



Weaving harmony from the classroom: A religious moderation-based classical guidance module as a preventive strategy against toxic positivity in elementary schools

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| Article info | Abstract |
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| Keywords: Classical guidance, module, religious moderation, toxic positivity | Toxic positivity, the pressure to always think positively and deny negative emotions, is now emerging even in elementary school-aged children. This phenomenon may hinder emotional health and communication openness. This study aims to develop a classical guidance module grounded in religious moderation to reduce toxic positivity among elementary students. This study uses a 4-D model development research approach (Define, Design, Develop, Disseminate). However, this research only reached the development stage. The study was conducted at SDN 01 Lima Kaum, Tanah Datar, with a sample of 39 students from the fifth and sixth grades, selected using purposive sampling. Data were collected through questionnaires and interviews and were subsequently analysed descriptively and quantitatively. The results showed that 51% of students experienced toxic positivity in the high to very high category. The developed module was validated by experts, achieving a validity score of 76% (categorised as "valid"). It was subsequently revised in response to validator input on language simplification, the addition of contextual examples, and the integration of religious moderation values. These findings demonstrate the urgency of early intervention grounded in moderate religious values to foster healthy emotional literacy in children. Consequently, this module guides classroom teachers to achieve balance and address negative emotions to support students' mental health. |

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1. Introduction

In the context of character education and mental health, understanding students' emotional dynamics is increasingly crucial. The digital age and intense social pressures not merely shape how children interact but also influence how they process and express emotions. Amidst efforts to build psychological resilience and social empathy, a paradoxical phenomenon emerges: the drive to always "think positively" can become an indispensable emotional burden. This phenomenon is known as toxic positivity—an attitude that denies or suppresses negative emotions with a forced positive narrative, thus inhibiting authentic emotional expression and disrupting the development of healthy emotional regulation in children (Kojongian & Wibowo, 2022). In elementary education, where the foundations of mental and social health are being formed, toxic positivity has the potential to become a hidden barrier that erodes students' emotional honesty and self-confidence.

The concept of toxic positivity is gaining attention in psychology and counselling literature. Kojongian and Wibowo (2022) define it as the belief that individuals should maintain a positive attitude in all situations, even when facing painful or traumatic ones. Toxic positivity is a growing issue and is closely related to topics such as emotional distress, the mental health of medical personnel, and social media (Sumakul et al., 2025). Their research indicates that responses such as "Don't be sad, you'll become weak!" or "Always be grateful, don't complain!" actually create guilt in individuals experiencing sadness, anxiety, or anger. Among adolescents, Cherry (2021) found that toxic positivity was negatively correlated with psychological well-being and emotion regulation skills. Wang et al. (2021) point out that the process of toxic positivity results in the denial, minimisation, and invalidation of human emotional experiences (Nelson & Canty, 2022; Putra et al., 2023). Furthermore, Fitriani & Maharani (2020) added that denying negative emotions can worsen mental health conditions, including increasing the risk of masked depression and anxiety disorders (Nabawi, 2025). Toxic positivity causes a person to underestimate themselves and their negative feelings and suppress negative things rather than acknowledge or address them (Upadhyay et al., 2022). Denying the presence of negative emotions can harm mental health. This toxic positivity ultimately constitutes a denial of reality (Kaufman, 2021).

In Indonesia, several early studies have identified manifestations of toxic positivity in social and family relationships (Kojongian & Wibowo, 2022). Still, their focus has been limited to adult or adolescent populations. Meanwhile, in the context of primary education, research on toxic positivity remains very limited, particularly regarding locally relevant, religious-values-based interventions for elementary school-aged children, particularly in formal educational settings in Indonesia. The main limitations of previous research are twofold: first, the majority of studies are descriptive-phenomenological in nature and do not develop concrete and measurable intervention solutions; second, existing intervention approaches tend to be general and do not consider the dimensions of religious values that underlie children's moral development in a religious society like Indonesia. One of the religious values that should be instilled in children from an early age is the concept of religious moderation. According to Zahroh (2022), religious moderation is a balanced approach to religion, namely understanding and practising religious teachings without extreme tendencies, either too rigid (extreme right) or too liberal (extreme left) (Alhafizh & Dede, 2025). Discussing the concept of religious moderation cannot be separated from the idea of maqashid sharia. This is reasonable because both concepts aim to promote goodness and advance human welfare. One of the components of maqasid sharia is related to life protection (hifz al-nafs). This indicates that health in Islam is viewed holistically, encompassing a balance among body, mind, and spirit. This concept is not only relevant historically but also remains essential in contemporary health contexts (Rus et al., 2024).

