



Religious Moderation in Islamic Education: A Systematic Literature Review with Pedagogical Implications for Primary Education

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Abstract: This study presents a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) of 224 Scopus-indexed academic articles addressing religious moderation in the context of Islamic education. The primary problem examined is the persistent gap between the normative proclamation of wasatiyyah (Islamic moderation) as an educational ideal and its actual operationalization in pedagogical practice. The central research questions are: (1) What are the dominant thematic clusters in the existing literature on religious moderation in Islamic education? (2) What learning strategies and teacher roles have been identified as effective in internalizing moderation values? (3) What research and pedagogical gaps remain unaddressed, particularly at the primary school level? The method employed is a PRISMA-guided Systematic Literature Review (SLR), drawing on data extracted from the Scopus database using the Bibliometrix R-package and covering the publication period 2015–2026, combining bibliometric analysis with inductive-deductive thematic synthesis. This urgency is underscored by the escalating tide of religious intolerance and radicalism within Indonesia's educational institutions, which calls for systematic, evidence-based responses grounded in the existing body of research. The findings reveal five major thematic clusters: the wasatiyyah paradigm and moderation theology; tolerance and pluralism; multicultural learning strategies; teacher roles and character education; and implementation challenges. The review identifies a critical research gap at the primary education level, indicating that this educational stage remains the least explored within the literature on religious moderation in Islamic education. Drawing on evidence synthesized from the broader body of literature, this study formulates pedagogical implications for primary education, including curriculum reform in Islamic Religious Education, the adoption of dialogical and cooperative learning approaches, systematic teacher professional development incorporating moderation competencies, and the integration of digital literacy to strengthen students' resilience against extremist online narratives.

Keyword : Islamic education; multicultural education; primary education; religious moderation; SLR; tolerance; wasatiyyah.

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Introduction

Indonesia, as the country with the world's largest Muslim population, faces increasingly complex challenges in maintaining social harmony amid the tide of globalization, which brings with it a variety of religious narratives – including those that have the potential to threaten social cohesion. In this context, Islamic education

bears a dual and weighty responsibility: on the one hand, it must be able to preserve and strengthen the Islamic identity of the younger generation; on the other hand, it is called upon to shape citizens capable of living peacefully alongside others, regardless of differences in religion, ethnicity, and culture. Religious moderation, therefore, is not merely a policy slogan, but an urgent pedagogical necessity (Prasetyo et al., 2025).

The phenomenon of rising intolerance and radicalism in Indonesia's educational environment is a backdrop that cannot be ignored. Various surveys and studies indicate that exposure to extremist content through digital media is increasing among students, placing Islamic educational institutions under growing pressure to respond through structured and evidence-based pedagogical approaches. In this regard, Nasir & Rijal (2021) argue that Islamic higher education institutions should play a leading role in mainstreaming religious moderation by establishing the *wasatiyya*

On the other hand, a number of fundamental questions regarding the effectiveness of religious moderation education remain unanswered in the literature. Do the moderation programs that have been implemented in Islamic educational institutions actually produce sustainable changes in attitudes and behavior? What learning strategies have proven effective in instilling the values of tolerance and pluralism in students at various levels? To what extent do Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers have the capacity to serve as effective agents of moderation? These questions require answers grounded in a systematic and comprehensive synthesis of research.

The urgency of this study is further reinforced by the fact that the elementary education level—which serves as the foundation for the formation of children's character and values—receives the least attention in the literature on religious moderation. Muslih et al (2024), in the *Journal of Islamic Education*, is one of the few researchers to explicitly examine the context of elementary education in studies of religious moderation, and his findings indicate that teachers at this level face unique challenges that require specific and contextual pedagogical solutions.

Despite the growing body of research and several previous systematic literature reviews on religious moderation in Islamic education, important limitations remain. Existing review studies have largely focused on religious moderation as a policy discourse, counter-radicalization strategy, or higher education context, while providing limited discussion of its pedagogical implications for primary Islamic education. Furthermore, previous reviews have generally relied on descriptive synthesis without integrating bibliometric mapping and thematic synthesis to comprehensively identify research trends, thematic developments, pedagogical strategies, implementation challenges, and future research directions. Therefore, this study offers a distinct contribution by combining a PRISMA-guided systematic literature review with bibliometric analysis and thematic synthesis to generate a more

comprehensive evidence base. More importantly, this review explicitly positions primary education as the main analytical focus and formulates evidence-based pedagogical implications for Islamic Religious Education at the elementary school level, an area that remains underrepresented in previous review studies.

This study is designed to fill this gap by conducting a comprehensive systematic literature review of 224 relevant Scopus articles. This review aims to: (1) map the development and trends of research on religious moderation in Islamic education using bibliometric analysis; (2) identify key thematic clusters and relationships among studies in the existing literature; (3) analyze learning strategies proven effective in instilling the values of tolerance and pluralism; (4) examine the role of teachers and character education in strengthening religious moderation; (5) identify challenges in implementing moderation in Islamic educational institutions; and (6) formulate concrete, evidence-based pedagogical implications for learning at the elementary education level.

