

Religious Moderation in Islamic Education: An Epistemological Framework of Wasatiyyah

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Abstract: Rising socio-religious polarization has placed Islamic education under scrutiny as either a resource for peace or a site of ideological conservatism. Although religious moderation (wasatiyyah) has become a national priority in Indonesia, its conceptual and pedagogical mapping remains fragmented, and it is rarely examined as a question of Islamic epistemology rather than of policy. This study reads moderation philosophically, treating wasatiyyah as a principle of knowledge, and synthesizes contemporary scholarship into an integrative conceptual framework for Islamic education. Through a conceptual and analytical reading of contemporary scholarship on religious moderation and Islamic education, the study develops a triadic account in which effective moderation emerges from three linked dimensions: a substantive curriculum grounded in critical hermeneutics, an authentic teacher agency that moves from authoritarian instruction toward dialogic mediation, and a permeable school ecosystem that includes digital literacy. Read this way, moderation is an epistemic competency, a trained capacity for cognitive flexibility and post-conventional moral reasoning. The framework offers a theoretical route for reforming Islamic education toward inclusive pluralism and intellectual maturity, and it specifies the empirical validation that this reform now requires.

Keywords: Religious moderation; wasatiyyah; Islamic education; Islamic epistemology; conceptual analysis.

1. Introduction

The world is passing through a sharp phase of socio-religious polarization. Over the past decade, the return of identity politics and of extremist ideologies has opened deep fissures in plural societies, from the rise of Islamophobia in the West to militant religious movements in the East, and social cohesion has become harder to hold. Within this setting the role of religious education is again in question. Scholars describe it as a double-edged instrument that can serve peace or entrench conflict¹. In the Muslim world, *wasatiyyah* (moderation) has become a central theological and strategic response, one that positions Islam as a middle path away from both religious radicalism and an extreme secular liberalism². In Indonesia the discourse is institutionalized as “religious moderation,” a national programme meant to protect *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* against transnational extremism³.

Islamic education, rooted in the ideal of *rahmatan lil alamin*, is in principle a natural vehicle for moderate values. A clear paradox nonetheless persists. Despite its foundations, Islamic education is often read as a possible seedbed of conservatism⁴. Critics point to teaching in some *madrasahs* and *pesantrens* that leans on rote memorization of medieval texts (*kitab kuning*) with little modern contextualization. This literalist habit is frequently linked to graduates who hold deep piety yet lack the critical judgement that plural societies demand⁵. The seepage of conservative ideology into the hidden curriculum has raised further concern. The result is a pressing question: if Islamic education sets out to produce good Muslims, does it also produce good citizens who can live with pluralism? Because there is no shared framework, the quality of moderate education varies widely and often tracks the private leanings of individual teachers⁶.

¹ K. D. Bush and D. Saltarelli, *The two faces of education in ethnic conflict: Towards a peacebuilding education for children* (UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, 2000).

² M. H. Kamali, *The middle path of moderation in Islam: The Qur'anic principle of wasatiyyah* (Oxford University Press, 2015); M. Mutawali, “Moderate Islam in Indonesia: Cultivating religious tolerance through education,” *Religions* 14, no. 7 (2023): 812, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14070812>.

³ A. Azra, “Revisiting Indonesian Muslim moderation (wasatiyah): The case of religious education,” *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 16, no. 2 (2022): 253–274, <https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2022.16.2.253-274>; A. Akhmadi, “Moderasi beragama dalam keragaman Indonesia,” *Inovasi: Jurnal Diklat Keagamaan* 14, no. 1 (2020): 45–55, <https://doi.org/10.52048/inovasi.v14i1.121>; G. Lestari, “Bhinneka Tunggal Ika as a tool for religious moderation in Indonesia,” *Journal of Law and Policy* 3, no. 1 (2020): 15–29, <https://doi.org/10.15294/jlp.v3i1.38541>.

⁴ C. Tan, *Islamic education and indoctrination: The case in Indonesia* (Routledge, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003141150>; R. W. Hefner, “Islam and institutional religious freedom and pluralism in contemporary Indonesia,” *Religions* 11, no. 6 (2020): 296, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11060296>; A. R. Arifianto, “Islamic education and radicalism in Indonesia: Defending the secular state,” in *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Indonesia* (Routledge, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429456930-22>.

⁵ M. Sirry, “Between orthodoxy and reform: Islamic education in Indonesia,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 51, no. 1–2 (2020): 120–145, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022246342000045X>.

⁶ S. Assa’idi, “The rise of conservative Islam in Indonesia and its impact on religious moderation,” *Al-Jami’ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 59, no. 1 (2021): 143–172, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2021.59.1.143-172>.