However, as noted by Habibie (2021) and Sari et al. (2023), the values of religious moderation—which emphasise balance, tolerance, and emotional honesty—can serve as an effective ethical foundation for countering the emotional distortions associated with toxic positivity. This gap is crucial because elementary school-aged children are at a stage of psychosocial development that is vulnerable to normative pressures, including the pressure to "always appear happy" for social acceptance (Ernilah et al., 2022). Therefore, Nisa & Widyaningrum (2024) emphasise that integrating the values of religious moderation into education is not merely an option but an urgent need (Nur, 2024).

In Regulation of the Minister of Administrative and Bureaucratic Reform Number 16 of 2009, Chapter VII, Article 13, Point I, and Regulation of the Minister of National Education Number 35 of 2010 concerning Details of Class Teacher Responsibilities, Point 9, it explicitly states that in addition to teaching obligations, the main duty of class teachers at every level is to provide guidance and counseling in the classroom. Guidance and counselling services are essential for students at all levels of education, including elementary school. The purpose of guidance and counselling at this level is to provide solutions for students experiencing internal and external problems that hinder their development, in addition to increasing students' interest in learning (Hadiarni et al., 2021). Durlak et al. (2011) and Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta (2000) suggest that children at an early age need to be facilitated with school counselling programs to support them in achieving holistic development (Efatri et al., 2021). In addition, Khaulani et al. (2020) points out that due to the limitation of insight into the potential of the students at the elementary school level who are undergoing various development processes increasingly emphasize the essentials of guidance and counseling services to aid them in achieving their goals regarding the potential that exists within them, thereby they need guidance and counseling services to achieve their goals (Nurjani & Hadiarni, 2024).

One way to reduce toxic positivity in elementary school is through classroom guidance services. These services are guidance and counselling services provided by guidance and counselling teachers or counsellors to groups of students within a classroom (Rosidah, 2017) and conducted directly (Rosita et al., 2024). These services aim to develop students' self-confidence, self-concept, and self-control. In line with the explanation above, these classroom services are expected to provide effective support and help students with low self-confidence develop their learning potential to achieve future success (Rohmah et al., 2021). However, studies by Suryahadikusumah & Dedy (2019) and Witono (2020) revealed that classroom teachers' participation in implementing guidance and counselling services was in the medium and low categories, because in general, classroom teachers lacked insight and skills due to rarely attending training on the implementation of guidance and counselling in elementary schools (Lutfiyan & Taufiq, 2024; Witono et al., 2020). Therefore, to support the implementation of guidance and counselling services in elementary schools, class teachers need to be equipped with classical guidance modules based on religious moderation.

There has been little research investigating toxic positivity in elementary school-aged children, especially in formal educational settings in Indonesia. The main limitations of previous research are twofold. First, most studies are descriptive-phenomenological and do not develop concrete, measurable intervention solutions. Second, existing intervention approaches tend to be general and do not consider the dimensions of religious values that underpin children's moral development in a religious society such as Indonesia. However, as noted by Habibie (2021) and Sari et al. (2023), the values of religious moderation—which emphasise balance, tolerance, and emotional honesty—can serve as an effective ethical foundation for countering the emotional distortions associated with toxic positivity. This gap is crucial because elementary school-aged

children are at a stage of psychosocial development that is vulnerable to normative pressures, including the pressure to “always appear happy” for social acceptance (Ernilah et al., 2022).