The findings of this review are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to the advancement of research on religious moderation in Islamic education. Theoretically, this study provides a comprehensive synthesis of the existing body of knowledge by integrating bibliometric mapping with thematic analysis, thereby offering a clearer understanding of the evolution, dominant themes, and emerging research gaps in the field (Page et al., 2021; Prasetyo et al., 2025). Practically, the findings are expected to inform curriculum developers, policymakers, school leaders, and Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in designing evidence-based strategies for strengthening religious moderation through curriculum development, teacher professional learning, and classroom pedagogical practices. Furthermore, the identification of research gaps at the primary education level provides a foundation for future empirical studies and policy initiatives aimed at promoting inclusive and moderate Islamic education from the early years of schooling (Prasetyo et al., 2025).

Methodology

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach that followed the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines (Page et al., 2021; Saputra et al., 2025). The SLR was chosen as the method because it allows for a structured, transparent, and replicable synthesis of a large number of relevant studies, thereby yielding stronger and more reliable conclusions than traditional narrative reviews. The complete multi-stage process of database searching, duplicate removal, screening, and evaluating full-text eligibility is systematically mapped out in Figure 1.

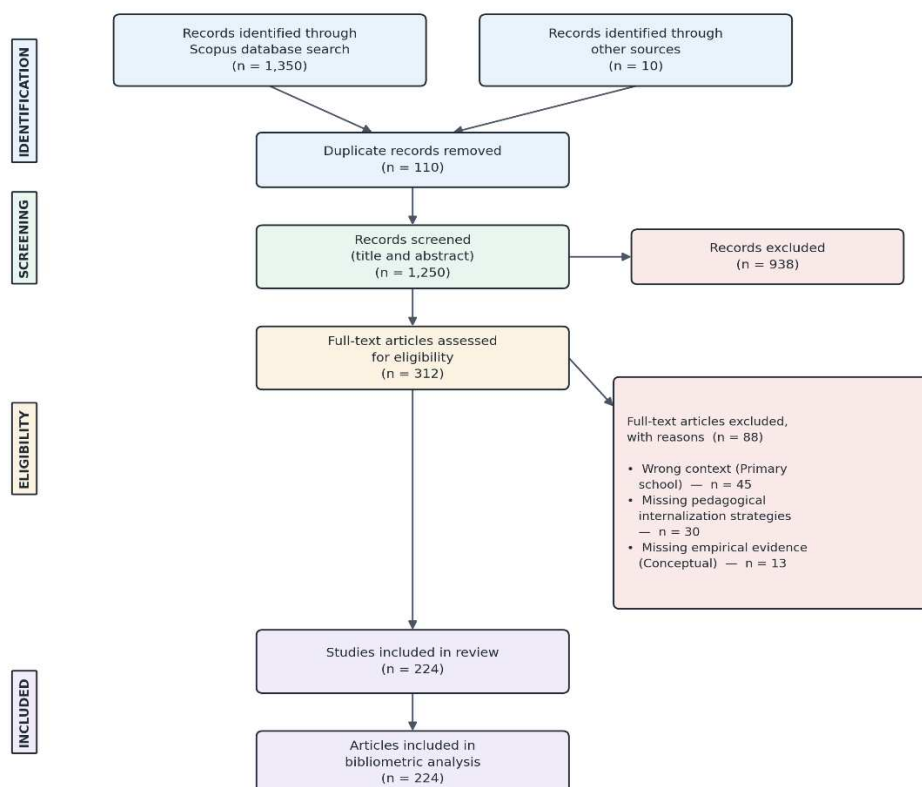


Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram

As detailed in the PRISMA flow diagram (Figure 1), the systematic selection procedure progressed through four distinct phases. The initial electronic database search on Scopus retrieved 1,350 records, while manual searching of alternative sources identified 10 additional records. After removing 110 duplicate records, a total of 1,250 unique articles remained for title and abstract screening. During this initial screening phase, 938 records were excluded due to thematic irrelevance. Consequently, the remaining 312 full-text articles were thoroughly assessed for eligibility. Out of these, 88 articles were excluded based on strict criteria: 45 articles were removed due to an incorrect context that did not focus on primary education, 30 articles were excluded for missing pedagogical internalization strategies, and 13 articles were excluded because they lacked empirical evidence, representing conceptual or theoretical papers instead. Ultimately, a final sample of 224 articles fully satisfied all predefined inclusion criteria and were included in the systematic review and subsequent bibliometric analysis.

Data Sources and Search Strategy

The data sources for this study were scientific articles indexed in the Scopus database, which were exported using the Bibliometrix R-package. The search was conducted using the following combination of keywords in the title, abstract, and

keywords fields of the articles: “religious moderation” OR “tolerance” OR “pluralism” OR “multicultural education” OR “Islamic education” OR “religious literacy” OR “character education” OR ‘pesantren’ OR “Islamic boarding school”

The search was limited to articles published in Scopus-indexed scientific journals (document type: article), with no year restrictions to ensure comprehensive historical coverage, although in practice the search results yielded articles from the years 2015 through 2026.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Articles were included in this study if they met all of the following criteria: (1) indexed in Scopus and available in English; (2) address the themes of religious moderation, tolerance, pluralism, or multicultural education in the context of Islamic education; (3) are empirical research articles or conceptual reviews published in indexed scientific journals; and (4) are thematically relevant to the context of formal or non-formal Islamic education. Conversely, articles were excluded if: (1) they were not scholarly articles (e.g., editorials, letters to the editor, or conference proceedings); (2) they lacked clear thematic relevance to Islamic education or religious moderation; or (3) they were duplicates of other articles in the dataset.