Moderation in Islamic education rests on four pillars: *tawassut* (the middle path), *tawazun* (balance), *i'tidal* (justice), and *tasamuh* (tolerance)⁷. Putting these values to work calls for a move from an exclusivist and indoctrinative model toward an inclusive and dialogic one. Yet the theoretical discussion of how to integrate the pillars into a modern curriculum stays fragmented. Open questions remain over whether moderation belongs as a standalone subject or an embedded value, and whether reform should begin with teacher training or with textbook content. This ambiguity feeds an “implementation fatigue,” in which institutions take up the language of moderation without reworking the educational foundations beneath it⁸.

A growing literature has taken up these problems, yet a clear gap remains. Most existing studies are empirical and local, built on case studies that do not scale into a general framework⁹. Much of the work is descriptive rather than analytical: it records what moderation looks like in practice, but few studies synthesize these accounts to explain the how and the why of its conceptual architecture. There is as yet no integrative account that traces the decade-long development of the concept and distills it into a coherent model. Without such synthesis the field stays siloed, and scholars repeat local findings instead of building on a shared foundation¹⁰. A second gap is philosophical. Moderation is seldom studied as a matter of Islamic epistemology, that is, as a claim about how religious knowledge should be formed and held, even though the integration of religious and secular knowledge is exactly where the difficulty lies¹¹.

A conceptual and analytical approach answers both gaps directly. Rather than count studies, this article reads the existing scholarship interpretively to build an integrative framework, and it treats *wasatiyyah* as a principle of knowledge before it is a rule of conduct¹². The objectives are threefold: to clarify the core themes and pillars of moderation as they appear in recent scholarship; to identify the pedagogical and environmental conditions that support the internalization of moderate values; and to construct an integrative model that joins curriculum,

⁷ M. Fahri and A. Zainuri, “Konsep moderasi beragama dalam syariat Islam,” *Jurnal Tatsqif* 17, no. 2 (2019): 143–154, <https://doi.org/10.20414/jtq.v17i2.1587>; K. M. Arif, “Moderasi beragama dalam perspektif pendidikan Islam,” *Al-Mutharahah* 18, no. 2 (2021): 110–123, <https://doi.org/10.51339/mutarah.v18i2.231>.

⁸ U. Sumbulah and A. Abu-Hussain, “Youth and religious moderation in Indonesia,” *International Journal of Interreligious and Intercultural Relations* 8, no. 1 (2022): 12–28, <https://doi.org/10.12726/ijirir.24.2>.

⁹ A. Munip, “Strategi implementasi moderasi beragama di sekolah,” *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 8, no. 1 (2022): 1–18, <https://doi.org/10.15575/jpi.v8i1.17112>; S. Sutrisno, “Actualization of religious moderation in Islamic education,” *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam* 16, no. 2 (2019): 155–170, <https://doi.org/10.14421/jpai.2019.162-07>.

¹⁰ A. Abai et al., “Religious moderation in Indonesian education: A systematic review,” *Journal of Higher Education Theory and Practice* 22, no. 5 (2022): 112–128, <https://doi.org/10.33423/jhetp.v22i5.5261>; Y. Hanafi et al., “The internalisation of religious moderation values in Indonesian universities,” *Heliyon* 7, no. 6 (2021): e07365, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2021.e07365>.

¹¹ M. A. Abdullah, “The need for integration of religious and secular knowledge,” *Journal of Islamic Education* 5, no. 1 (2020): 45–60, <https://doi.org/10.15575/jpie.v5i1.8890>; Z. Dahlan, “Integrating moderation values into science and religion: A new paradigm in Indonesian Islamic universities,” *International Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities* 6, no. 1 (2023): 45–59, <https://doi.org/10.21744/ijssh.v6n1.1892>.

¹² H. Snyder, “Literature review as a research methodology: An overview and guidelines,” *Journal of Business Research* 104 (2019): 333–339, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.07.039>.

teacher agency, and school culture. The intended contribution is a theoretical route for researchers and a working guide for policymakers who aim to reform Islamic education toward peace and intellectual maturity¹³.

Because this study sets out to explain moderation rather than only describe it, the analysis is guided by an explicit framework built from three bodies of theory. Each is chosen because it speaks to one face of the problem the literature keeps returning to, and together they define moderation as an epistemic competency.

The first is *wasatiyyah* read as a principle of knowledge. Etymologically the root *wa-sa-ta* carries the senses of *al-khayriyyah* (excellence) and *al-markaziyyah* (centrality), and it does not mean a diluted or half-held faith. In the classical period this centrality let Islamic thought work as a bridge between Hellenistic philosophy and other traditions of learning. On this reading, moderation is the balanced relation between reason (*'aql*) and revelation (*naql*), and its educational task is the integration of religious and rational sciences rather than their separation¹⁴. This is why the framework treats *tawassut* as an epistemic stance and not merely a behavioural one.

