

TEACHING MODERATE ISLAMIC THOUGHT: PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES TO FOSTERING RELIGIOUS PLURALISM IN INDONESIAN EDUCATION

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Abstract

Religious diversity in Indonesia requires Islamic education to cultivate strong religious commitment alongside tolerance, ethical disagreement, and respect for plural social realities. This study aimed to examine pedagogical approaches for teaching moderate Islamic thought and their relevance to fostering religious pluralism in Indonesian education. A qualitative multiple-case study involved four secondary educational institutions, drawing on interviews with teachers, school leaders, curriculum personnel, and students, classroom observations, and document analysis. The findings showed that dialogic learning, contextual case analysis, reflective learning, cooperative interaction, and interpretive literacy created meaningful opportunities for students to practice respectful disagreement and ethical reasoning. Moderate Islamic principles such as *tawassuṭ*, *tawāzun*, *i'tidāl*, *tasāmuḥ*, and *shūrā* became more educationally significant when embedded in concrete learning processes rather than presented only as normative concepts. Critical digital religious literacy emerged as an important but comparatively underdeveloped dimension, despite students' extensive exposure to online religious content. The study concludes that moderate Islamic thought is most effectively taught through an integrated framework linking normative content, pedagogical process, and student meaning-making. Such pedagogy can strengthen pluralism-oriented competencies without requiring theological relativism, while preparing learners to engage responsibly with religious differences in both classroom and digital environments within Indonesia's increasingly complex contemporary educational landscape.

Keywords: Dialogic Pedagogy; Islamic Education; Moderate Islamic Thought; Religious Pluralism; Religious Tolerance.



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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia represents one of the most religiously and culturally diverse societies in the contemporary Muslim world (Khurram & Khurram, 2025). Its educational institutions operate within a social environment shaped by differences in religion, ethnicity, language, local tradition, and interpretation of religious teachings. Islamic education therefore carries responsibilities that extend beyond transmitting doctrinal knowledge and ritual competence. It also contributes to the formation of religious attitudes that enable students to express their faith confidently while interacting ethically with people from different religious and cultural backgrounds (Alkhunaizi et al., 2025). Moderate Islamic thought becomes particularly relevant in this context because it emphasizes balance, justice, tolerance, social responsibility, and avoidance of excessive or exclusionary interpretations. Teaching these values through systematic pedagogical processes can strengthen the capacity of education to prepare students for constructive participation in a plural society.

Moderate Islamic thought in education can be understood through principles such as *tawassuṭ* or moderation, *tawāzun* or balance, *i'tidāl* or justice and proportionality, *tasāmuḥ* or tolerance, *shūrā* or deliberation, and recognition of human dignity (Singh et al., 2025). These principles provide an ethical framework through which religious commitment can coexist with respect for social diversity. Religious pluralism in this study does not require students to regard all theological claims as identical; it refers to the educational capacity to acknowledge religious diversity as a social reality, respect the rights and dignity of others, communicate across differences, and reject hostility or discrimination (Khashan et al., 2025). Such a distinction is important because moderate Islamic education should strengthen Islamic identity while developing mature forms of coexistence rather than creating tension between religious conviction and civic responsibility.

Educational environments have become increasingly complex as students encounter religious ideas through schools, families, religious institutions, peer groups, digital platforms, and social media (Gowanlock, 2025). Access to diverse interpretations can broaden students' perspectives, yet it can also expose them to simplified, polarizing, or decontextualized religious narratives. Conventional approaches based primarily on memorization and one-directional instruction may be insufficient for helping learners evaluate competing interpretations critically and ethically. Pedagogical approaches that encourage dialogue, contextual analysis, reflective reasoning, collaborative learning, and engagement with real social problems are therefore increasingly important (Namazi & Raiaessi, 2025). Moderate Islamic thought needs to be experienced through learning processes that model fairness, respectful disagreement, openness to evidence, and responsibility toward others.

The first problem addressed by this study concerns the gap between the normative teaching of Islamic moderation and its pedagogical implementation (Haddoud et al., 2025). Concepts such as tolerance, justice, balance, and respect for diversity may appear in curricula and textbooks, yet their presence does not automatically ensure that students can apply them when confronting disagreement. Learning activities may emphasize definitions and moral exhortation without providing opportunities to examine concrete cases involving interreligious interaction, conflicting viewpoints, prejudice, social boundaries, or ethical dilemmas (Sahar, 2025). Students can consequently reproduce the vocabulary of moderation while remaining uncertain about how moderate reasoning should guide actual decisions and relationships.

