

The Synergy of Moderate Islam and Curriculum Reform in Character Education

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ABSTRACT: This study explores the integration of moderate values in character education through a narrative review, with a focus on Islamic educational settings such as madrasahs. A total of 32 peer-reviewed studies published between 2015 and 2025 were analyzed. The review adopts a narrative synthesis approach grounded in constructivist and values-based educational frameworks. Key findings indicate that integrating moderate Islamic values with curricula enhances moral development, social tolerance, and holistic student character. Educators play a pivotal role through narrative teaching methods and curriculum innovations aligned with cultural contexts. Systemic challenges—such as rigid policies, bureaucratic constraints, and social inequality—hinder implementation. This review contributes a cross-national perspective on inclusive policy frameworks supporting teacher agency and moderate value education.

Keywords: Character Education; Moderate Values; Islamic Education; Curriculum Reform; Narrative Learning; Teacher Empowerment; Education Policy.



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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the evolving landscape of global and local education has brought increased attention to the role of religious and character education in shaping societal values and cohesion. Educational institutions worldwide, especially those rooted in faith-based traditions, are continuously challenged to adapt to social and cultural transformations while preserving their foundational values (Mariyono, 2024; Amalia et al., 2025). In this context, pesantren and madrasah in Indonesia, as long-standing Islamic educational institutions, offer a unique case study for understanding the intersection between tradition and modernity in character education. As modern society becomes increasingly complex, holistic educational strategies that integrate ethical, spiritual, and civic values are essential for fostering inclusive, peaceful, and socially responsible communities (Taufik, 2020).

Global trends such as technological advancements, cultural shifts, and changing paradigms in education underscore the necessity of integrative approaches that can harmonize traditional and moderate values within the framework of religious education. These developments demand critical

reflection on how faith-based institutions can maintain cultural continuity while embracing innovations in pedagogical practices (Mariyono, 2024; Taufik, 2020). Locally, Indonesia presents a diverse societal fabric characterized by religious pluralism and multiculturalism, often creating tensions between modernization and tradition. As'ad (2015) emphasizes that the dynamic interplay between modern values and traditional religious norms calls for strategic pedagogical frameworks that bridge these apparent dichotomies.

Empirical studies further affirm the urgency of addressing this issue through comprehensive approaches. For instance, Amalia et al. (2025) found that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in madrasahs has positively influenced students' adoption of moderate character traits. Similarly, Ma'arif et al. (2024) reported that integrative teaching practices contribute significantly to behavioral and attitudinal shifts among students, particularly in fostering tolerance in diverse settings. These findings highlight the potential of curriculum reforms grounded in narrative-based methods to transform the character education landscape within Islamic institutions (Pasaribu et al., 2024).

Moreover, research conducted in Singapore's madrasahs supports the notion that embedding moderate religious values into the educational process not only enhances students' moral and social competencies but also strengthens their engagement and empathy ("Development of Teaching and Learning of Islamic Education Program," 2020). Such evidence underscores the importance of narrative-based pedagogies in cultivating ethical awareness, civic responsibility, and harmonious coexistence among youth. These outcomes are particularly pertinent as the world grapples with issues of extremism, polarization, and identity conflicts (Ma'arif et al., 2024; As'ad, 2015).

Despite these promising findings, significant challenges persist in the implementation of integrative and value-based education. One major issue is the disparity in educational resources and infrastructure, especially between urban and rural areas (Mariyono, 2024; Pasaribu et al., 2024). Additionally, variations in the interpretation and application of religious values often hinder consistent implementation of moderate and inclusive education frameworks (Ma'arif et al., 2024). Bureaucratic inertia and resistance to change further impede the adoption of innovative and narrative-driven pedagogical models ("Development of Teaching and Learning of Islamic Education Program," 2020).

Pedagogical reforms also face systemic constraints stemming from teacher shortages and a lack of professional development in narrative methodologies. The challenge is further exacerbated by the difficulty of aligning national educational standards with local cultural and religious realities (Amalia et al., 2025; As'ad, 2015). In some cases, policy interventions fail to account for specific community needs, rendering educational programs ineffective or misaligned with the lived experiences of learners (Mariyono, 2024; Ma'arif et al., 2024). These structural and contextual challenges necessitate a more nuanced, inclusive, and participatory approach to educational reform.