The second is critical hermeneutics. If moderation is a way of forming knowledge, then how a text is read becomes decisive. The relevant tools are the study of *asbab al-nuzul* (the historical occasions of revelation) and *maqasid al-shari'ah* (the higher objectives of the law), which allow a student to see how a ruling was understood in its own setting and why it may need reinterpretation in a modern nation-state¹⁵. Without this interpretive depth, tolerance rests on a thin layer of sentiment that harder, literalist counter-readings can strip away.

The third is moral-cognitive development. Extremism tends to grow from a strong need for cognitive closure, a wish for firm, either-or answers to questions that are in fact complex¹⁶. Moderation therefore requires the opposite capacities, namely integrative complexity and, over time, a shift toward post-conventional moral reasoning in which a young person holds to justice and human dignity out of understanding rather than compliance¹⁷. These three theories map onto the three dimensions the analysis will identify, curriculum, teacher, and ecosystem, and they supply the analytic lens used to interpret the scholarship.

¹³ N. Hasan, "Islamic education, youth and future of moderate Islam in Indonesia," *Studia Islamika* 27, no. 1 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.36712/sdi.v27i1.13545>; A. Farih, "Nahdlatul Ulama and the internalization of moderate Islam in Indonesia," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 14, no. 1 (2020): 183–208, <https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2020.14.1.183-208>; M. Nasir and A. Abbas, "The future of religious moderation in Indonesia: A review of educational policies," *International Journal of Religious Studies* 9, no. 3 (2021): 201–218, <https://doi.org/10.24035/ijrs.9.3.2021.14>.

¹⁴ Abdullah, "The need for integration of religious and secular knowledge"; Dahlan, "Integrating moderation values into science and religion".

¹⁵ Sirry, "Between orthodoxy and reform"; Tan, *Islamic education and indoctrination*.

¹⁶ A. W. Kruglanski et al., "Cognitive closure and the psychology of extremism," *Journal of Social and Political Psychology* 6, no. 1 (2018): 215–230, <https://doi.org/10.5964/jspp.v6i1.688>.

¹⁷ L. Kohlberg, *The psychology of moral development: The nature and validity of moral stages* (Harper & Row, 1984); A. Sahin, "Critical issues in contemporary Muslim education," *Religions* 9, no. 7 (2018): 220, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel9070220>.

This is a conceptual study that uses an analytical and interpretive method rather than an empirical or statistical one. The aim is to build a coherent theoretical framework, so the analysis engages the contemporary scholarship on religious moderation and Islamic education as a body of ideas to be read, compared, and synthesized¹⁸. Recent peer-reviewed work in both English and Indonesian, published across the past decade, supplies the material, and related reviews in the field provide points of reference¹⁹.

The analysis proceeds in two moves. First, it reads the literature thematically to surface the recurring concepts, the four pillars, the models of implementation, and the barriers that scholars report. Second, it reads these themes through the theoretical framework set out above, so that *wasatiyyah* epistemology, critical hermeneutics, and moral-cognitive development become the lens that organizes the material into an integrative model joining curriculum, teacher agency, and school culture. The account that follows is interpretive and argumentative. It does not claim exhaustive coverage of the field, and its conclusions are offered as a theoretical contribution open to empirical test.

2. Methods

The scholarship on religious moderation in Islamic education has matured over the past decade, moving from abstract theological debate toward concrete pedagogical models. Reading it as a whole brings out a clear intellectual arc, a stable set of core values, and a recurring set of implementation problems, which the following analysis takes in turn.

The field shows a clear developmental arc. Before 2017 the exact term religious moderation (*moderasi beragama*) was uncommon in international scholarship, and writers preferred broader labels such as religious tolerance, Islamic pluralism, or multicultural education²⁰. Attention then grew quickly after 2019, in step with the inclusion of religious moderation in the National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN 2020–2024). The turn is strongly policy-driven and points to a close relation between state agendas and educational reform²¹.

A second pattern is an empirical deficit. Much of the existing work is conceptual, philosophical, or descriptive, while empirical and especially longitudinal studies that test whether particular interventions reduce radical dispositions remain comparatively scarce. A great deal of scholarship advocates moderation and closes with normative claims about what

¹⁸ Snyder, "Literature review as a research methodology".

¹⁹ N. Huda, "Systematic literature review on peace pedagogy in Islamic schools," *Journal of Peace Education* 21, no. 1 (2024): 12–35, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17400201.2023.2285671>.

²⁰ Hefner, "Islam and institutional religious freedom"; Lestari, "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika as a tool for religious moderation".