Selection and Analysis Procedures

After an initial search yielded 224 articles, all of them were saved in Bib format and exported to Excel using Bibliometrix for further analysis. The analysis was conducted in two main stages. The first stage was a bibliometric analysis that included the temporal distribution of publications, the identification of productive journals, keyword frequency analysis, and co-citation network mapping. The second stage is thematic synthesis, conducted through an in-depth review of the titles, abstracts, and (for key articles) the full texts of the articles, with the aim of identifying thematic clusters, patterns of findings, and research gaps. The thematic coding process follows an inductive-deductive approach in which thematic categories are developed iteratively based on the content of the literature while referring to the conceptual framework of Islamic education and religious moderation.

Data Validity

To ensure the trustworthiness of the review findings, several procedures were implemented throughout the review process. First, the review strictly followed the PRISMA 2020 guidelines to ensure a transparent and systematic study selection process. Second, all articles were screened using predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria to minimize selection bias. Third, thematic coding was conducted iteratively through repeated reading and comparison of the selected studies, allowing the refinement of themes until conceptual consistency was achieved. Finally, all extracted

data and thematic classifications were re-examined against the original articles to ensure the accuracy and consistency of the synthesis. Although formal investigator triangulation or expert validation was not conducted, these systematic procedures enhanced the transparency, dependability, and credibility of the review findings.

Result and Discussion

Results of the Literature Synthesis: Bibliometric Overview

This systematic literature review identified and analyzed 224 Scopus-indexed scientific articles published between 2015 and 2026. Table 1 presents the temporal distribution of publications, illustrating the evolution of research on religious moderation in Islamic education over the last decade.

Table 1. Distribution of Articles by Year of Publication (2015 to 2026)

Year	Articles	Percentage (%)
2015	3	1.3%
2016	3	1.3%
2017	4	1.8%
2018	5	2.2%
2019	9	4.0%
2020	11	4.9%
2021	17	7.6%
2022	17	7.6%
2023	23	10.3%
2024	46	20.5%
2025	67	29.9%
2026	19	8.5%
Total	224	100%

The data presented in Table 1 demonstrate a clear upward trajectory in research productivity, with a particularly pronounced acceleration beginning in 2023. The highest publication output was recorded in 2025, with 67 articles (29.9% of the total dataset), followed by 46 articles (20.5%) in 2024. In contrast, research activity during the period from 2015 to 2019 remained relatively limited, with annual publications ranging from three to nine articles. This pattern indicates that religious moderation has

evolved from a relatively specialized topic into an increasingly prominent field of scholarly inquiry within Islamic education (Zamroni et al., 2025).

The substantial increase in publications after 2020 may reflect the growing academic recognition of religious moderation as a strategic educational response to contemporary challenges, including religious intolerance, social polarization, and the dissemination of extremist narratives through digital media (Hasan & Juhannis, 2024; Wahab, 2025). In the Indonesian context, this trend is closely associated with the government's institutionalization of religious moderation through formal education policies. The publication of *Moderasi Beragama* by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia (2019) established religious moderation as a strategic framework for Islamic education, while the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology further strengthened the integration of values such as tolerance, diversity, and responsible citizenship through the *Pancasila Student Profile* (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2019; Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia, 2022). These policy initiatives have encouraged broader scholarly engagement with curriculum development, teacher professionalism, multicultural education, and character formation (Hutagaol et al., 2025; Rahmadi & Hamdan, 2023; Zamroni et al., 2025). Similar observations were reported by Zamroni et al. (2025), whose bibliometric study likewise identified a marked increase in research productivity following the expansion of religious moderation initiatives within Indonesian educational institutions.

Beyond the increase in publication volume, the findings also suggest the gradual maturation of this research field (Zamroni et al., 2025). Earlier studies predominantly emphasized conceptual discussions of *wasatiyyah*, religious tolerance, and theological foundations, whereas more recent research has increasingly examined practical educational dimensions such as curriculum integration, multicultural learning strategies, teacher competencies, digital literacy, and educational approaches to preventing radicalism (Muis, 2026; Rahmadi & Hamdan, 2023). This thematic diversification indicates a transition from predominantly normative discourse toward more evidence-based and practice-oriented educational research, reflecting the growing effort to translate the principles of religious moderation into concrete pedagogical practices (Mukhibat et al., 2024; Prasetyo et al., 2025).

Nevertheless, despite the remarkable growth in publication output, the subsequent analyses presented in this review reveal that this expansion has not been evenly distributed across educational levels. Most studies continue to focus on higher education institutions and Islamic boarding schools, whereas primary education remains comparatively underrepresented. This imbalance identifies an important research gap and underscores the need for future empirical studies that develop and

evaluate pedagogical models for strengthening religious moderation from the early years of formal education.

In addition to publication growth, the distribution of articles across journals provides valuable insights into the intellectual structure of research on religious moderation in Islamic education. Table 2 presents the ten most productive journals contributing to this field, highlighting the publication outlets that have played a central role in disseminating scholarly discussions on religious moderation.