A key gap in existing literature lies in the limited exploration of narrative integration within curriculum design and classroom practices in Islamic educational settings. While numerous studies have addressed character education and curriculum development separately, few have bridged

these domains through a holistic, context-sensitive lens (Mariyono, 2024; Pasaribu et al., 2024). Most current research remains heavily quantitative, lacking the depth and nuance needed to unpack the complex processes through which values are internalized and expressed in educational environments (Ma'arif et al., 2024; As'ad, 2015).

This study aims to address these gaps by conducting a narrative review that synthesizes empirical evidence on the role of narrative-based pedagogies in fostering moderate values within pesantren and madrasahs. The review will explore how integrative and contextual approaches to education can enhance students' character development while responding to the cultural and social dynamics of their communities (Amalia et al., 2025; Taufik, 2020). By focusing on both global challenges and local realities, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how educational institutions can function as agents of moral and civic formation.

The scope of this review includes empirical and conceptual studies conducted primarily in Indonesia and other Southeast Asian contexts, where Islamic educational institutions play a significant societal role. Special attention is given to pesantren and madrasahs that have implemented curricular reforms aimed at promoting inclusivity, tolerance, and civic engagement (Mariyono, 2024; Pasaribu et al., 2024). The review also considers the influence of regional variations, socio-economic backgrounds, and institutional policies in shaping the effectiveness of value-based education.

By adopting a narrative review approach, this study aims not only to consolidate existing knowledge but also to propose a conceptual framework for future pedagogical innovation in religious education. Through its critical analysis, the review provides practical recommendations for educators, policymakers, and curriculum developers seeking to design more adaptive, culturally responsive, and ethically grounded educational models. Ultimately, this research underscores the importance of character education in fostering resilient, empathetic, and morally anchored individuals capable of contributing to a pluralistic and dynamic society (Ma'arif et al., 2024; As'ad, 2015).

Despite growing interest in moderate Islamic values, limited research examines their pedagogical integration through narrative frameworks within Islamic education. This review addresses that gap by synthesizing recent empirical findings and proposing a context-sensitive conceptual framework for curriculum reform. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on narrative learning as a vehicle for value internalization, bridging traditional religious education with modern pedagogical practices.

METHOD

This narrative review adopts a systematic yet flexible approach to synthesizing existing literature related to character education in Islamic institutions, particularly pesantren and madrasah, through the lens of moderate values and narrative pedagogy. The primary objective of this methodology is to provide a comprehensive and context-sensitive understanding of how moderate religious values

can be integrated into character education practices. This section outlines the procedures undertaken in identifying, selecting, and analyzing relevant literature, encompassing database sources, keyword selection, inclusion and exclusion criteria, as well as evaluative processes applied to the selected studies.

Literature was gathered from reputable academic databases including Scopus and Google Scholar. These platforms were selected due to their extensive indexing of peer-reviewed journals, which ensures the credibility and scholarly quality of the retrieved studies (Amalia et al., 2025; Ma'arif et al., 2024). A thorough keyword search strategy was employed to locate studies directly relevant to the topic. Keywords were derived from an initial survey of seminal and recent literature in the field of Islamic education and character development. Terms such as "pendidikan karakter," "nilai moderat," "pesantren," "madrasah," "integrasi kurikulum," "Islamic education," "integrative learning," and "narrative review" were systematically combined using Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT) to maximize both the specificity and breadth of the search (Mariyono, 2024; Arifin et al., 2023).

To optimize the retrieval of relevant studies, various combinations of keyword phrases were used, including "pendidikan karakter pesantren," "integrasi nilai moderat dalam madrasah," and "pengembangan karakter melalui pendekatan naratif." Synonyms and closely related terms such as "penguatan karakter," "pendidikan nilai," and "reformasi pendidikan Islam" were also included to broaden the literature scope and encompass diverse scholarly perspectives (Amalia et al., 2025; Mariyono, 2024). Specific search phrases were placed within quotation marks to ensure that databases returned results containing the exact phrase, thereby improving the relevance of results (Ma'arif et al., 2024; Arifin et al., 2023).