²¹ Azra, "Revisiting Indonesian Muslim moderation"; J. Menchik, *Islam and democracy in Indonesia: Tolerance without liberalism* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316417799>.

should be done²², yet far less measures what actually works. This imbalance shapes the present study, since it is the gap that a theoretical framework must eventually be tested against.

The scholarship also clusters geographically. State Islamic universities in Indonesia produce much of the output, with UIN Sunan Kalijaga, UIN Syarif Hidayatullah, and UIN Sunan Ampel among the main hubs²³, and international co-authorship is comparatively rare. The Indonesian model of *wasatiyyah* is therefore rich in local practice but still thin in comparative work with other Muslim-majority settings such as Morocco, Jordan, or Malaysia²⁴.

The conceptual evolution: from theology to critical pedagogy

The discourse moves through three phases.

In the formative phase (2015–2017), moderation was treated as a fixed theological concept. Researchers supplied textual justifications from the Qur'an and Sunnah to position Islam as a middle path (*ummatan wasatan*), largely as a defensive reply to the rise of movements such as ISIS, and education was seen as a way to correct misread verses²⁵.

In the institutionalization phase (2018–2021), following the national mandate, the literature recast moderation as an institutional priority. Attention shifted to how schools might write moderation into their vision and mission, and scholars located it at the level of an institutional habitus and a source of national loyalty²⁶.

In the critical-competency phase (2022–2025), the work turns multidisciplinary and reads moderation through critical pedagogy. Teaching students to be passive moderates is treated as insufficient; education is asked to help them deconstruct extremist narratives and manage digital religious discourse, and moderation is framed as a global competency rather than a set of dogmas²⁷.

The four pillars

Across the scholarship there is firm consensus on the values that make up religious moderation. The analysis identifies four recurring pillars, summarized in Table 1 and discussed below.

²² For example, see A. S. Manshur and F. Hamdani, "The role of headmaster in developing religious moderation-based school culture," *Journal of Islamic Education Leadership* 1, no. 2 (2021): 56–70, <https://doi.org/10.22219/jiel.vii2.17654>; S. Saharudin, "The implementation of moderation values in Islamic religious education," *International Journal of Asian Education* 1, no. 2 (2020): 105–114, <https://doi.org/10.46966/ijae.vii2.45>.

²³ S. Hamdi et al., "Religious moderation in Indonesian higher education: Learning from the experience of UIN Sunan Kalijaga," *Religions* 12, no. 11 (2021): 940, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12110940>.

²⁴ Hanafi et al., "The internalisation of religious moderation values"; N. M. Roslan, "Moderate education model: A comparative study," *ICR Journal (Journal of Islam and Civilizational Renewal)* 12, no. 1 (2021): 127–146, <https://doi.org/10.52282/icr.v12i1.821>.

²⁵ Kamali, *The middle path of moderation*; Arif, "Moderasi beragama dalam perspektif pendidikan Islam".

²⁶ Farih, "Nahdlatul Ulama and the internalization of moderate Islam"; A. Mu'ti and A. Azra, *Christian-Muslim relations in Indonesia: The challenges of multi-faith education* (Routledge, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003058212>; E. S. Nurdin, "Civic education and religious moderation in Indonesia," *Review of International Geographical Education (RIGEO)* 11, no. 1 (2021): 450–462, <https://doi.org/10.33403/rigeo.800683>.

²⁷ Mutawali, "Moderate Islam in Indonesia"; I. Subchi et al., "Religious moderation in the eyes of Indonesian student organizations," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 16, no. 1 (2022): 1–24, <https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2022.16.1.1-24>.

Table 1. Synthesized pillars of religious moderation in education

Pillar	Core meaning in the literature	Pedagogical translation	Key citations
<i>Tawassut</i>	The middle path; avoiding <i>tatharruf</i> (radicalism) and <i>tasahul</i> (laxity)	A balanced curriculum that integrates religious and rational sciences	Fahri & Zainuri ²⁸ ; Kamali ²⁹
<i>Itidal</i>	Justice and integrity; holding to truth without personal bias	Fairness in classroom management; inclusive representation of minority views in textbooks	Assa'idi ³⁰ ; Munip ³¹
<i>Tasamuh</i>	Active tolerance; mutual respect beyond mere coexistence	Cross-cultural encounters; interfaith projects; collaborative learning	Raihani ³² ; Tan ³³
<i>Tawazun</i>	Balance between the worldly and spiritual, religious and national	Citizenship education; a good Muslim as a loyal citizen	Subchi et al. ³⁴ ; Nurdin ³⁵

Tawassut is the most cited pillar. The literature describes it as the capacity to avoid two extremes, *tatharruf* (excess) and *tasahul* (laxity), and in education it appears as a balanced reading of scripture that holds textualism and context together³⁶. *Itidal* is the ethical dimension, a commitment to justice that extends to those of other faiths and views, and in schools it becomes fairness in curriculum representation and in the treatment of minority or dissenting students³⁷. *Tasamuh* is the behavioural outcome, and the literature insists that in a plural society it must reach beyond coexistence toward active engagement through interfaith dialogue and cross-cultural encounter³⁸. *Tawazun* names the balance between the worldly and the spiritual and

²⁸ Fahri and Zainuri, "Konsep moderasi beragama dalam syariat Islam".