Table 2. The Ten Most Productive Journals in the Dataset

No.	Journal Name	Articles	(%)
1	Jurnal Pendidikan Islam	16	7.1%
2	Religions	13	5.8%
3	Nazhruna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam	12	5.4%
4	Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam	10	4.5%
5	Ulumuna	7	3.1%
6	Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun	7	3.1%
7	HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies	7	3.1%
8	Pharos Journal of Theology	6	2.7%
9	Journal of Al-Tamaddun	5	2.2%
10	Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization	4	1.8%

The distribution of publications demonstrates that research on religious moderation is concentrated in journals specializing in Islamic education, religious studies, and theology. *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* emerged as the most productive source, publishing 16 articles (7.1%), followed by *Religions* with 13 articles (5.8%) and *Nazhruna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* with 12 articles (5.4%). This concentration suggests that religious moderation has been primarily developed within the discourse of Islamic education rather than as an isolated theological concept. The prominence of these journals also reflects the increasing institutional commitment of Islamic higher education institutions to promoting moderation as an educational paradigm (Nasir & Rijal, 2021).

Another noteworthy finding is the diversity of publication outlets represented in the dataset. Alongside Indonesian journals, internationally indexed journals such as *Religions*, *HTS Teologiese Studies*, *Pharos Journal of Theology*, and *Journal of Al-Tamaddun* have increasingly published studies on religious moderation. This pattern indicates that the issue has attracted wider international scholarly attention and is no longer confined to Indonesia, although Indonesian scholars continue to dominate knowledge production in this area. The international dissemination of these studies also reflects the growing relevance of Indonesia's experience in promoting religious moderation as

a reference for broader discussions on Islamic education in plural societies (Zamroni et al., 2025).

To better understand the intellectual orientation of the literature, thematic coding was conducted across all selected articles. Because several studies addressed more than one topic, a single article could be classified into multiple thematic clusters. The resulting thematic distribution is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Major Thematic Clusters in the Literature

No.	Cluster	n	(%)	Representative Authors
1	Religious Tolerance & Pluralism	80	35.7%	Rahmat; Aryati; Aderibigbe; Anwar
2	Islamic Education & Curriculum	68	30.4%	Mukhibat; Mulyana; Fauzi; Ichsan
3	Multicultural Education	40	17.9%	Marzuki; Muhajir; Wardana; Sukardi
4	Moderation & Wasatiyyah	37	16.5%	Nasir; Burhanuddin; Ainissyifa; Zamroni
5	Pesantren and Madrasah	28	12.5%	Burga; Athoillah; Mashuri; Rozaki
6	Radicalism & De-radicalization	18	8.0%	Tambak; Ismail; Yani; Nasih
7	Teacher Role & Competence	17	7.6%	Muslih; Al-Momani; Arifin; Usman
8	Character Education	12	5.4%	Ma'ārif; Mahmud; Sabaruddin

The thematic distribution indicates that research on religious moderation is primarily centered on religious tolerance and pluralism (35.7%), followed by Islamic education and curriculum (30.4%). This pattern suggests that scholars increasingly view educational institutions as strategic spaces for promoting moderation through curriculum development, multicultural learning, and character formation rather than through theological discourse alone (Mukhibat et al., 2024; Nasir & Rijal, 2021). Conversely, the relatively limited number of studies on teacher competence (7.6%) and character education (5.4%) reveals important research gaps. Given the pivotal role of teachers in internalizing moderation values, future studies should place greater emphasis on classroom-based pedagogical models and teacher professional development, particularly within primary education settings (Muslih et al., 2024).

Citation analysis was conducted to identify the publications that have exerted the greatest scholarly influence within the field. Table 4 lists the ten articles with the highest total citations in the dataset.

Table 4. Ten Articles with the Highest Total Citations (TC)

No.	Author (Year)	Title	Journal	TC
1	Nasir & Rijal (2021)	Keeping the Middle Path	Indonesian J. of Islam and Muslim Societies	45
2	Mukhibat et al. (2024)	Development and Evaluation of Religious Moderation Curriculum	Cogent Education	39
3	Marzuki et al. (2020)	Multicultural Education in Salaf Pesantren	Cakrawala Pendidikan	37
4	Aryati & Suradi (2022)	Implementation of Religious Tolerance: Pesantren Bali Bina Insani	Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun	36
5	Burga & Damopolii (2022)	Reinforcing Religious Moderation Through Local Culture-Based Pesantren	Jurnal Pendidikan Islam	35
6	Aderibigbe et al. (2023)	Fostering Tolerance Through the Fundamentals of Islamic Education	Religions	34
7	Arifin et al. (2023)	Improving Professional Teacher Competence Through Clinical Supervision	Nazhruna	31
8	Mulyana, (2023)	Religious Moderation in IRE Textbook and Implementation in Indonesia	HTS Teologiese Studies	29
9	Rahmat & Yahya (2022)	Impact of Inclusive Islamic Education Teaching Materials Model	Intl. J. of Instruction	26
10	Alhashmi et al. (2020)	Tolerance in UAE Islamic Education Textbooks	Religions	22

TC = Total Citations.

The citation analysis identifies Nasir & Rijal (2021) as the most influential publication in the dataset, highlighting the foundational role of the *wasatiyyah* paradigm in shaping contemporary discussions on religious moderation in Islamic education. Likewise, Mukhibat et al. (2024) demonstrates the growing emphasis on translating moderation principles into curriculum design and educational practice. Another notable finding is that most highly cited studies originate from Indonesia,

reflecting the country's significant contribution to the development of religious moderation scholarship. This dominance suggests that Indonesia has become an important reference point for research on Islamic education and moderation while also indicating the need for more comparative studies across different national and educational contexts (Nasir & Rijal, 2021; Zamroni et al., 2025).