This study aims to develop and validate a religious-moderation-based classical guidance module designed to reduce toxic positivity among elementary school students in Tanah Datar, West Sumatra. The research novelty lies in the integration of two elements: (1) a focus on the early childhood population that has not been widely studied in the context of toxic positivity, and (2) an intervention approach through classical guidance services, which are the responsibility of elementary school classroom teachers according to Permendikbud No. 111/2014. This study not only addresses the practical needs of classroom teachers for intervention guidance but also enriches the literature on value-based approaches in developmental counselling. Specifically, the research objectives are (1) to identify the prevalence level of toxic positivity in fifth and sixth-grade students at SDN 01 Lima Kaum Batusangkar in Tanah Datar; and (2) to develop a valid, practical, and culturally relevant classical guidance module to reduce this behaviour. This study did not test effectiveness through experiments; instead, it focused on the validity of the module's content and design as a first step toward developing evidence-based interventions.

2. Method

This research employs a research and development approach based on the 4-D model (define, design, develop, disseminate) proposed by Thiagarajan et al. However, in this study, these stages were only implemented up to the develop stage due to time and resource constraints. The steps can be seen from the following chart:



Figure 1. Research stages

2.1 Define stage

The define stage is the analysis and problem-identification phase that provides information for product development. The define stage is useful for identifying and defining the learning process's needs and for collecting data on the product to be produced, as presented in the module.

2.2 Design stage

The design stage involves developing the product, specifically the module prototype.

2.3 Develop stage

This stage produces a validated product. The resulting product is revised in response to input or expert suggestions. The goal of this development stage is to create learning media. At this stage, the learning media product must also undergo several stages of revision by validators or experts and be tested on students as users (Arkadiantika et al., 2020).

The research focuses on developing a religious-moderation-based classical guidance module to reduce toxic positivity among elementary school students. The research location was determined at SD Negeri 01 Lima Kaum, Tanah Datar Regency, West Sumatra. The research population comprised all fifth- and sixth-grade students. A total of 39 students were selected through purposive sampling, based on the premise that this age group has entered a stage of social development that facilitates the emergence of emotional distortions, such as toxic positivity. The main data collection instrument consisted of a closed-ended questionnaire based

on a Likert scale developed from a grid based on the toxic positivity construct according to Kojongian and Wibowo (2022), covering three main dimensions: (1) denial of negative emotions, (2) lack of understanding of one's own feelings, and (3) the use of cornering sentences as a form of emotional repression. Two Guidance and Counselling lecturers expertly validated the instrument. The testing procedure refers to the standards for developing quantitative instruments for elementary school-aged children.

In addition to the questionnaire, semi-structured interviews with class teachers were also conducted to enrich contextual data regarding the manifestation of toxic positivity in the school environment. Data analysis techniques combined descriptive, quantitative, and thematic qualitative approaches. Data from the questionnaire were analysed using descriptive statistics to report the frequency distribution and percentage of toxic positivity levels among respondents, with categories defined by ideal score intervals. Meanwhile, interview data were analysed using data reduction, categorisation, and thematic analysis to identify behavioural patterns and intervention needs. The module product was validated by expert validators using an assessment sheet covering three aspects: content suitability, presentation, and language. The final score was calculated as a percentage and categorised according to the criteria of Riduwan and Akdon (2013) (Laksana et al., 2025). The module was declared suitable for use if it obtained a score of $\geq 61\%$. All research procedures adhered to the principles of academic ethics, including school approval and confidentiality of respondents' identities.

3. Results

3.1 Define stage

This stage involves activities to determine the product to be developed and to gather information about students' needs in the learning process. The define stage also aims to identify existing challenges and obstacles. This definition stage includes needs analysis and student analysis.

3.2 Needs analysis

A needs analysis is conducted to determine the needs of students and teachers in implementing the planned classical guidance service. This needs analysis aims to identify the basic issues required for module development and to determine whether the module meets the media criteria and service delivery needs.

At this stage, interviews with classroom teachers and the principal were conducted to gather information on toxic positivity among elementary students in the study area. In this interview stage, subjects were given insight into toxic positivity and subsequently explored whether there were students in the school who indicated toxic positivity. Based on the interviews, it was found that numerous students were trapped in toxic positivity. One example of toxic positivity is when a student shares her feelings with a friend, only to get a response that leaves her disappointed and hurt. In addition, information was obtained about students who belittled friends who cried, mocked them, or spoke harshly to them. As a result, the friend who was belittled prefers to keep his feelings to himself, is reluctant to discuss his problems with teachers or friends, and, when the student is concerned, triggers the student to become quiet, often isolating himself, and has difficulty interacting with others.