²⁹ Kamali, *The middle path of moderation*.

³⁰ Assa'idi, "The rise of conservative Islam in Indonesia".

³¹ Munip, "Strategi implementasi moderasi beragama di sekolah".

³² R. Raihani, "Internalising Islamic values in schools: The case of religious moderation," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 58, no. 2 (2020): 345–372, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2020.582.345-372>.

³³ Tan, *Islamic education and indoctrination*.

³⁴ Subchi et al., "Religious moderation in the eyes of Indonesian student organizations".

³⁵ Nurdin, "Civic education and religious moderation in Indonesia".

³⁶ Fahri and Zainuri, "Konsep moderasi beragama dalam syariat Islam"; Sirry, "Between orthodoxy and reform"; S. Ismail, "Integration of moderation values in PAI curriculum," *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam* 19, no. 1 (2022): 88–105, <https://doi.org/10.14421/jpai.2022.191-03>.

³⁷ Assa'idi, "The rise of conservative Islam in Indonesia"; Hanafi et al., "The internalisation of religious moderation values".

³⁸ Raihani, "Internalising Islamic values in schools"; Z. Baidhawry, "Islamic education, religious diversity and culture of peace in Indonesia," *Religions* 13, no. 1 (2022): 32, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13010032>.

between the religious and the national, and a marked feature of the recent decade is the tie it draws between being a moderate Muslim and being a loyal citizen³⁹.

Implementation models

The scholarship points to three dominant models for putting moderation into practice.

Model A: structural integration (curriculum focus). The most common strategy embeds moderate values in the formal curriculum. One route is the infusion method, which folds moderation into existing subjects such as *fiqh*, *akidah-akhlak*, and *tarikh*, for example by teaching *fiqh* as a plural tradition of legal opinion (*ikhtilaf*) rather than a fixed rulebook⁴⁰. A second route is the direct-subject approach, which creates dedicated modules on peace education or religious moderation⁴¹.

Model B: cultural-relational (teacher agency and the hidden curriculum). A large group of studies argue that the hidden curriculum, meaning the unwritten values and the teacher's own conduct, shapes students more than textbooks do⁴². The teacher acts as a living curriculum, and a teacher who preaches tolerance on paper while showing exclusivism in person cancels the moderate message⁴³. The way a school marks national holidays, handles religious difference, and organizes prayers forms a silent pedagogy of moderation⁴⁴.

Model C: social-digital (extracurricular and technology). Since students spend much of their time online, recent studies (2023–2025) focus on the digital ecosystem. They teach a digital literacy for moderation, the ability to spot hoaxes, hate speech, and extremist propaganda on social media⁴⁵. Student-led initiatives, for instance through *Rohis*, prove more effective than top-down lectures⁴⁶.

³⁹ Nurdin, "Civic education and religious moderation in Indonesia"; Subchi et al., "Religious moderation in the eyes of Indonesian student organizations"; S. Anwar and M. Syafe'i, "Conceptualizing religious moderation in the curriculum of madrasah," *Cendekia: Jurnal Kependidikan dan Kemasyarakatan* 19, no. 2 (2021): 231–248, <https://doi.org/10.21154/cendekia.v19i2.3122>.

⁴⁰ Ismail, "Integration of moderation values in PAI curriculum"; Anwar and Syafe'i, "Conceptualizing religious moderation in the curriculum of madrasah".

⁴¹ Munip, "Strategi implementasi moderasi beragama di sekolah"; Saharudin, "The implementation of moderation values".

⁴² Tan, *Islamic education and indoctrination*; N. Hidayat, "Internalization of moderate values in Islamic religious education," *Tadris: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 15, no. 1 (2020): 15–30, <https://doi.org/10.19105/tjpi.v15i1.2980>.

⁴³ Hefner, "Islam and institutional religious freedom"; C. Basri and S. I. Dwiningrum, "The role of Islamic religious education teachers in implementing religious moderation," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 11, no. 1 (2022): 1–14, <https://doi.org/10.14421/jpi.2022.11i1.1-14>.

⁴⁴ M. Nur et al., "Teacher agency in implementing religious moderation: Challenges and opportunities," *Qualitative Research in Education* 12, no. 1 (2023): 45–68, <https://doi.org/10.17583/qre.2023.11234>.