The literature search was conducted with date filters applied to prioritize studies published within the last decade, ensuring that only current and contextually relevant materials were considered. Additional filters such as "peer-reviewed only" and limiting searches to journal articles further enhanced the quality and relevance of selected studies (Mariyono, 2024; Arifin et al., 2023). The use of advanced search features and carefully constructed search strings ensured comprehensive coverage of the target topic without losing focus due to irrelevant literature.

In terms of inclusion criteria, this review incorporated empirical and theoretical studies published in peer-reviewed journals that directly addressed character education, moderate Islamic values, or curriculum integration within pesantren or madrasah contexts. Studies were required to have a clear methodological basis, including qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-method designs, with explicit discussions on pedagogical strategies, value integration, or religious education reform (Amalia et al., 2025; Ma'arif et al., 2024). Publications in both English and Bahasa Indonesia were accepted to ensure linguistic inclusivity and contextual richness.

Exclusion criteria involved the elimination of studies not subject to peer review, those lacking clear methodological grounding, or publications that focused on contexts unrelated to pesantren or madrasah. Additionally, literature focusing exclusively on theological debates without educational or pedagogical relevance was excluded (Amalia et al., 2025; Mariyono, 2024). Older studies that

did not reflect contemporary issues or practices were also omitted, unless they provided foundational theoretical insights relevant to the discussion.

Following the initial search, abstracts and titles were screened to identify potential relevance. Selected articles then underwent full-text review to ensure alignment with the objectives of this narrative review. Articles were further evaluated based on the depth of their analysis, clarity of argumentation, and their contribution to understanding the integration of moderate values into character education (Arifin et al., 2023; Ma'arif et al., 2024).

The final set of studies included a mix of empirical research (e.g., field studies in pesantren and madrasah), case studies, curriculum evaluations, and conceptual articles on narrative-based pedagogy and value integration. To manage and organize the collected literature, reference management software such as Mendeley and Zotero was employed. These tools facilitated the categorization, annotation, and comparison of sources, enabling efficient thematic synthesis.

Thematic analysis was used to synthesize the data extracted from selected literature. This process involved coding for recurring themes such as pedagogical approaches, character traits emphasized, contextual challenges, and institutional strategies. Particular attention was given to how studies conceptualized "moderate values" in the Islamic educational setting and how these values were operationalized through curriculum, teacher practices, and student engagement (Amalia et al., 2025; Mariyono, 2024).

The analysis also incorporated contextual factors such as regional diversity, cultural interpretations of religious values, and the socio-political climate influencing educational reforms in Indonesia. These dimensions provided a nuanced understanding of the interplay between local traditions and global educational trends. Furthermore, triangulation techniques were applied by comparing findings across multiple studies to identify consistent patterns, contradictions, and research gaps (Ma'arif et al., 2024; Arifin et al., 2023).

Overall, this methodology supports a comprehensive and rigorous approach to conducting narrative reviews in education. It emphasizes the importance of strategic keyword selection, meticulous filtering of relevant studies, and a systematic analysis process. By grounding this review in a robust methodological framework, the study aims to contribute meaningfully to academic discourse on Islamic character education and its role in fostering inclusive, ethical, and context-sensitive pedagogies.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this narrative review demonstrate a complex interaction between traditional religious values and the evolving landscape of modern education. Based on a synthesis of recent empirical and theoretical studies, three dominant themes emerge across the literature: (1) the integration of moderate values into Islamic educational systems, (2) curriculum transformation as a vehicle for character education, and (3) the critical role of educators and narrative approaches in

contextualizing moral learning. These themes not only reflect national practices in Indonesia but are also comparable to global trends in moral education frameworks.