As previously introduced, a questionnaire was used to quantify the level or category of toxic positivity among elementary students. The distributed questionnaire was also validated by two validators, with the following general notes/recommendations: a) aligning statements with

indicators, b) employing simple language that is easy for respondents (elementary school students) to understand, and c) avoiding duplicate statements. After collecting data from the distributed questionnaire, the researchers processed and analysed the data to identify several categories of toxic positivity among elementary school students.

3.3 Student analysis

Student analysis examines student characteristics, including age. This analysis was conducted to examine how the attributes of fifth- and sixth-grade students at SDN 01 Lima Kaum influence the development of required modules and to ensure that these modules are tailored to their characteristics and age. The analysis results are shown in the following table.

Table 1. Results of the analysis of the questionnaire on toxic positivity

| Categories | Interval | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------|----------|-----------|------------|
| Very high | 126-150 | 9 | 23% |
| High | 102-125 | 11 | 28% |
| Fair | 78-101 | 9 | 23% |
| Low | 54-77 | 7 | 18% |
| Very low | 30-53 | 3 | 8% |
| Total | | 39 | 100% |

In light of the distributed questionnaires, percentages are calculated for each category. 9 students (23%) are in the very high category; 11 students (28%), 9 students (23%), and 7 students (18%) are in the moderate category; and 3 students (8%) are in the low category. The table above shows that the high category had the highest frequency, with 11 students (28%). It can be concluded that from the distributed toxic positivity questionnaires, students exhibiting toxic positivity behaviours fall into the moderate to high category, with the highest scores in the high category.

3.4 Design stage

The design stage follows the define stage. Before entering the development stage, the module is first designed. Several steps are taken, including developing the framework, creating the module format, defining the writing style and language, and addressing other aspects. The resulting design is discussed within the team to determine its suitability for validation. If not, the design is revised until it is deemed suitable.

The steps include 1) collecting all the materials needed in making the module such as, RPL (guidance service plan), materials on toxic positivity, classical guidance, religious moderation, exercises for teachers and students, and syllabus developed, from various relevant sources, 2) making an outline for making the module, in this activity contains identification of the module making program, through this identification is determined title, materials and topics, 3) designing the module through canva online starting from making a cover by combining images, colors, written with several types of fonts, 4) making a foreword, table of contents, introduction, materials and exercises and closing, 5) packaging and compiling materials on how to reduce toxic positivity in elementary school students with classical guidance based on religious moderation systematically with language that is easy for students to understand, 6) making an evaluation sheet in the form of questions related to the material (teacher and student exercises), and 7) finishing, which is carried out in the activity of reviewing, testing the validity of the classical

guidance module based on religious moderation to reduce toxic positivity behavior in elementary school students, in accordance with the expected product.

Table 2. Steps in designing the module prototype

| | |
|--|---|
| Cover | |
| Preface | |
| Table of Contents | |
| Chapter I: Introduction | A. Background B. Purpose of Using the Module C. Direction on Using the Module |
| Chapter II: Materials and Practices | A. Toxic Positivity B. Classical Guidance C. Religious Moderation D. Religious Moderation-based Classical Guidance Reduce Toxic Postivity Behaviour among elementary school students E. Implementation of Religious Moderation-based Classical Guidance |
| Chapter III: Conclusion and Suggestion | A. Conclusion B. Suggestion |
| References | |

Sample designs for the prototype module are presented below.