⁴⁵ A. Zahabiya, "Digital religious moderation for Gen Z," *International Journal of Cyber Theology* 4, no. 1 (2023): 12–28, <https://doi.org/10.4018/IJCT.315678>; Abai et al., "Religious moderation in Indonesian education"; M. N. Hadi, "Digital literacy and religious moderation among Muslim youth in Indonesia," *Communication and Society* 36, no. 2 (2023): 101–118, <https://doi.org/10.15581/003.36.2.101-118>; H. Baharun, "Social media and religious moderation in schools," *Tadris: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 16, no. 2 (2021): 215–230, <https://doi.org/10.19105/tjpi.v16i2.4412>.

⁴⁶ Subchi et al., "Religious moderation in the eyes of Indonesian student organizations"; A. Abbas et al., "Cultivating religious moderation through pesantren education in the digital age," *Journal of Islamic Education and*

Alongside these gains, literature names four persistent barriers. The first is teacher conservatism, an ideological gap between state policy and educators' personal beliefs, since many teachers, especially in rural areas, hold exclusivist views that sit against the moderate curriculum⁴⁷. The second is parental and communal influence, a home-school tension in which the pluralism taught at school meets more conservative expectations at home⁴⁸. The third is the post-truth digital environment, where the sheer volume of radical content can outweigh a school's moderate messaging⁴⁹. The fourth is assessment ambiguity: there are few validated tools for measuring the success of moderation, so schools struggle to demonstrate impact, which in turn drives implementation fatigue.

3. Results and Discussion

The analysis supports reading religious moderation as an integrative property of the whole educational system rather than the output of any single intervention. Three dimensions occur across the scholarship and organize the discussion that follows: curricular substance, teacher agency, and institutional ecosystem. Each corresponds to one of the *wasatiyyah* pillars set out in the theoretical framework, and together they specify the conditions under which moderation becomes an epistemic competency. The rhetoric of *wasatiyyah* is now common in policy, yet its translation into a working pedagogy is still contested and often superficial. The three-part model that follows is meant to address the tension between the classical religious tradition and the demands of modern pluralism.

Dimension one: curricular substance and the problem of contextualization

The first dimension draws on *tawassut*. As the theoretical framework argued, the root *wa-sa-ta* signals excellence and centrality, and in the classical period that centrality let Islamic thought bridge philosophy and other sciences. The literature suggests that modern Islamic curricula struggle to recover this bridging role. The difficulty is an epistemological fragmentation: students learn secular sciences through a positivist lens and religious material through a literalist one, with no account of how the two connect. The framework treats *tawassut* as the integrative link, so that the aim becomes the moderation of knowledge itself, in which reason (*'aql*) and revelation (*naql*) are held in balance to yield an integrated worldview⁵⁰.

Ethics 5, no. 2 (2023): 88–104, <https://doi.org/10.15575/jjee.v5i2.21543>; M. Ali, *Digital Islam and Muslim networks in post-Suharto Indonesia* (Amsterdam University Press, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1ok37p8>.

⁴⁷ Tan, *Islamic education and indoctrination*; Sirry, "Between orthodoxy and reform"; A. Makin, "Challenging religious intolerance in Indonesia: The role of Islamic education," *Studia Islamika* 28, no. 1 (2021): 1–25, <https://doi.org/10.36712/sdi.v28i1.12154>.

⁴⁸ Raihani, "Internalising Islamic values in schools".

⁴⁹ Sumbulah and Abu-Hussain, "Youth and religious moderation in Indonesia".

⁵⁰ Abdullah, "The need for integration of religious and secular knowledge"; Dahlan, "Integrating moderation values into science and religion".

A related tension is the text-versus-context debate. Many curricula stay text-heavy and privilege the memorization of medieval *fiqh* framed in pre-plural settings⁵¹, which produces an anachronistic dissonance. Teaching the classical category of *dhimmi* without a modern reworking toward equal citizenship (*muwatanah*), for example, can plant an us-and-them hierarchy in the minds of younger students. A moderate curriculum therefore needs a critical hermeneutic approach. Adding tolerance verses to a textbook is not enough; students must learn *asbab al-nuzul* and *maqasid al-shari'ah*, that is, how a text was read in the past and why it must be reread to satisfy *i'tidal* in a modern state⁵².

Dimension two: teacher agency and the paradox of authority

The second dimension is where implementation most often fails. State policy asks for a moderate output, yet the teachers who deliver it are frequently shaped by conservative movements outside the school⁵³. Some educators show an ideological resistance, treating religious moderation as a Western-liberal agenda meant to dilute Islamic authenticity. The resistance is usually quiet but pervasive: a teacher may follow the official syllabus under supervision and return to exclusivist rhetoric in informal settings. Moderation, then, cannot be imposed from the top alone, since it depends on a change in the teacher's own theological outlook⁵⁴.

