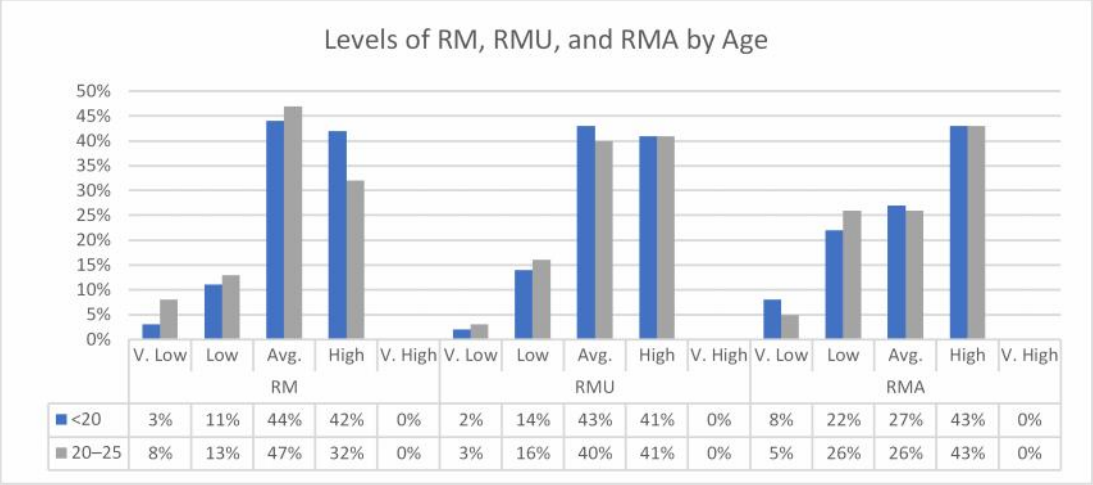
These interval-level quantitative data measured three constructs. First, RM was based on the theoretical framework proposed by Gordon Allport,[20] which defines religious maturity through six components: differentiation, dynamic character, moral consistency, comprehensiveness, integrality, and a heuristic orientation. These components were operationalized in a 23-item questionnaire. Second, RMU was based on components specified by the Indonesian Ministry of Religion in the Religious Moderation Book and the Director General of Islamic Education Decree No. 897.[21] Four core components of religious moderation were used: tolerance, commitment to nationalism, non-violence, and accommodation of local cultures. In this study, "understanding" is a cognitive process that involves recognizing connections between different pieces of knowledge.[22] RMU was measured using 21 items. Third, RMA encompasses actions aligned with the four components of religious moderation. This construct was measured with 21 items. The survey was administered after the instrument's validity and reliability had been established. Data analysis was performed using descriptive statistics and path analysis to assess the fit of the correlation matrix to two or more causal models.[23]

In the second phase, qualitative research was conducted by adapting Bourdieu's habitus perspective to further explore other factors within the campus environment and the students' broader social environment that contribute to students' levels of RM and RMU and thereby influence RMA. Informants were selected through purposive sampling, involving 25 students and faculty members representing various religious affiliations at MUK and CBUK. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and observations. The data were then analysed using thematic analysis supported by NVivo 14 software.[24] To ensure data validity, the researchers employed source triangulation, methodological triangulation, and participant verification.

Results and Discussion

Levels of RM, RMU, and RMA among Students at MUK and CBUK

The study examined levels of RM, RMU, and RMA among MUK and CBUK students by age (Figure 1), educational background (Figure 2), and religious affiliation (Figure 3). Based on data obtained from 329 respondents, 207 students (63%) were under the age of 20, while the remaining 122 students (37%) were between the ages of 20 and 25. Regarding secondary educational background, 51% or 168 respondents came from public schools, while 49% or 161 respondents came from religion-based schools. Regarding religious affiliation, 128 respondents (39%) identified as Catholic, 105 respondents (32%) as Muslim, and 96 respondents (29%) as Protestant Christian.