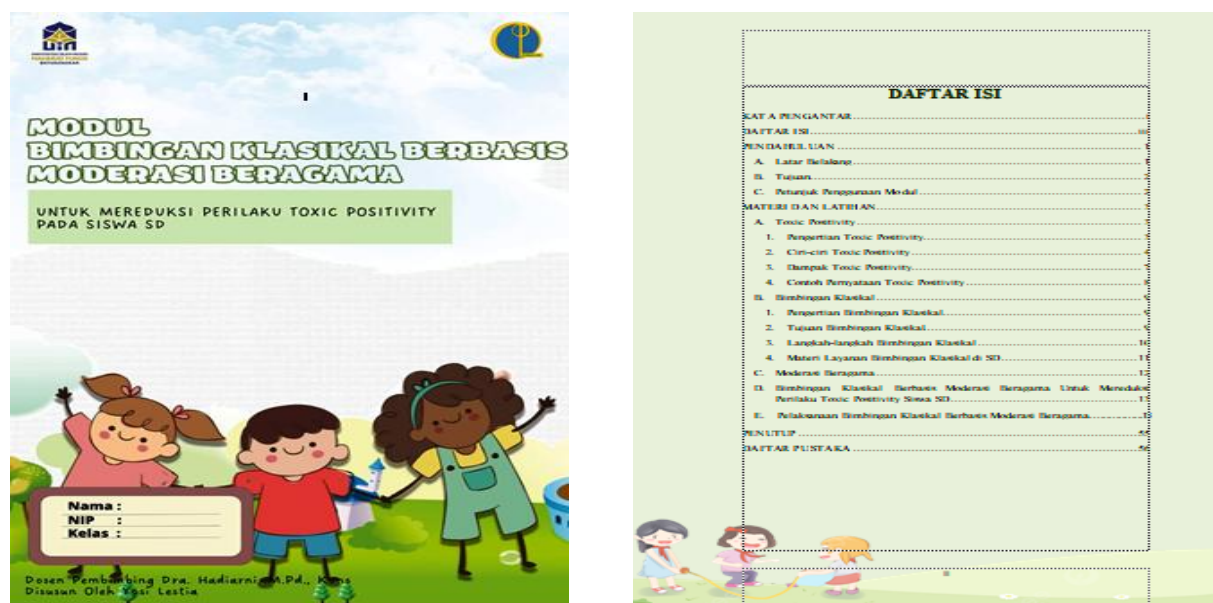


Figure 2. Cover and Table of Contents

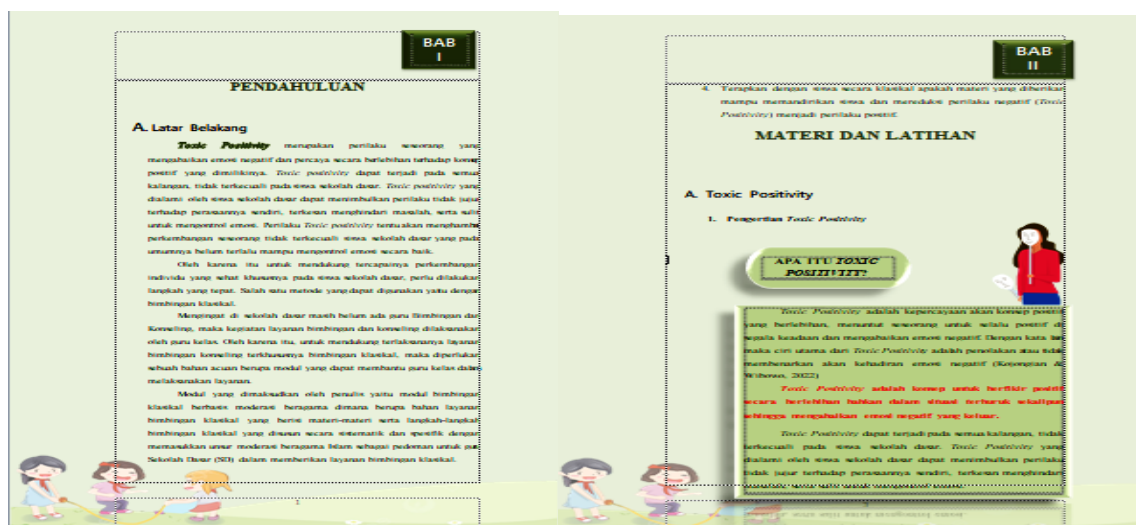