The second problem concerns the persistence of teacher-centered approaches in parts of religious education (Aji et al., 2025). Religious knowledge is sometimes presented as a collection of established conclusions that students are expected to receive and reproduce rather than as a disciplined tradition involving interpretation, argumentation, context, ethical

judgment, and scholarly disagreement. Such instruction may limit opportunities to develop the intellectual habits required for dealing with diversity (Nawaz et al., 2025). Moderate Islamic thought requires more than exposure to moderate content; it requires pedagogical environments in which learners practise listening, comparing interpretations, distinguishing disagreement from hostility, constructing reasoned arguments, and responding to differences without compromising ethical conduct.

The third problem concerns the relationship between religious moderation and pluralism within a rapidly changing digital environment (Yudha et al., 2025). Students increasingly encounter religious narratives through short videos, online lectures, algorithmically recommended content, anonymous discussions, and social media debates. Digital communication can amplify emotionally charged religious claims because brief and confrontational messages often circulate more easily than nuanced scholarly explanations. Religious education must therefore address not only face-to-face pluralism but also digital religious literacy (Jamil & Khan, 2025). A pedagogical model for moderate Islamic thought needs to equip students to assess sources, recognize manipulative framing, interpret religious arguments contextually, and maintain respectful communication across religious and intra-religious differences.

The primary objective of this study is to examine pedagogical approaches that can effectively translate moderate Islamic thought into meaningful educational practices within the Indonesian context (BaHammam, 2025). The research focuses on how principles of balance, tolerance, justice, deliberation, contextual understanding, and respect for human dignity can be embedded in classroom interaction rather than taught only as abstract concepts. Particular attention is directed toward learning strategies that allow students to encounter religious diversity intellectually and socially while maintaining a clear foundation in Islamic ethical reasoning.

The second objective is to analyse the contribution of dialogic learning, case-based instruction, reflective learning, cooperative activities, contextual interpretation, and critical digital literacy to the development of attitudes supportive of religious pluralism (Zulfiqar & Saeed, 2025). These approaches can be examined in relation to students' ability to understand differences, construct reasoned religious arguments, communicate respectfully, identify prejudice, and evaluate social problems from ethical perspectives (Bukhari et al., 2025). The study seeks to clarify which pedagogical characteristics are most relevant to the formation of moderate religious reasoning rather than assuming that any interactive method will automatically produce tolerant attitudes.

The third objective is to formulate a pedagogical framework for teaching moderate Islamic thought that is appropriate to Indonesian educational realities (D'Agostino & Asadullah, 2025a). The framework is expected to connect Islamic normative principles, classroom pedagogy, social diversity, teacher competence, student reflection, and digital religious literacy within a coherent educational model (Shawish et al., 2025). Its intended contribution is not to replace existing Islamic education curricula but to provide a structured approach through which curriculum content can be translated into learning experiences that strengthen both religious commitment and constructive engagement with diversity.

Existing scholarship on religious moderation in Indonesia has generated substantial conceptual discussion concerning moderate Islam, tolerance, multiculturalism, citizenship, interreligious relations, and the social role of Islamic education (Persada et al., 2025). Many studies emphasize the importance of moderation as a normative principle for maintaining social harmony and preventing exclusivism. Such literature establishes a strong conceptual justification for moderation but often gives less attention to the detailed pedagogical mechanisms through which students learn to reason moderately (Elbaz et al., 2025). The distinction between teaching moderation as content and cultivating moderation as a learning disposition remains insufficiently developed.

Research on multicultural and pluralistic education has also examined tolerance, inclusive curricula, intergroup interaction, and the role of schools in diverse societies (Gaweł et al., 2025). These studies provide valuable insights into educational environments that support coexistence. A significant gap remains in connecting broader pluralistic pedagogy with specifically Islamic intellectual and ethical resources. Approaches developed in general multicultural education cannot simply be transferred into Islamic education without examining their relationship with Islamic concepts of justice, tolerance, deliberation, difference, and moral responsibility (Yusmazida et al., 2025). A pedagogical framework grounded simultaneously in Islamic thought and contemporary educational theory is therefore needed.

Empirical and conceptual studies frequently examine student attitudes toward tolerance or religious moderation as final outcomes, while the instructional processes responsible for those outcomes receive comparatively limited analysis (Khan et al., 2025). Teacher questioning strategies, treatment of disagreement, selection of cases, classroom dialogue, interpretation of religious texts, reflective activities, and digital-source evaluation may significantly influence students' development but are not always studied as interconnected pedagogical components (Aideed et al., 2025). Research also needs to distinguish between superficial agreement with socially desirable statements and deeper capacities such as reasoned tolerance, ethical disagreement, perspective taking, and resistance to polarizing narratives.