	RM					RMU					RMA				
<20	3%	11%	44%	42%	0%	2%	14%	43%	41%	0%	8%	22%	27%	43%	0%
20–25	8%	13%	47%	32%	0%	3%	16%	40%	41%	0%	5%	26%	26%	43%	0%

Figure 1. Levels of RM, RMU, and RMA by the respondents' ages

Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of RM, RMU, and RMA among college students, grouped into two age groups: younger than 20 and ages 20–25. Regarding RM, 42% of students younger than 20 fell into the high category. In contrast, 32% of students aged 20–25 were in the high category. Meanwhile, regarding the RMU aspect, students younger than 20 and those aged 20–25 had the same proportion in the high category (41%). Similarly, regarding the RMA aspect, both age groups had the same proportion in the high category (43%). The relatively high

proportion of younger students in the high RM category is not new; in fact, it reinforces previous findings. Schultz found that chronological age does not directly determine a person's level of religious maturity.[25]

Watson et al. offer one potential explanation: young people tend to score higher on extrinsic religious orientation. Extrinsic commitment is based on the social advantages of being religious, as illustrated by the statement, "My religion serves to satisfy my needs for fellowship and security." By contrast, adults tend to score higher on intrinsic religious orientation, which reflects the extent to which an individual's religion fulfills internal needs for certainty, strength, and direction, as illustrated by the item, "God's will should shape my life."[26] Thus, the high level of RM among respondents under the age of 20 may be influenced primarily by factors other than age.

The findings for RM, RMU, and RMA based on age were further analyzed in terms of the contribution of students' educational background before entering college, as shown in Figure 2:

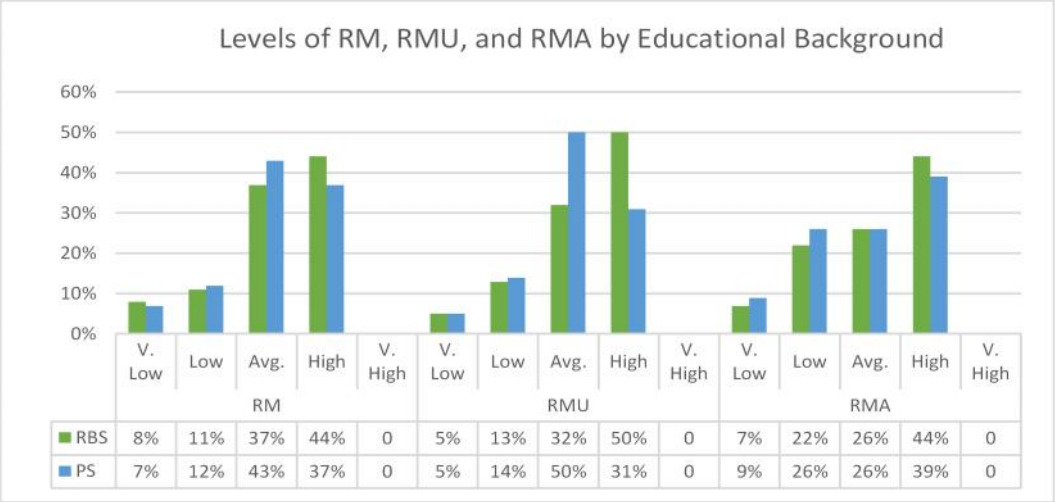


Figure 2. Levels of RM, RMU, and RMA by educational background

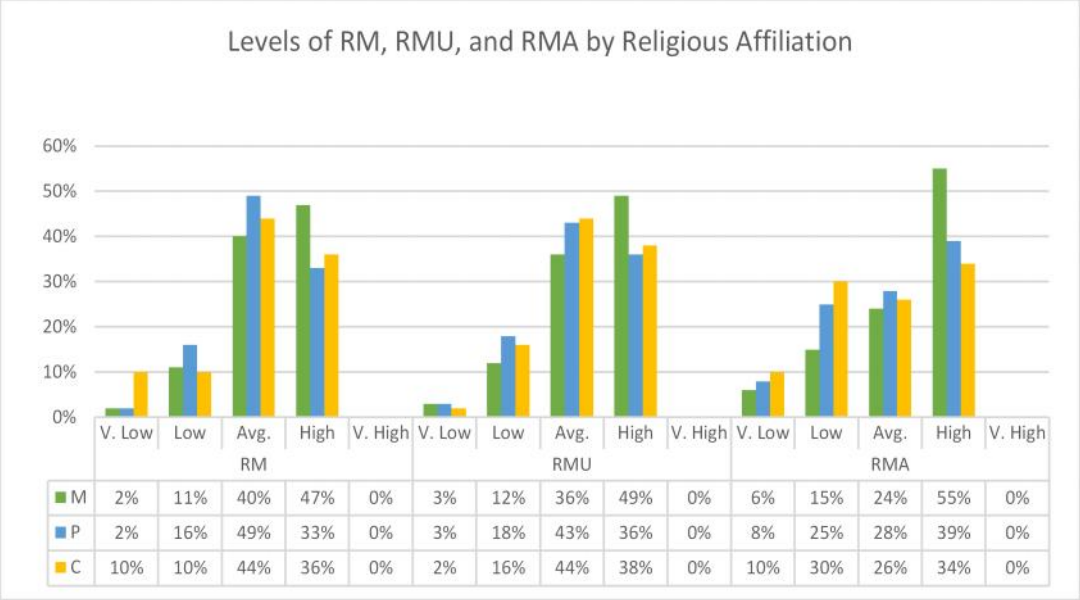
The figure presents a comparison between students from religion-based schools and public schools based on their RM, RMU, and RMA scores. In terms of RM scores, students from religion-based schools showed a higher proportion in the high maturity category—44%—compared to 37% for public schools. Regarding RMU, 50% of students from religion-based schools were also in the high category, while 31% of students from public schools were in the same category. In the high RMA category, students from religion-based schools accounted for 44%, compared with 39% of students from public schools. These results suggest that religion-based education is associated with students' RM, RMU, and RMA scores at both ENT universities.