Figure 3. Sample Chapters

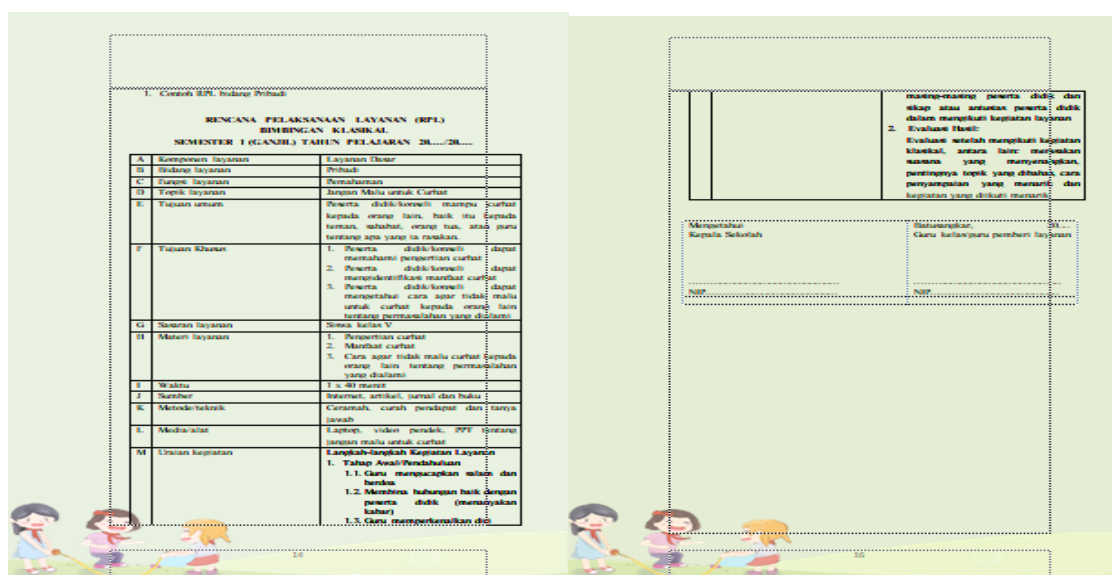


Figure 4. Sample of Guidance Service Plan (RPL)