The first prominent theme is the integration of moderate values into Islamic education. This theme is reflected in studies showing how pesantren and madrasah institutions increasingly adopt curricula that synthesize traditional religious instruction with principles of inclusivity, tolerance, and civic engagement (Ma'arif et al., 2024; Mariyono, 2024). Mariyono (2024) emphasizes that this integration creates a contextualized pedagogical model that aligns Islamic teachings with multicultural values, resulting in the cultivation of adaptive and empathetic student character. Taufik (2020) similarly affirms that embedding moderate values within classroom instruction significantly increases student awareness of social harmony and pluralism. Quantitative and qualitative evidence from case studies of madrasah schools indicate that students exposed to such curricula exhibit higher levels of empathy, tolerance, and civic participation (Ma'arif et al., 2024).

The second theme involves curriculum transformation, particularly as reflected in Indonesia's implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka. Amalia et al. (2025) document how this reformed curriculum strategically incorporates Islamic values while promoting flexibility in pedagogical approaches. Teachers reported higher student engagement and internalization of moral principles, signaling a successful fusion of religious doctrine and constructivist learning methods. Taufik (2020) corroborates that students educated under this model exhibit enhanced moral reasoning and social responsibility. These findings underscore the importance of substantive curricular reform that extends beyond content changes to include the moral formation of learners.

A third theme centers on the pivotal role of teachers as agents of value transmission and moral transformation. Taufik (2020) argues that teachers' emotional competence and culturally responsive methods directly impact students' moral development. Studies also reveal that when teachers employ narrative teaching strategies, the pedagogical process becomes more personally meaningful and context-sensitive (Ma'arif et al., 2024). Through qualitative observations and interviews, researchers found that students resonate more with real-life stories and relational approaches than with abstract moral instruction alone (Mariyono, 2024). Thus, educators serve as mediators who bridge theoretical knowledge with daily life realities in forming student character.

Complementing these thematic insights is the application of narrative methods in research and pedagogy. The narrative review approach uncovers personal and collective moral experiences within educational settings (Mariyono, 2024). Narrative-based data from interviews and classroom stories provide depth and nuance, capturing students' ethical transformations and identity construction. This qualitative richness adds methodological value and complements the statistical evidence used in other studies (Taufik, 2020).

Additionally, the literature identifies various factors influencing the effectiveness of character education programs. These include sociocultural context, economic conditions, policy support, and institutional capacity. Social norms and family involvement are shown to reinforce school-based moral instruction, especially when there is alignment between home and school values (Taufik, 2020). Cultural traditions, particularly in rural Indonesia, have a strong influence on how values are understood and practiced (Mariyono, 2024).

Economically, schools with access to greater resources were able to invest in teacher training, curricular innovation, and learning technology—all of which are correlated with stronger character outcomes (Amalia et al., 2025). In contrast, under-resourced schools struggled with consistent implementation. These disparities highlight the need for adaptive strategies that account for socioeconomic differences.

On a policy level, national and regional frameworks that explicitly support moderate value education are crucial. Amalia et al. (2025) emphasize the need for coherent alignment between national goals and local educational practices. Government initiatives that fund professional development and curriculum design for character education are found to significantly improve implementation fidelity and educational outcomes (Taufik, 2020).

Global comparative studies further reveal significant variations in how character education is conceptualized and executed. In Greater China, for instance, educational philosophies prioritize harmony and communal well-being, contrasting with more individualistic approaches seen in Western models (Hue, 2021). These differences necessitate culturally grounded adaptations when transferring best practices across contexts. Despite these differences, a shared global trend is the movement toward holistic education that integrates moral, emotional, and cognitive development.

Best practices observed globally include project-based learning, community service integration, and digital platforms for character education. Countries that combine classroom instruction with real-life moral challenges, such as service learning projects, tend to report higher levels of student moral engagement (Taufik, 2020). Likewise, teacher training programs that emphasize emotional intelligence and narrative pedagogy have been effective in nurturing teacher capacity to deliver value-based education (Amalia et al., 2025).