This phenomenon can be explained using the concept of religiosity-based nurture. This concept views culture in terms of microsystem features, such as how a caregiver and close others interact with a child, what they talk about and do, and what the child is

taught at home and in school. Culture can also be considered in terms of macrosystem features, such as societal beliefs, ideologies, and education systems, and the societal framing of responsibilities among individuals, families, and the state.[27] As a result, education has a significant impact on fostering students' spirituality and religious development.

Papaleontiou's findings also confirm that it has long been believed that children are incapable of experiencing spirituality because they are developmentally immature. However, more recent research seems to indicate the opposite. Therefore, all facets of human development, including spiritual development, should be taken into account by parents and educators. Children's spirituality should be fostered since it can offer inner strength and support during difficult times.[28] Accordingly, the development of students' RM, RMU, and RMA is significantly influenced by the cultivation of religious values through learning in schools with more intensive religious instruction.

Meanwhile, the influence of religious affiliation on students' levels of RM at both campuses is shown in Figure 3:



	RM					RMU					RMA				
	V. Low	Low	Avg.	High	V. High	V. Low	Low	Avg.	High	V. High	V. Low	Low	Avg.	High	V. High
M	2%	11%	40%	47%	0%	3%	12%	36%	49%	0%	6%	15%	24%	55%	0%
P	2%	16%	49%	33%	0%	3%	18%	43%	36%	0%	8%	25%	28%	39%	0%
C	10%	10%	44%	36%	0%	2%	16%	44%	38%	0%	10%	30%	26%	34%	0%

Figure 3. Levels of RM, RMU, and RMA by the respondents' religious affiliations

Figure 3 compares RM, RMU, and RMA among Muslim, Protestant Christian, and Catholic students. Muslim students show the highest percentage of high RM (47%), followed by Catholics (36%) and Protestants (33%). Catholic students have slightly higher representation in the very low category (10%). For RMU, Muslim respondents again had the highest proportion in the high category (49%), compared with Protestants (36%) and Catholics (38%). For RMA, the trend persists, with Muslims showing the highest percentage in the high RMA category (55%), followed by Protestants (39%) and Catholics (34%). These findings indicate that Muslim students generally have higher RM and RMU, a pattern associated with more positive RMA.

The differences may reflect varying religious education experiences and cultural contexts. Amri et al. concluded that the principles of Islamic moderation have permeated Indonesian literature, influencing not only academic circles but also the local Muslim community's collective character. These principles are intricately entwined with Indonesia's historical and cultural fabric.[29] At Islamic universities such as the State Islamic University of Malang, students engage with religious texts that advocate moderation and apply them in daily life. In other words, students' religious practice, grounded in religious texts, is expressed verbally, in writing, and through action.[30]

The findings of this study warrant further, more comprehensive research into the underlying causes. Previous studies focusing more specifically on aspects of religious orientation -such as Buzdar's study- found that Muslim students are intrinsically more religious than their Hindu and Christian peers. They tend to use their religious beliefs and convictions for self-fulfilment. They prefer to embrace religion for religion's sake. By contrast, Christian students tend to have an extrinsic religious orientation, both personally and socially. Hindu students exhibit a balance between intrinsic and extrinsic religious orientations, both personally and socially.[31] Ghorbani et al. found that students from different religious backgrounds demonstrate different levels of RM across sociocultural environments. Their study involved students in the United States and Iran. For Iranian participants, adjustment was predicted by intrinsic religious orientation.[32]