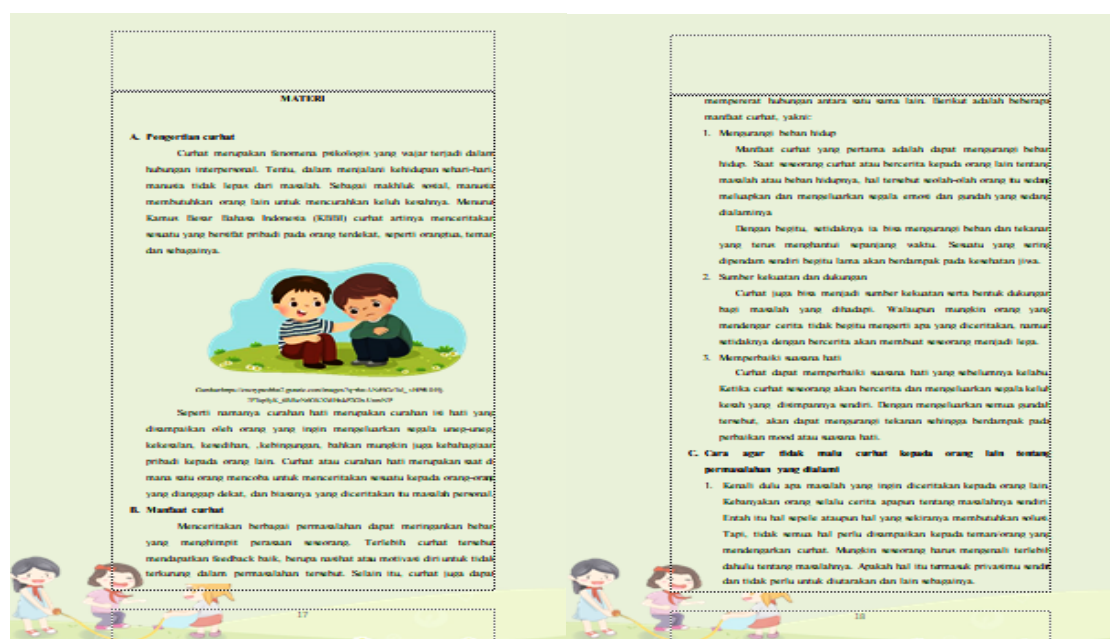


Figure 5. Sample of Material

This design stage can be carried out after the definition stage. The module is designed based on the results of student data analysis (Harjanto et al., 2022). This classical guidance module is designed for elementary school teachers (SD) to enhance the effectiveness of classical guidance implementation and to help students understand toxic positivity. This module also provides materials aligned with problem indicators and a guidance service plan (RPL) to guide the implementation of classical services by teachers. This module design contains a cover, background, purpose of using the module, instructions for using the module, materials on toxic positivity, classical guidance, religious moderation, guidance service plan (RPL), and service materials to be provided by teachers to students related to toxic positivity behavior, along with student and teacher exercises, a closing, conclusions, and a bibliography.

The cover of this module was designed in Canva. Several aspects of the module's creation require preparation, including supporting images, student exercises, and the module's colour scheme. The classical guidance module, based on religious moderation, was developed to reduce toxic positivity behaviour among students of SDN 01 Lima Kaum and includes the RPL for classical guidance, divided into four aspects: personal, learning, social, and career. Teacher and student training has been improved by using simple language appropriate to the abilities of elementary school students.

3.5 Development stage

The development stage is the module's realisation stage. This stage consists of validity and practicality testing. Validation aims to ensure the module is valid. This validity test was conducted by expert validators, namely guidance and counselling lecturers. Validation was carried out by providing validation sheets to the validators, covering content, presentation, and language suitability. The module validation results can be seen in the following Table 3.

Table 3. Prototype module validation test results

| Aspects | Obtained Score | Maximum Score | Percentage | Category |
|--------------------------|----------------|---------------|------------|----------|
| Content feasibility | 31 | 40 | 77.5% | Valid |
| Presentation feasibility | 24 | 32 | 75% | Valid |
| Language feasibility | 15 | 20 | 75% | Valid |
| Total | 70 | 92 | 76% | Valid |

Table 3 describes the module prototype validation. The developed module obtains a total score of 70 out of 92 and a validity percentage of 76% across content, presentation, and language suitability.

The practicality test was conducted by distributing questionnaires to students. Based on student responses, several indicators of toxic positivity were identified that warranted the researcher's attention and must be addressed immediately by the teachers of SDN 01 Lima Kaum. The following table presents the practicality results:

Table 4. Result of the practicality of the toxic positivity questionnaire

| Indicators | Obtained score | Maximum Score | Percentage | Category |
|--|----------------|---------------|------------|-----------|
| Forbidding people or yourself to be sad, angry, cry, etc. | 734 | 1.170 | 62.74 | Practical |
| Judging people or yourself who express their negative emotions | 742 | 1.170 | 63.42 | Practical |
| Suppressing one's feelings and thoughts about a problem | 796 | 1.170 | 68.03 | Practical |
| Suppressing one's feelings and thoughts about a problem | 747 | 1.170 | 63.85 | Practical |
| Speaking harshly and impolitely to other people | 722 | 1.170 | 61.71 | Practical |
| Total | 3.741 | 5.850 | 63,95 | Practical |

Based on the percentages in Table 4, the student questionnaire is practical, as demonstrated by each item.

4. Discussion

The main research findings indicate that elementary school students at SDN 01 Lima Kaum, Tanah Datar, experience high to very high levels of toxic positivity, and the classical religious moderation-based guidance module to reduce toxic positivity is categorised as "valid" by expert validators. These findings directly address the research objectives—to identify the prevalence of toxic positivity in elementary school students and develop local value-based interventions to reduce it—while also confirming that the phenomenon, long associated with adolescents and adults, is rooted at an early age, even in religious contexts.