Cross-cultural exchanges and collaborative educational programs have also facilitated the spread of effective strategies. Exchange programs enable educators to learn from global experiences and adapt them to their local realities. Such initiatives have led to more context-sensitive and impactful character education programs (Hue, 2021).

In summary, the results of this narrative review show that character education anchored in moderate values thrives under conditions of curriculum innovation, teacher empowerment, and culturally sensitive pedagogy. Empirical and narrative evidence converge to support the idea that moral formation is most successful when educational systems are responsive to the sociocultural and economic contexts of learners. The findings call for strategic alignment between policy, pedagogy, and community engagement to ensure sustainable and meaningful character education across diverse settings.

The present study offers a comprehensive narrative review on the integration of moderate values in character education, emphasizing its relevance within Islamic educational contexts and multicultural environments. The findings corroborate the existing literature, particularly studies by Ma'Arif et al. (2024) and Mariyono (2024), who asserted that institutions such as madrasahs are actively implementing structured strategies to foster moderate character development among students through integrated curricula. These findings reinforce the notion that character formation transcends cognitive knowledge delivery and must encompass affective and cultural dimensions (Taufik, 2020).

The convergence of traditional religious values and modern pedagogical approaches continues to be a consistent theme. Mariyono (2024) emphasized multicultural values as mediators between religious traditions and innovative education, aligning well with current findings that underscore the necessity of integrating cultural context into curriculum reform. These shared perspectives between past and current studies confirm a common goal of cultivating inclusive and socially adaptive character traits while highlighting essential elements such as teacher involvement and curriculum structuring (Ma'Arif et al., 2024; Mariyono, 2024).

This study expands on previous work by introducing a more holistic perspective, focusing not only on theoretical integration but also on the practical and emotional dimensions of pedagogical implementation. Taufik (2020) previously highlighted the strategic role of Islamic education in instilling moral values, and the present findings affirm this while extending the discussion to include narrative and experiential components that were less emphasized in conventional studies. The emphasis on narrative-based learning as a means of exploring personal transformation and moral development contributes to an enriched discourse on educational strategies.

One systemic difference lies in methodological focus. Whereas earlier studies tended to emphasize quantitative assessments or rigid traditional curriculum models, this study integrates narrative methods and qualitative analysis, revealing nuanced dynamics in value internalization. The strength of this approach lies in its capacity to capture contextual interactions between educators and learners, validating the experiential essence of character formation (Mariyono, 2024). This confirms that moderate value interventions are particularly effective in accommodating diverse cultural backgrounds within educational institutions.

Systemic issues emerge as key barriers to effective character education. Prior literature, especially Taufik (2020) and Amalia et al. (2025), identified rigid national policies and a lack of institutional continuity as major obstacles. Policy frameworks that fail to adapt to the changing social and cultural landscape hinder value-based educational reform. Amalia et al. (2025) criticized the inflexible structure of existing curriculum models in madrasahs, calling for reform initiatives that embrace local contextual needs. In addition, hierarchical institutional structures often suppress innovation due to bureaucratic inertia (Taufik, 2020).

Social inequalities further exacerbate systemic constraints. Differences in access to educational resources due to economic disparities limit the reach and effectiveness of character education, particularly in rural and underprivileged areas (Taufik, 2020). The research underscores that character development efforts are undermined by unequal resource distribution, which affects teacher training, curriculum materials, and infrastructure support.

Internal institutional resistance to change also emerged as a barrier. Schools and madrasahs often adhere strictly to standardized protocols, discouraging pedagogical experimentation or adaptive methods (Taufik, 2020; Amalia et al., 2025). A fragmented policy framework adds another layer of complexity, obstructing efforts to harmonize moderate values within national education systems.

From a global perspective, Hue (2021) highlighted the challenges posed by decentralized education systems. While decentralization can enable localized innovations, it also risks inconsistency in character education outcomes. Regional policy disparities necessitate systemic restructuring that

supports both localized flexibility and national oversight to ensure coherence in character education (Hue, 2021).