Religious Maturity's Contribution to the Formation of Religious Moderation

The next analysis examined how students' RM influences their RMU and RMA, both directly and indirectly. To determine whether RM and RMU contribute to RMA among MUK and CBUK students, we analyzed the relationships among these three variables. The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Path Coefficients and p-values for relationships among variables

Structural Path	β Coefficient	p-value	Interpretation
RM → RMU	0.664	< 0.001	Significant
RM → RMA	0.289	< 0.001	Significant
RMU → RMA	0.598	< 0.001	Significant

The results of the regression and path analyses indicate statistically significant relationships among the variables studied. First, RM demonstrates a strong positive effect on RMU ($\beta = 0.664$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that individuals with higher levels of religious maturity tend to have a deeper, more comprehensive understanding of religious moderation. The p-value indicates that this relationship is statistically significant, so it is unlikely that the results occurred by chance.

Furthermore, RM exhibits a direct positive influence on RMA ($\beta = 0.289$, $p < 0.001$). This finding implies that RM contributes directly to the formation of RMA, although the

magnitude of this effect is comparatively smaller than its effect on RMU. In addition, RMU significantly affects RMA ($\beta = 0.598$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that an understanding of religious moderation plays a crucial role in shaping individuals' RMA.

Table 2. Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects of RM on RMA

Effect Type	**Structural Path**	**β**	**Interpretation**
Direct Effect	RM → RMA	0.289	Moderate
Indirect Effect	RM → RMU → RMA	0.397	Substantial
Total Effect	RM → RMA	0.686	Strong

Note: The indirect effect was calculated using the product-of-coefficients approach (0.664×0.598). The total effect represents the sum of the direct and indirect effects. All direct paths were statistically significant at $p < 0.001$.

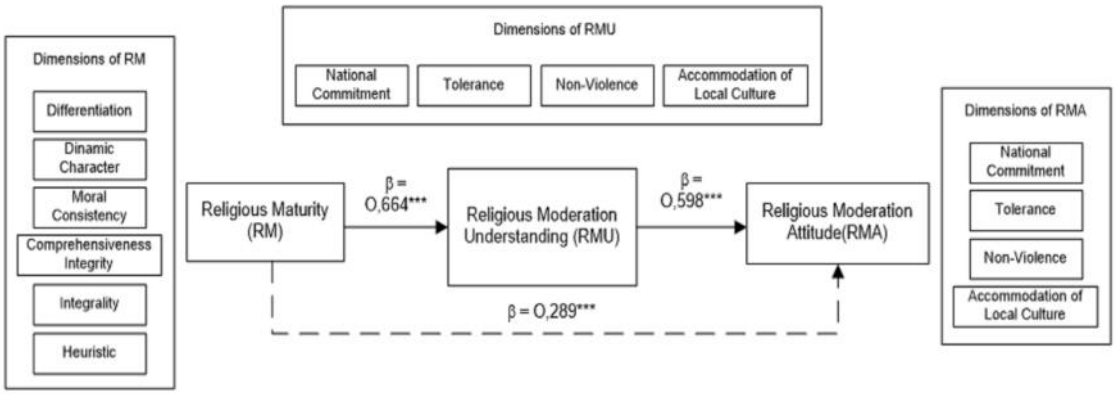


Figure 4. Path Analysis Model of Religious Maturity, Religious Moderation Understanding, and Religious Moderation Attitude

RMU partially mediates the relationship between RM and RMA. The indirect effect ($\beta = 0.397$) exceeds the direct effect ($\beta = 0.289$), indicating that understanding religious moderation serves as an important mechanism through which religious maturity influences students' moderation attitudes.

To facilitate interpretation of the mediation model, Figure 4 visually summarizes the direct and indirect relationships among RM, RMU, and RMA. The figure confirms that RM exerts both a direct effect on RMA and an indirect effect through RMU, indicating a partial mediation mechanism.

The mediation analysis presented in Table 2 further reveals that the indirect effect of RM on RMA through RMU is substantial (indirect $\beta = 0.397$). Notably, this indirect effect is greater than the direct effect, highlighting the pivotal mediating role of understanding in translating RM into RMA. These results indicate strong partial mediation: RM influences RMA both directly and indirectly through enhanced RMU. Overall, the findings underscore that fostering RM alone is insufficient; individuals' RMU

must also be strengthened because cognitive understanding serves as a key mechanism through which religious values are transformed into RMA.