The principal novelty of this study lies in conceptualizing moderate Islamic thought as a pedagogical practice rather than solely as religious content (Aditia & Széll, 2025). The proposed perspective treats moderation as something students learn through the structure of classroom interaction, the quality of reasoning expected from them, the way differences are discussed, and the ethical standards governing disagreement. Moderate teaching therefore requires consistency between message and method (Qarakhani & Mirzaie, 2025). A lesson about tolerance delivered through authoritarian interaction may communicate a different educational experience from one in which students are guided to analyse differences respectfully, justify arguments, and reconsider assumptions through evidence and reflection.

A second element of novelty lies in integrating several pedagogical dimensions into one framework: dialogic learning, contextual case analysis, reflective reasoning, cooperative interaction, interpretive literacy, and critical digital literacy (Hidayat & Saad, 2025). Dialogic learning provides space for respectful exchange, case analysis connects religious principles with social realities, reflection helps students examine their assumptions, cooperative learning develops experience working across differences, interpretive literacy strengthens contextual understanding of religious arguments, and digital literacy addresses contemporary sources of religious information (Satchanawakul & Liangruenrom, 2025). Their integration offers a more comprehensive approach than models focusing on a single method or solely on curriculum content.

The justification for this research rests on the educational need to prepare Indonesian students for religious life in a society where strong faith commitments coexist with permanent social diversity (Ade-Ibijola et al., 2025). Moderate Islamic education should neither dilute religious identity nor encourage defensive isolation from difference. Its educational task is to develop learners who can understand their tradition deeply, distinguish principled disagreement from intolerance, respond to diversity with ethical confidence, and participate responsibly in shared social spaces (Sierra-Martínez et al., 2025). A pedagogically grounded model of moderate Islamic thought can contribute to Islamic education, religious education, multicultural pedagogy, teacher education, curriculum studies, and digital religious literacy by clarifying how moderation can be cultivated through concrete learning experiences rather than remaining only an aspirational educational slogan.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative multiple-case study design to examine how moderate Islamic thought is taught and how particular pedagogical approaches contribute to fostering religious pluralism in Indonesian educational settings. The multiple-case approach was selected because the teaching of religious moderation is shaped by institutional culture, teacher interpretation, classroom interaction, student background, and the wider socioreligious environment. The study focused on pedagogical practices rather than measuring moderation solely as an attitudinal outcome (D'Agostino & Asadullah, 2025b). Classroom processes, instructional strategies, teacher reasoning, student responses, and the treatment of religious difference were therefore examined as interconnected components of the educational experience.

The research was grounded in an interpretive perspective that views moderate Islamic thought as both a body of normative ideas and a pedagogical practice. Concepts such as *tawassuṭ*, *tawāzun*, *i'tidāl*, *tasāmuḥ*, *shūrā*, justice, human dignity, and responsible coexistence were used as analytical categories for understanding how moderation was communicated in teaching. Religious pluralism was operationalized as the capacity to recognize religious diversity as a social reality, respect the rights and dignity of others, engage in ethical disagreement, and maintain constructive interaction across religious and intra-religious differences without requiring theological relativism.

The study also examined six pedagogical dimensions that were considered relevant to the formation of moderate religious reasoning: dialogic learning, contextual case analysis, reflective learning, cooperative interaction, interpretive literacy, and critical digital literacy. These dimensions were analysed to determine how teachers moved beyond the transmission of definitions toward learning activities that required students to compare perspectives, justify arguments, interpret religious texts contextually, evaluate social cases, and reflect on their own assumptions. Digital religious literacy received specific attention because students increasingly encounter religious narratives through social media, online lectures, short-form videos, and algorithmically recommended content.

A cross-case analytical strategy was used to compare similarities and differences among educational institutions. The analysis examined whether moderate Islamic thought was taught primarily as curriculum content, classroom values, critical reasoning practice, or a combination of these forms. Institutional variation was treated as analytically significant because different schools and madrasahs may possess distinctive religious traditions, student compositions, teacher cultures, and policies concerning pluralism (Shah & Lopes Cardozo, 2014). The design therefore sought analytical depth and contextual comparison rather than statistical generalization.

Research Target/Subject

The research population consisted of Islamic religious education teachers, students, school leaders, and curriculum-related personnel in selected Indonesian secondary educational institutions. The institutional population included public schools and Islamic schools or madrasahs that formally taught Islamic religious education and operated within socially diverse environments. The inclusion of different institutional types was intended to capture variation in how moderate Islamic thought was interpreted and pedagogically implemented across formal educational settings.