Religious Moderation as a Paradigm of Contemporary Islamic Education

Religious moderation in contemporary Islamic education has evolved beyond mere normative discourse to become an operational pedagogical paradigm. At the conceptual level, Ichsan et al. (2024) in the *Journal of Islamic Education* asserts that the implementation of moderation-based Islamic education requires a *wasatiyyah* paradigm rooted directly in the Qur'anic perspective, rather than merely a social construct imported from outside. This argument is intellectually significant because it legitimizes religious moderation as an authentic theological expression of the Islamic tradition, rather than as a product of external pressure.

Muhtifah (2021), in *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, presents an intriguing case study on the theology of Islamic moderation in Singkawang, a city known as the "city of tolerance" in West Kalimantan. This study describes how religious moderation is successfully practiced organically through daily social interactions, which are then internalized through local Islamic educational institutions. The Singkawang phenomenon demonstrates that the most effective form of moderation is that which grows out of the lived experience of coexistence amid diversity, not that which is imported through top-down policies.

In the context of curriculum development, Mukhibat et al. (2024) in *Cogent Education* offers a comprehensive analysis that finds that the effectiveness of a moderation curriculum depends on the synergistic integration of three components: a cognitive component that builds conceptual understanding of moderation, an affective component that instills a tolerant disposition, and a conative component that encourages inclusive behavior in real life. The absence of any one of these components creates a gap between knowledge and behavior, which is precisely the root cause of the failure of many religious moderation programs. This finding is reinforced by Afwadzi et al. (2024) in *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, who found that students who cognitively understand the concept of moderation do not necessarily exhibit tolerant behavior in real-life situations.

Ainissyifa & Nasrulloh (2025), in the journal *Ulumuna*, examined the implementation of religious moderation values at an Islamic university in Garut, West Java, and found that the values of *tawassuth* (moderation), *tawazun* (balance), and *tasamuh* (tolerance) had been successfully internalized, while the value of *ta'adul* (justice) still faces resistance from students affiliated with conservative groups. This variation in the success of internalization indicates the need for a differentiated

approach in moderation education, where more abstract values such as interfaith justice require more intensive and contextual pedagogical strategies.

The comparative perspective offered by Tayeb (2017) in his study of Malaysia shows that Indonesia and Malaysia have different strategies for defining and promoting moderate Islam through their education systems. Indonesia tends to adopt a pluralistic approach that recognizes diversity as a positive value, while Malaysia places greater emphasis on Islam as the state religion with more formally structured boundaries of moderation. According to Tayeb, this difference is rooted in the two countries' distinct political histories regarding the relationship between Islam and the state. Such comparative studies are essential for informing educational policies that are context-specific rather than general in nature.

From an intellectual-historical perspective, Safitri et al. (2022) in the *Islam Futura Scientific Journal* conducted a hermeneutic study of Nurcholish Madjid's thought and concluded that Nurcholish's ideas on secularization and Islamic pluralism constitute an important intellectual foundation for the conceptualization of contemporary religious moderation in Indonesia. In a similar vein, Idris (2020), in *MIQOT*, analyzed Azyumardi Azra's thoughts on multicultural education and argued that Azra's intellectual legacy in integrating multicultural perspectives into the tradition of Indonesian Islamic education constitutes a historical milestone that cannot be overlooked in understanding the genealogy of the religious moderation movement in education.

Learning Strategies for Instilling the Values of Tolerance and Pluralism

The reviewed literature reveals a diverse spectrum of learning strategies for instilling the values of tolerance and pluralism. Rahmat & Yahya (2022), in the *International Journal of Instruction*, provides strong empirical evidence that an inclusive Islamic education curriculum model has been shown to significantly increase students' religious tolerance, with findings indicating that learning approaches that actively integrate narratives of interfaith dialogue are more effective than conventional lecture-based approaches. This study is one of the few quasi-experimental studies in the reviewed corpus, giving it very high evidential value in supporting the argument regarding the effectiveness of inclusive pedagogy.

Luthfi et al. (2025), in the *Journal of Educational and Social Research*, developed a multicultural-based Islamic Education (PAI) learning model for junior high school students in Cilegon and found that a cooperative approach—which places students from different backgrounds in a single learning group—resulted in a significant increase in moderate attitudes. The mechanism of change identified by Luthfi is consistent with Allport's contact theory: structured positive interactions between different groups effectively reduce prejudice and increase cross-group empathy. Takunas et al., (2024), in *Nazhruna: Journal of Islamic Education*, adds a dialogical

dimension to this argument by demonstrating that a discursive approach to Islamic Education (PAI) instruction – in which students actively discuss issues of diversity – yields a deeper understanding than a transmissive approach.

In the context of Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), the integration of local wisdom into learning strategies receives special attention. Muhajir et al. (2020) in the *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, analyzes the approach to developing a multicultural curriculum at the Darul Hikmah Modern Islamic Boarding School in Tulungagung and concludes that the integration of local wisdom values fosters a more authentic understanding of multiculturalism because it is culturally relevant to the students. Burga & Damopolii (2022), in the *Journal of Islamic Education*, reinforces this argument by demonstrating how local culture-based Islamic boarding schools in Sulawesi strengthen religious moderation through the integration of local customs into Islamic educational practices, so that moderation is not perceived as a threat but rather as an enriched expression of cultural identity.