Substantively, these findings indicate that individuals with higher levels of RM tend to possess a deeper and more comprehensive RMU, which subsequently influences their RMA both directly and indirectly. Although the magnitude of the direct and indirect effects differs, the results consistently demonstrate that RM exerts a significant influence on RMA. This aligns with Glock and Stark's explanation that RM is reflected not only in ritual compliance but also in the quality of beliefs and religious experiences and the application of religious values in everyday life.[33]

Allport asserts that religiously mature individuals tend to exhibit consistency between their daily behavior and the moral values of their religion. In other words, RM plays an important role in helping individuals control behavior that is inconsistent with religious norms, thus creating a more stable and harmonious personality.[34] These results are corroborated by Zannah et al., who found that students' RM explained 64% of the variance in bullying behavior. The results indicate that students' propensity to engage in bullying behavior decreases as RM increases. This finding strengthens the theory that RM reflects the internalization and practice of religious values, which can foster self-control, empathy, and a tolerant attitude toward others.

Beyond Religious Maturity: Religious Moderation as Habitus and Culture in ENT

The quantitative results show that RM has a strong influence on RMU, which in turn has a strong influence on RMA. The qualitative findings are consistent with this pattern. Interviews with faculty members revealed that these three aspects, in an academic context, are manifested through dialogic and inclusive pedagogical practices. For example, one faculty member at the MUK Faculty of Law (JMS) explained that when teaching, he often uses group discussions. "I divide the class into several groups to critically and openly solve contextual problems based on their religious understanding. Group members consist of men and women from various religions and ethnicities. Each group takes turns presenting the results of their discussions, and the same applies during the question-and-answer session."

Students from different religious backgrounds consistently reported feelings of comfort, safety, and acceptance within the campus environment. These experiences indicate that moderation is not merely understood as an abstract concept but is internalized and expressed through everyday attitudes and social interactions. One Anthropology student in the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences (ET) explained: "I come from So'e and study at MUK to seek knowledge here. Although I am a Protestant Christian, I do not feel awkward socializing with my friends here. Many of my classmates are Catholic and Muslim, but we all get along well. The campus is also a comfortable place

for us to engage in activities together, such as sports or playing music together." This account aligns with observations indicating that the atmosphere and learning environment at MUK were comfortable and that students freely used facilities such as the library, sports facilities, canteen, and other places on campus.

A similar atmosphere was observed at CBUK, where all students have access to facilities and infrastructure without discrimination based on ethnicity or religion. In class, lecturers allowed students to express their opinions in front of their peers without discrimination. One student (MS) reported that since she first enrolled at CBUK, she has felt comfortable and has not experienced any pressure due to discrimination from friends or lecturers. "I am happy to study here. Even though I am from Suma and am Muslim, I have never felt any pressure or harassment from anyone on campus. It's safe here," she said. The head of the Islamic Religious Education Study Program (YN) also stated: "Student organizations at MUK are diverse; they include IMM (Muhammadiyah Student Association), HMI [Islamic Student Association], PMII (Indonesian Islamic Student Movement), and HMPD (Study Program Student Association) to accommodate the diversity of student beliefs. Students here still have the freedom to express themselves, but they remain under campus guidance."

Another interesting development at CBUK, coinciding with the celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday on October 1, 2023, was the formation of the Muslim Student Association (MSA) as one of the mandatory religion-based student activity units at CBUK.[35] Further elaboration on this point was provided by CBUK's First Vice Rector (AM), who stated, "This campus prioritizes professionalism and maintains a conducive academic environment, so there is no such thing as interfaith or interethnic conflict here. All parties feel safe and comfortable in carrying out their respective roles and functions. We always support faculty activities and facilitate students' academic needs without discriminating based on religious, ethnic, or cultural background, thereby enhancing CBUK's reputation in the eyes of the Kupang community and nationwide."

Statements from these interviews, along with observations at MUK and CBUK, indicate the expression of RM, RMU, and RMA values across various contexts: classroom learning, interactions outside the classroom, student activities, supporting facilities and infrastructure, and the provision of non-discriminatory campus services for the entire academic community. Consequently, the development and reinforcement of these three aspects are directly fostered by the learning environment -through the influence of lecturers, administrative staff, and fellow students alike. Bourdieu's theory of habitus is clearly applicable here: the internal campus environment plays a pivotal role in shaping the RM, RMU, and RMA of students in Kupang. For instance, the practice of expressing opinions in accordance with one's religious principles fosters greater religious maturity among students and simultaneously enhances their understanding of religious moderation, thereby positively influencing their RMA.