This finding's interpretation aligns with a study that posited that toxic positivity is the belief in consistently maintaining a positive outlook, regardless of the situation. Forcing oneself to remain positive has significant negative consequences, including a tendency to reject negative emotions and to push oneself to be okay, ultimately leading to the accumulation of negative emotions that

can trigger uncontrolled anger (Lubna & Achmad, 2023). In numerous cases, individuals who initially focused on the positive aspects of problems later experienced worsening symptoms, felt worthless, and blamed themselves (Putra et al., 2023).

However, this study extends the scope of these findings to the developmental realm of children aged 9–12, a group at a critical stage in the formation of emotional regulation and social identity (Ernilah et al., 2022). A significant difference lies in the context, while previous literature has generally focused on urban populations or adolescents. This study reveals that toxic positivity is also deeply rooted in religious communities, specifically through the distortion of spiritual values such as "patience" and "gratitude" that are understood in a rigid and repressive manner. Students, for instance, tend to suppress expressions of sadness for fear of being perceived as "ungrateful" or "weak in faith." This explains its high prevalence despite seemingly harmonious environments because the pressure to "not be sad" is embedded in moral and spiritual narratives. Thus, these findings do not contradict the existing literature; rather, they deepen and contextualise it, demonstrating that toxic positivity is cross-age and cross-cultural. Still, local culture and interpretations of religious values strongly influence its manifestations. This is in line with the findings of previous research, which confirmed that in a spiritual context, someone who often puts forward the term patience creates limited discussion space related to the inner wounds and psychological conditions he experiences (Nabawi, 2025).

Theoretically, this research contributes to the integration of two rarely linked domains, emotional literacy in elementary school children and religious moderation. These findings support the arguments of Habibie (2021) and Sari et al. (2023) that religious moderation is not merely about interfaith tolerance but also encompasses an honest attitude towards the complexity of human emotions as part of human nature. According to Lu & Wu (2020) and Yanto (2020), there is a positive relationship between religiosity and ethics. This is evident in honesty, compassion, and a tendency to have positive attitudes toward people of different religions (Solihah et al., 2024). Based on the perspective of Maqasid Al-Ahari'ah, protection of the soul (Hifz Al-Nafs) encompasses mental health, thereby denying that negative emotions contradict the objectives of sharia (Chodir, 2024). In practice, this module provides an operational solution for classroom teachers—who, in the Indonesian education system, play a pivotal role in implementing guidance services in elementary schools (Minister of Education and Culture Regulation No. 111/2014)—to transform repressive narratives into liberating emotional dialogues. This module, for instance, teaches students that crying like the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) over the death of his son is a form of emotional honesty in Islam, not a weakness of faith (Sobirin, 2025). This approach allows children to develop emotional authenticity without experiencing moral guilt. However, this study has several limitations. First, the research design progressed only to the development and validation stages, without testing its effectiveness through experiments or quasi-experiments. Second, the sample size was limited to 39 students in a single school; therefore, generalising the findings to a broader population requires caution. Third, the toxic positivity instrument did not report its statistical reliability, although content validity was met.

Based on these limitations, future research is recommended to (1) test the effectiveness of the module through a quasi-experimental design with control and treatment groups, (2) expand the sample to various regions with diverse religious and cultural backgrounds to test the transferability of the module, (3) develop a toxic positivity instrument that has been tested for reliability and empirical validity in early childhood populations, and (4) explore the relationship between toxic positivity and other variables such as emotional intelligence, parental attachment, or digital media exposure. Thus, values-based interventions such as this can continue to be refined as part of a holistic, evidence-based character education ecosystem.

5. Conclusion and implications

This study successfully developed a valid classical guidance module based on religious moderation to reduce toxic positivity in students of SD Negeri 01 Lima Kaum, Tanah Datar, where respondents underscored high to very high levels of toxic positivity. These findings confirm that the pressure to "always be positive" has been ingrained since childhood, often through distortions of religious values such as prohibitions on expressing sadness in favour of "gratitude" or "patience." The main research contribution lies in integrating a contextual approach—combining early childhood emotional literacy with inclusive and liberating religious moderation values—as a preventive response to such emotional distortions. Therefore, this module provides a practical solution for classroom teachers in implementing classical guidance services in accordance with Permendikbud No. 111/2014, while enriching the value-based intervention model in guidance and counselling in elementary schools.

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