Digital and technology-based approaches are beginning to receive significant attention in the current literature. Syaharuddin et al. (2025), in the *Journal of Islamic Education*, explored a web-based approach to promoting social awareness in Islamic schools and found that integrating technology into the teaching of cultural and religious values significantly increased student engagement. Supriyadi et al., (2025) in the *International Research Journal of Multidisciplinary Scope*, developed a design-thinking-based model of Islamic education for higher education institutions and found that a user-centered approach is capable of creating more relevant and contextual learning experiences for Generation Z. These findings hold particular relevance given that today's youth are growing up in a digital ecosystem that also serves as a breeding ground for the spread of intolerant narratives.

Wardana (2025), in the *Kasetsart Journal of Social Sciences*, offers a more reflective perspective on multiculturalism as a pedagogical framework, arguing that effective multicultural education in Indonesia must go beyond symbolic recognition of differences to encourage students to discover substantive points of commonality. Similarly, Sukardi et al. (2025), in *Cakrawala Pendidikan*, demonstrates that the success of multicultural education in high schools is highly dependent on a conducive school climate, thereby emphasizing that learning strategies cannot be separated from the broader institutional context.

The Role of Teachers and Character Education in Strengthening Religious Moderation

The role of teachers as agents of moderation receives central attention in the reviewed literature. Muslih et al. (2024), in the *Journal of Islamic Education*, reports the findings of a comparative study between Indonesia and Malaysia that identifies three key factors determining the effectiveness of teachers as agents of moderation: a

deep conceptual understanding of moderation, pedagogical competence to integrate the values of moderation into teaching, and adequate institutional support from school principals. The absence of any one of these factors, according to Muslih, would significantly reduce teachers' capacity as agents of value change.

Al-Momani et al. (2024), in *Millah: Journal of Religious Studies*, examined the role of Jordanian teachers in promoting a culture of tolerance and concluded that teachers' personal example has a far greater influence on shaping students' tolerant attitudes than the transmission of values through lectures. The principle of *uswah hasanah*, which lies at the heart of Islamic pedagogical tradition, has been empirically proven to be relevant: teachers who consistently demonstrate tolerant behavior, are open to differences, and value diversity in their daily lives are more successful in instilling these values in their students. These findings have important implications for the recruitment and development of Islamic Education (PAI) teachers, where character and moderation should be selection criteria just as important as academic qualifications.

Tambak (2021), in *MIQOT: Journal of Islamic Studies*, offers an in-depth analysis of the role of Islamic Education (PAI) teachers in countering radicalism in schools. This study argues that PAI teachers occupy a unique strategic position because they possess religious authority recognized by students, enabling them to effectively present moderate interpretations of Islam as an alternative to extremist narratives. However, Tambak also warns that Islamic Education teachers who themselves lack an adequate understanding of moderation may inadvertently become vectors for the spread of intolerant narratives. This warning underscores the urgency of training programs that explicitly equip Islamic Education teachers with a comprehensive understanding of moderation.

Arifin et al. (2023), in *Nazhruna: Journal of Islamic Education*, examined a moderation-based clinical supervision model and found that a teacher mentoring system that explicitly integrates the perspective of religious moderation results in a significant improvement in the quality of learning. These findings open a new direction in the development of educational quality management systems, where religious moderation needs to be incorporated as a quality indicator that is systematically measured and evaluated, not merely as a policy ornament.

In the realm of character education, in the *Journal of Islamic Education* examined the development of moderate Islamic character in madrasahs and found that a holistic approach – which integrates character education across all subjects – leads to a deeper internalization of values. This finding is consistent with the character education paradigm, which emphasizes that character development is the responsibility of the entire school community, not just religious education teachers. Usman et al. (2024), in the *Journal of Islamic Education*, adds a spiritual dimension by exploring the role of *muraqabah* in the development of teachers' pedagogical

competencies, arguing that the deep internalization of spiritual values within teachers will organically lead to more ethical and inclusive teaching practices.

Challenges in Implementing Religious Moderation in Islamic Educational Institutions

Although the literature presents many success stories, more critical studies reveal various structural and cultural challenges that hinder the effective implementation of moderation. Fitriani (2023), in *Ulumuna*, identifies that fragmented implementation—where religious moderation is solely the responsibility of Islamic Education (PAI) teachers without the support of an integrated system—is the primary cause of the ineffectiveness of moderation programs in Islamic schools. This fragmentation creates a situation where the values instilled in Islamic Education (PAI) lessons clash with the values implicitly promoted by other elements within the school environment.

Afwadzi et al. (2024) in *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* identifies a serious gap between declarative knowledge and actual behavior regarding religious moderation among students at Islamic universities. This finding challenges the assumption that the transfer of knowledge about moderation automatically leads to changes in attitudes and behavior. Mulyana (2023) in *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, reinforces this critique through an analysis of PAI textbooks, finding that content on moderation is often declarative in nature without being accompanied by learning tools that encourage the internalization of values. Rosidin et al. (2024), in the *Jurnal Lektur Keagamaan*, adds a methodological dimension by finding that although narratives of religious moderation are present in textbooks, the pedagogical approaches used to convey these values remain predominantly descriptive and require further development to facilitate meaningful value internalization.