The framework proposes a move from the teacher as absolute authority to the teacher as dialogic mediator, grounded in *tasamuh*. True *tasamuh*, from *samaha* (generosity), asks the teacher for an intellectual generosity that lets several readings live in the classroom. Most classrooms, as many studies report, still run on a monologic model in which the teacher owns the single religious truth. Teacher agency therefore calls for a pedagogical courage, the willingness to open hard conversations about religious diversity, gender, and human rights even where these cut against local conservative norms, so that the teacher becomes a facilitator of critical thinking.

Dimension three: institutional ecosystems and the problem of insularity

The third dimension embodies *tawazun*. Many initiatives fail because they are classroom-bound: a student may hear about tolerance for forty-five minutes and then spend the rest of the day in a school culture that discourages contact with non-Muslims. The literature warns of an echo-chamber effect in some private Islamic schools, where the hidden curriculum, the unwritten rules, the choice of guest speakers, and the social atmosphere, cultivates a siege mentality that no amount of formal teaching can undo⁵⁵. A structurally insular ecosystem cannot produce moderate graduates. The framework proposes instead an integrated-civic ecosystem in which the school works as a small model of the state, and moderation shows up in fair and inclusive student-

⁵¹ Tan, *Islamic education and indoctrination*; Sirry, "Between orthodoxy and reform".

⁵² Anwar and Syafe'i, "Conceptualizing religious moderation in the curriculum of madrasah".

⁵³ Munip, "Strategi implementasi moderasi beragama di sekolah".

⁵⁴ Basri and Dwiningrum, "The role of Islamic religious education teachers"; Nur et al., "Teacher agency in implementing religious moderation".

⁵⁵ Assa'idi, "The rise of conservative Islam in Indonesia".

council elections, in extracurricular partnerships with students from other backgrounds, and in a school's own digital presence, which many institutions have effectively handed to extremist influencers and now need to reclaim with credible moderate content⁵⁶.

The psychological core: cognitive flexibility and moral reasoning

Theology dominates the field, yet the success of moderation also rests on educational psychology, specifically on cognitive flexibility and prosocial moral reasoning. At its core, moderation is the capacity to sit with ambiguity, whereas extremist ideologies feed on the need for cognitive closure, the search for firm, black-and-white answers to complex questions⁵⁷. Students taught through dogmatic methods often settle into a fixed mindset. The framework holds that *tawassut* is also a cognitive skill that requires integrative complexity, and it notes a real tension between preservation and inquiry: *tahfiz* culture is vital for transmission, but on its own it may narrow critical agency unless it is paired with hermeneutical work⁵⁸. For moderation to last, education must move students toward post-conventional moral reasoning⁵⁹, where they keep to the middle path from an understanding of *i'tidal* and *karamah insaniyyah* rather than from external pressure. That shift is what separates a symbolic moderation of compliance from an internalized moderation of conviction.

Comparative note: the Indonesian model in a wider field

Placing the Indonesian model in a wider setting helps clarify its significance, though the evidence for the comparison is uneven. Studies of Gulf states such as the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia have often described moderation there as a top-down, state-led strategy tied to security and to international image⁶⁰, whereas the Indonesian discourse frames moderation as a civilizational project that joins religious commitment to democratic pluralism⁶¹. This contrast should be read with care, since comparative primary studies of the Gulf remain scarce in the current literature and the Indonesian claim rests on a firmer local base than the Gulf one does. A shared risk is the securitization of moderation: if students come to see it as a tool of government surveillance, it will meet strong resistance. The literature suggests that the value of the Indonesian model lies in presenting moderation as an authentic Islamic renewal (*tajdid*), showing that deep religious commitment and committed citizenship in a plural democracy can hold together.

⁵⁶ Zahabiya, "Digital religious moderation for Gen Z"; A. Fahrudin et al., "Religious moderation in school ecosystem: A case study of Indonesian high schools," *Journal of Education and Learning (EduLearn)* 16, no. 3 (2022): 325–333, <https://doi.org/10.11591/edulearn.v16i3.20455>; A. Ikhwan, "Management of Islamic education based on religious moderation," *Journal of Islamic Education Management* 6, no. 2 (2021): 123–134, <https://doi.org/10.24239/j-paiz.v6i2.887>; Y. Suryana, "Multicultural education management in strengthening religious moderation," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 11, no. 2 (2022): 145–160, <https://doi.org/10.14421/jpi.2022.112.145-160>.