Additionally, this study examined how students' residential communities affect the development and maintenance of these three aspects. The dean of the MUK Faculty of

Islamic Studies (JN) illustrated this point: "We have always been accustomed to a culture of mutual tolerance, so when asked about the concept of religious moderation that has recently been promoted by the government, we were surprised that this question was only being asked now. We have inherited traditions from our ancestors -such as *Nusi*, *Butukila*, and *Suki Toka Apa*- in Kupang City society. Therefore, students on this campus have never thought of fighting because of differences in religion or beliefs." A lecturer and MUK alumnus (JT) from Alor expressed a similar view: "We are accustomed to living side by side with people of other religions in our area, even in villages and sometimes in the same household. Marrying someone of a different religion is not a big problem, because one party will give in and convert to the other party's religion to validate the marriage. Examples like these reflect the high level of tolerance as a value of our local cultural heritage here."

Narratives from lecturers underscore that tolerance and interfaith harmony are deeply rooted in local cultural traditions, aligning with the positive practices they experience on campus. Consequently, it is unsurprising that survey results indicate religious maturity is not the sole factor shaping students' religious moderation orientations (RMU and RMA) in Kupang. In fact, existing local wisdom further reinforces moderate attitudes among both students and lecturers. These tolerance-promoting local cultural practices are deeply ingrained in ENT society as a whole, including the student population. The people of ENT -comprising diverse ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups spread across various small islands- are accustomed to living together harmoniously, free from mutual hostility.

The interview data align with Bourdieu's concept of habitus. In this context, local values and traditions kept alive and practiced by the community in their daily lives have become ingrained in the community's habitus. The *Nusi* value, which prioritizes cooperation and solidarity, reflects the collective practices of the Kupang community in fostering harmonious social interactions. Mutual assistance in daily social life, religious activities, and customary practices demonstrates the internalization of values of unity within the community's social consciousness. Without the need for formal rules, this custom cultivates a tendency among the people to act in alignment with ideals of harmony or religious moderation. Meanwhile, the *Butukila* tradition, which places strong emphasis on kinship and brotherhood, can be viewed as a form of habitus that fosters a sense of belonging among residents.

Furthermore, *Suki Toka Apa*, symbolizing the spirit of cooperation and assistance to those in need, whether in social or religious contexts, illustrates how habitus generates a worldview and social behaviors that emerge naturally within community life. Habitus operates through a continuous process of social reproduction, unfolding via daily cultural experiences, parental upbringing, and social interactions. This aligns with Bourdieu's definition of habitus as a system of dispositions formed through social experience -subsequently integrated into the cognitive frameworks, behaviors, and practices of a group and passed down across generations within the Kupang community, including the students who are part of that society.

Conclusion

The survey results in this study are consistent with several previous studies showing that chronological age does not necessarily correspond to levels of RM, RMU, or RMA. Similarly, a person's religious education background prior to entering college influences these three aspects. According to the survey results, the highest levels of RM, RMU, and RMA among college students were found among Muslim students, followed by Catholic and Protestant students. Beyond these descriptive patterns, the focus of this study -on the extent to which students' RM influences their RMU and RMA- reveals that RM has a significant direct effect on RMU, although its direct effect on RMA is weaker and is substantially mediated by RMU. This implies that interventions to strengthen students' religious maturity and cognitive understanding of religious moderation are crucial.

However, this study extends beyond this conclusion, as the factors contributing to the formation of RM and RMU stem not only from formal learning on campus but also from the communities where students live. This aligns with Allport's emphasis on the influence of life experiences on religious maturity and Bourdieu's theory of habitus, which emphasizes the crucial role of society in shaping the worldview of the individuals living within it -in this context, the ENT community, which is rich in local wisdom regarding religious harmony and tolerance. Thus, the concept of religious moderation is not viewed as something new that must be introduced to the ENT community. Beyond RM, the ENT community's religious moderation is supported by practices of coexistence that are deeply rooted in culture and reflected in local traditions such as *Nusi, Butukila*, and *Suki Toka Apa*. These traditions can be more widely promoted as effective, adaptable tools for fostering religious maturity and intergenerational moderation in diverse societies, both in Indonesia and in other countries.

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