Syabuddin et al. (2026), in *Kharisma*, identifies the dual pressures faced by Islamic boarding schools in implementing moderation: on the one hand, there are expectations from the government and society; on the other hand, there is internal resistance from elements that view moderation as an external intervention that threatens the purity of the teachings. Nasih et al. (2024) Nasih in the *Journal of Ecohumanism*, expands on this analysis by noting that resistance to moderation is often amplified by social media networks and exclusive online communities that create “echo chambers” among students, making intolerant narratives feel more familiar and convincing than the messages of moderation conveyed in the classroom.

These findings suggest that resistance to religious moderation should not be understood merely as institutional reluctance but as an ideological contestation over religious authority and the interpretation of Islamic teachings within educational settings. For some groups, moderation is perceived as a state-driven discourse that

may weaken doctrinal authenticity or challenge long-established religious traditions. Consequently, implementing religious moderation requires not only curriculum reform but also constructive dialogue that bridges national educational objectives with diverse theological perspectives, ensuring that moderation is understood as an integral Islamic value rather than an externally imposed agenda (Hasan & Juhannis, 2024; Nasir & Rijal, 2021).

Yani et al. (2025), in *Edelweiss Applied Science and Technology*, underscores the urgency of preventing radicalism by strengthening religious practice and the ideology of Pancasila, given that the digital space has become an increasingly important ideological battleground in shaping the religious orientation of the younger generation. Aryati & Suradi (2022), in the *Peuradeun Scientific Journal*, offers a more optimistic perspective through a study of the Bali Bina Insani Islamic boarding school, which successfully established an authentic model of tolerance through direct engagement with the Balinese Hindu community. However, this study also acknowledges that this success is heavily dependent on specific charismatic leaders, making it difficult to replicate systematically. This reliance on individuals rather than systems is a structural weakness that must be addressed through the institutionalization of more robust moderation programs.

Implications of the Study for Learning in Elementary Education

The results of this literature synthesis yield six concrete, evidence-based pedagogical implications for learning at the elementary education level. These implications are organized in Table 5, which presents the dimensions of the implications, pedagogical recommendations, and supporting literature sources.

Table 5. Synthesis of Pedagogical Implications for Learning in Elementary Education

Dimension	Pedagogical Recommendation	Literature Support
Curriculum & Materials	Integrate tolerance/pluralism narratives into IRE textbooks for primary schools explicitly and contextually	Mulyana (2023); Rahmat & Yahya (2022); Rosidin et al. (2024)
Learning Methodology	Apply cooperative, dialogical, and experiential learning approaches in IRE instruction	Ichsan et al. (2024); Luthfi et al. (2025); Takunas et al. (2024)
Teacher Competence	Develop professional competencies for primary school teachers that include religious moderation as a core dimension	Al-Momani et al. (2024); Arifin et al. (2023); Muslih et al. (2024)
School Climate	Transform school culture into an inclusive community that practices moderation values daily	Sukardi et al. (2025); Syarifah et al. (2025); Wardana a(2025)
Local Wisdom	Utilize local cultural traditions as authentic pedagogical resources for moderation education	Burga & Damopolii (2022); Imran et al. (2025); Tricahyo & Nursalam (2025)
Educational Technology	Develop digital content promoting moderation values to counter extremist narratives on social media	Syaharuddin et al. (2025); Yani et al. (2025)

Source: The researcher's synthesis of the reviewed literature, 2026.

The first implication relates to the curriculum and instructional materials. Rahmat (2022) provides a strong empirical foundation for the urgency of developing Islamic Education (PAI) instructional materials for elementary education that explicitly integrate narratives of tolerance and pluralism contextualized to the lives of elementary school-aged children. Such teaching materials need to be designed not only to convey declarative knowledge about diversity but also to develop social-emotional

skills that enable children to interact constructively with peers from different backgrounds. Critiques by Mulyana (2023) and Rosidin et al. (2024) of existing PAI textbooks provide specific guidance on aspects that need improvement.

The second implication concerns teaching methodology. Luthfi et al. (2025) and Takunas et al. (2024) jointly demonstrate that cooperative and dialogic approaches have proven more effective than transmissive approaches in fostering moderate attitudes. At the elementary education level, these approaches can be implemented through project-based learning that involves students from diverse backgrounds, role-playing exercises that foster cross-group empathy, and guided discussions on diversity issues relevant to children's daily lives. Kosim et al. (2025), in the *Journal of Islamic Education*, offers valuable lessons from the experiences of minority Muslim educational institutions in Cambodia and Thailand, where limitations have actually spurred pedagogical creativity that has resulted in authentic approaches to tolerance.

The third implication concerns the development of teacher professionalism. Muslih et al. (2024) and Arifin et al. (2023) jointly indicate the need for professional development programs for elementary school (SD) and Islamic elementary school (MI) teachers that specifically equip them with a conceptual understanding of moderation, pedagogical skills to integrate the values of moderation into cross-curricular learning, and the ability to constructively manage diversity in the classroom. Sabaruddin et al., (2025), in the **Emerging Science Journal**, proposes a contextual learning approach that integrates social intelligence into character-based education as an adaptable model.

The fourth implication relates to the school climate and culture. Syarifah et al. (2025) in *Munaddhomah*, through an ethnographic study of the hidden curriculum in inclusive schools, found that informal interactions among school community members have an impact just as significant as the formal curriculum in shaping students' tolerant attitudes. This implication requires school principals and the entire school community to consciously foster a school climate that embodies the values of moderation in every aspect of school life, from school rules to inclusive celebrations of major religious holidays.