⁵⁷ Kruglanski et al., "Cognitive closure and the psychology of extremism".

⁵⁸ Tan, *Islamic education and indoctrination*; Sahin, "Critical issues in contemporary Muslim education".

⁵⁹ Kohlberg, *The psychology of moral development*.

⁶⁰ Roslan, "Moderate education model".

⁶¹ Azra, "Revisiting Indonesian Muslim moderation".

Structural alignment and implementation fatigue

A final theme is implementation fatigue. Educators report exhaustion with top-down mandates that carry little practical clarity, and the framework answers this with structural alignment. The fatigue traces to fragmented implementation: when a ministry changes a curriculum but the university does not change how it trains teachers, or when a school teaches moderation while the local mosque preaches exclusivism, the student meets a cognitive dissonance. This misalignment is a leading reason why concerns about exclusivist attitudes among young people have not eased despite repeated programmes⁶². The triadic model, curriculum, teacher, and ecosystem, supplies the alignment that lets the parts of the system pull in one direction and moves Islamic education from a defensive posture toward a positive one.

Operationalizing the framework: implications and recommendations

The framework can be put to work in Indonesian institutions through three linked lines of action, addressed to different stakeholders so that they complement rather than repeat one another.

For the curriculum, and for school leaders and ministries, moderation should not become a new standalone subject that adds load. In the *madrasah*, *tawassut* is better integrated through a comparative schools-of-thought (*ikhtilaf*) approach within *fiqh* and *aqidah*. In the *pesantren*, the same aim is met through a modern contextualization of the *kitab kuning*, where *santri* engage in *bahtsul masail* that connect classical legal texts to present concerns such as inclusive citizenship (*muwatanah*) and minority rights. At the policy level this implies shifting evaluation from symbolic markers such as seminars and banners toward substantive indicators such as the inclusivity of school regulations and the depth of critical thinking built into Islamic Religious Education (PAI) textbooks.

For teacher agency, and for teacher-training programmes, the work is to move from an authoritarian-indoctrinative model toward dialogic pedagogy. In the *pesantren* hierarchy the standing of the *kyai* or *ustadz* can model an intellectual *tasamuh*. Teachers need safe spaces to hold difficult conversations about religious diversity and human rights without fear of being labelled un-Islamic, and professional development should reach beyond administrative technique toward a critical literacy that equips educators to help students deconstruct extremist and post-truth content online.

For the ecosystem, and for school governance, moderation must run through the whole institution. Practical steps include cross-cultural encounters and joint social projects with non-faith-based schools to break social insularity; student-led digital moderation units in which *santri* produce moderate content able to compete with radical material online; and a parental synergy that keeps the values taught at school in step with the religious upbringing at home, which reduces the dissonance students would otherwise carry.

⁶² Hasan, "Islamic education, youth and future of moderate Islam"; Makin, "Challenging religious intolerance in Indonesia".

4. Conclusion

This study has traced a decade of scholarship on religious moderation in Islamic education and the shift from purely theological readings toward a multidimensional educational task. The analysis shows that effective moderation emerges from the linked working of three dimensions: a substantive curriculum, an authentic teacher agency, and a permeable school ecosystem. The four pillars of *tawassut*, *i'tidal*, *tasamuh*, and *tawazun* remain the ground of the discourse, yet their implementation is often blocked by symbolic compliance and pedagogical dissonance. The contribution of this study is an integrative framework that connects state-level policy to classroom reality and that reads moderation as a systemic quality of educational excellence bound up with digital literacy and critical thinking.

The wider significance of the work lies in returning *wasatiyyah* to its classical, epistemic meaning and applying it to twenty-first-century pedagogy. Read this way, moderation is a deepening of faith, and it aims at a generation as firm in religious identity as it is flexible and humane in a plural world. The framework gives researchers a theoretical route and gives policymakers a practical one.

Several limitations qualify this study and mark the work still to be done. First, the analysis is conceptual and interpretive, so it does not claim exhaustive coverage of the field, and its selection of sources and its emphases reflect an analytical judgement that others may weigh differently. Second, the proposed triadic model is theoretical and needs field validation, ideally through longitudinal studies that test whether it reduces radical dispositions over time. Third, the analysis is centred on the Indonesian context, which limits its reach to other Muslim-majority settings such as Malaysia, Morocco, or Turkey. Fourth, it draws on existing scholarship that still says little about the long-term effect of algorithmic radicalization on Gen-Z students across different socio-economic settings.

These limitations set a clear agenda. Future work should pursue empirical validation of the triadic model through longitudinal and design-based research, develop and test digital-literacy modules that pair *wasatiyyah* with algorithmic awareness, and run comparative studies across Muslim-majority nations to show how different political cultures shape the idea of religious moderation in schools.

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