To address these challenges, literature recommends a series of integrated interventions. Among the most promising strategies are the simultaneous reform of curriculum and professional development for educators (Amalia et al., 2025). Narrative-based learning and direct experiences have demonstrated effectiveness in facilitating the internalization of moderate values among students (Ma'Arif et al., 2024). These approaches are grounded in contextually relevant pedagogy and emotional engagement.

Amalia et al. (2025) emphasize involving teachers, parents, and communities as essential components in implementing inclusive character education. Policy changes must support flexible standards that respond to local needs and promote innovation in teaching practices. Hue (2021) similarly advocates for policy decentralization with structured national guidance to balance autonomy and equity.

Further empirical evidence supports the positive outcomes of intensive teacher training programs focused on context-aware, value-based pedagogy (Amalia et al., 2025). In tandem, the use of digital platforms and e-learning technologies has enhanced students' engagement and facilitated timely feedback mechanisms, allowing for personalized moral development (Amalia et al., 2025).

Additionally, project-based learning and extracurricular activities are validated as effective tools for holistic character development. These programs promote collaboration, leadership, and ethical reasoning through real-life contexts, aligning with the principles of experiential education (Amalia et al., 2025).

Systematic monitoring and evaluation are vital for ensuring ongoing effectiveness. Taufik (2020) emphasizes that assessments should capture not only cognitive but also affective dimensions, allowing educators to adapt strategies dynamically. Evaluation indicators grounded in measurable moral values can provide valid data for continuous improvement.

Community and parental involvement is another critical factor. Active collaboration among schools, families, and local communities enhances the sustainability and contextual relevance of character education programs (Amalia et al., 2025). The inclusion of local knowledge and values contributes to a learning environment that is both culturally rich and socially inclusive.

Hue (2021) proposes an interdisciplinary model that integrates spiritual, cognitive, and aesthetic domains, expanding the scope of character education. The incorporation of life education and positive psychology concepts offers a theoretical foundation for comprehensive value formation.

Furthermore, dialogical and reflective teaching methods are gaining recognition. These strategies promote moral consciousness through interactive discussions and critical reflection, enabling students to engage deeply with ethical dilemmas (Amalia et al., 2025).

Professional capacity building for educators remains a cornerstone. Teachers equipped with skills in innovative and contextual teaching approaches are more likely to succeed in implementing effective character education (Taufik, 2020). Supportive policy environments and performance evaluations are crucial to maintaining momentum and adaptability.

Ultimately, the juxtaposition of current findings with previous research confirms that while foundational objectives remain constant, methodological and contextual advancements offer more effective pathways for implementing character education. By emphasizing experiential, narrative, and interdisciplinary elements, this study contributes a nuanced understanding that can guide policy and practice in addressing contemporary challenges in moral education (Ma'Arif et al., 2024; Taufik, 2020).

CONCLUSION

This narrative review has illuminated the vital role of moderate values in shaping character education within Islamic educational institutions. Synthesizing the thematic findings and analytical discussions, the study highlights that integrating moderate religious values with modern pedagogical practices forms the foundation of inclusive, adaptive, and contextually relevant character formation. The findings emphasize that narrative-based learning, participatory curriculum reform, and the strategic involvement of educators serve as central pillars for effective value internalization. Furthermore, the review identifies systemic challenges including rigid national policies, bureaucratic inertia, and social inequality, which hinder the full implementation of character education. These factors necessitate structural reforms, especially in aligning national education frameworks with localized cultural needs.

The urgency of implementing holistic character education is further underscored by global trends advocating life education and value-based learning, reinforcing the need for policy synchronization, decentralized curriculum planning, and teacher empowerment. Practical steps forward include strengthening teacher training, leveraging digital platforms for value dissemination, and promoting interdisciplinary approaches that connect moral, emotional, and cognitive development. Future research is encouraged to focus on longitudinal studies evaluating the long-term impact of integrated character education models, and to explore how community involvement and narrative engagement shape moral learning. Ultimately, this review confirms that moderate value integration—through narrative, inclusive pedagogy, and contextual adaptation—is not only essential but strategic in addressing current educational challenges and fostering a generation with strong moral resilience.

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