The fifth implication relates to the utilization of local wisdom. Imran (2025), in the *International Journal of Learning, Teaching, and Educational Research*, provides empirical evidence on the effectiveness of methodologies based on local wisdom within the context of communities along the Indonesia-Malaysia border. Tricahyo & Nursalam (2025) in *Ascarya*, demonstrates how the wayang tradition can serve as a rich medium for dialogue between Javanese and Islamic values. At the elementary education level, local traditions such as folktales, traditional ceremonies, and cultural festivals can be integrated as authentic pedagogical resources to convey the values of tolerance and diversity.

The sixth implication concerns digital literacy and counter-narratives to extremism. Syaharuddin et al. (2025) and Yani et al. (2025) both highlight the urgency

of developing digital content that promotes the value of moderation to counterbalance extremist narratives that children can easily access through social media platforms. At the elementary school level, this means that media literacy and digital literacy need to be integrated into the Islamic Education (PAI) curriculum, so that children develop the critical thinking skills necessary to evaluate the religious content they encounter in the digital world.

Synthesis of Findings and Directions for Future Research

A synthesis of the entire reviewed literature yields several theoretical propositions that can serve as a foundation for the development of research and Islamic education policy. First, religious moderation in Islamic education is a pedagogical paradigm rooted in the Islamic theological tradition (*wasatiyyah*) and requires a holistic approach that synergistically integrates the cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions. This proposition is supported by the convergence of findings from Ainissyifa & Nasrulloh (2025); Ichsan et al. (2024); Mukhibat et al. (2024). Curricula and educational programs that address only one dimension without considering the others will not produce sustainable changes in values.

Second, the quality of teachers as agents of moderation is a determining factor that cannot be replaced by any curriculum or policy, no matter how well-designed. Al-Momani et al. (2024); Muslih et al. (2024); Tambak (2021) collectively demonstrate that teachers' understanding, pedagogical competence, and personal exemplary conduct are the three pillars that must stand together for the process of internalizing the values of moderation to proceed effectively. Investment in the professional development of teachers—particularly in the dimension of religious moderation—is therefore a strategic priority that cannot be postponed.

Third, there is a significant research gap regarding the study of religious moderation at the elementary education level. Of the 224 articles analyzed, very few specifically examined the context of elementary schools (SD) or Islamic elementary schools (MI). This gap stands in stark contrast to its pedagogical urgency, given that elementary education is the foundation for character development and the formation of values that will shape an individual's religious orientation throughout their life. Research on religious moderation in elementary education, therefore, is an urgent, strategic research agenda with the potential for significant transformative impact.

Fourth, there is a methodological imbalance in the literature, which is dominated by qualitative-descriptive approaches. Experimental and longitudinal studies capable of demonstrating the causal effectiveness of pedagogical interventions for religious moderation remain extremely rare. Rahmat & Yahya (2022) is one exception, featuring a quasi-experimental design that needs to be replicated and further developed. The future of research on religious moderation in Islamic education requires methodological diversification, including the development of valid and

reliable measurement instruments to assess moderate attitudes and behaviors, longitudinal study designs capable of tracking changes in religious orientation over time, and classroom action research involving teachers as collaborative researchers.

Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the review relied exclusively on the Scopus database. Although Scopus is one of the largest and most reputable indexing databases, relevant studies indexed in other databases such as Web of Science, ERIC, Dimensions, or Google Scholar may not have been captured, potentially introducing database selection bias. Second, only English-language journal articles were included in the review. Consequently, important studies published in other languages, particularly Indonesian, Arabic, or Malay, may have been excluded despite their relevance to the topic of religious moderation in Islamic education. Third, this review focused on bibliometric mapping and thematic synthesis without conducting a formal methodological quality appraisal of the included primary studies. Therefore, the synthesized findings should be interpreted as reflecting trends and thematic patterns rather than the methodological strength of the underlying evidence. Finally, although thematic coding was conducted iteratively to ensure conceptual consistency, formal inter-coder reliability assessment or investigator triangulation was not performed. Future systematic reviews are encouraged to incorporate multiple databases, broader language coverage, formal quality assessment instruments, and independent coding procedures to further strengthen the robustness and reliability of the findings.

Conclusion

This systematic literature review has successfully mapped the research landscape of religious moderation in Islamic education through the synthesis of 224 Scopus-indexed articles. The findings affirm that religious moderation is not merely a policy program but a pedagogical paradigm rooted in the Islamic theological tradition with concrete operational implications for every aspect of education, from curriculum and learning methodology to teacher competence and school culture.

The key findings indicate that research on religious moderation in Islamic education has experienced accelerative growth since 2020, with major thematic clusters encompassing tolerance and pluralism, Islamic education and curriculum, and multicultural education. Among the various findings, the most academically significant is the research gap at the primary education level – the most strategically important yet least investigated level in the existing literature.

For education practitioners, this review recommends transforming IRE pedagogical approaches from transmissive to dialogical and participatory, strengthening teacher competencies through structured professional development

programs, and building school climates that consistently practice moderation values in daily institutional life. For researchers, it recommends developing empirical studies focused on the primary education context, diversifying methodology toward experimental and longitudinal designs, and developing valid and reliable moderation attitude measurement instruments applicable across diverse Islamic educational contexts.

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