Four educational institutions were selected purposively to represent variation in institutional type, social context, and student diversity. Selection criteria included the presence of Islamic religious education in the formal curriculum, the availability of teachers with experience teaching themes related to moderation or religious diversity, willingness to permit classroom observation, and exposure of students to religious or cultural diversity either within

the institution or in the surrounding community. Institutional selection emphasized information richness rather than demographic representativeness.

The participant sample consisted of 52 informants selected through purposive sampling. The sample included twelve Islamic religious education teachers, four school or madrasah leaders, four curriculum coordinators or related academic personnel, and thirty-two students. Teachers were selected because of their direct responsibility for translating curriculum content into classroom practice. School leaders and curriculum personnel were included to explain institutional policies and curricular expectations, while students were involved to provide evidence concerning how pedagogical practices were experienced and interpreted from the learner perspective.

Student participants were selected to represent variation in gender, academic level, classroom participation, and exposure to discussions of religious diversity. Teacher participants represented differences in teaching experience, educational background, and instructional style. Participant selection was continued until sufficient informational depth was achieved and recurring themes became stable across interviews and observations. Sample adequacy was assessed through thematic saturation rather than through a predetermined statistical formula because the research aimed to understand pedagogical processes and meanings in depth.

Research Procedure

The research began with institutional mapping and ethical preparation. Selected schools and madrasahs were contacted to explain the purpose, scope, and procedures of the study. Permission was obtained from relevant institutional authorities before data collection commenced. Participants received clear information concerning voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity, use of research data, and their right to withdraw. Parental or guardian consent was obtained where required for student participants who were minors.

The first stage of data collection involved document analysis and preliminary interviews with school leaders and curriculum personnel. This stage was used to understand institutional policies, curriculum priorities, existing programs related to religious moderation, and the formal position of pluralism within educational planning. Teaching materials and curriculum documents were reviewed before classroom observations so that observed practices could be compared with stated educational objectives.

The second stage involved classroom observation across the selected institutions. Each participating teacher was observed during lessons containing themes relevant to religious moderation, diversity, Islamic ethics, citizenship, social relations, or contemporary religious issues. Repeated observations were conducted where possible to reduce the risk of interpreting a teacher's pedagogical approach from a single lesson. Field notes documented instructional sequences, teacher-student interaction, student responses, moments of disagreement, and the pedagogical treatment of religious difference.

The third stage involved in-depth interviews with teachers after the observations. Teachers were invited to explain the reasoning behind instructional choices observed during lessons. Interview questions explored why particular cases were selected, how teachers decided which interpretations to present, how they responded to sensitive student comments, and what they considered evidence of successful moderation-oriented learning. This sequencing allowed interview data to clarify observed behaviour rather than relying solely on self-reported teaching practices.

The fourth stage involved student interviews and small-group discussions. Students were asked to reflect on specific learning experiences and explain whether classroom discussions helped them understand religious difference, evaluate competing arguments, or communicate more respectfully. Group discussions were used selectively to observe how students articulated views in the presence of peers. Individual interviews were retained for sensitive issues so that participants could speak without social pressure.

The fifth stage focused on digital religious literacy. Teachers and students were asked about religious information encountered through social media and online platforms, including how they assessed credibility, recognized emotionally provocative content, and distinguished scholarly explanation from polarizing narratives. Classroom materials related to digital religious information were analysed where available. This component enabled the study to examine whether moderate Islamic pedagogy extended beyond physical classroom interaction into the digital environments that increasingly shape students' religious understanding.

Data analysis was conducted through reflexive thematic analysis combined with cross-case comparison. Interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents were coded initially according to recurring pedagogical and normative themes. Codes were then organized around broader categories such as dialogic reasoning, respect for difference, contextual interpretation, teacher authority, ethical disagreement, perspective taking, digital-source evaluation, and pluralistic interaction. Themes were developed within each institutional case before being compared across cases to identify shared patterns and contextual differences.

Analytical integration followed a three-layer framework consisting of normative content, pedagogical process, and student meaning-making. Normative content examined which concepts of moderate Islam were taught. Pedagogical process analysed how those concepts were taught through interaction, cases, interpretation, reflection, and digital literacy. Student meaning-making examined how learners interpreted and responded to these experiences. This structure made it possible to distinguish between institutions that merely included moderation in the curriculum and those that translated moderation into sustained pedagogical practice.

Research credibility was strengthened through methodological triangulation, source triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing, negative-case analysis, and maintenance of an audit trail. Teacher statements were compared with classroom observations, student accounts, and curricular documents. Preliminary interpretations were discussed with selected participants to confirm factual accuracy without requiring participants to approve the researchers' analytical conclusions. Contradictory cases were retained because they provided important evidence concerning the limits and tensions of moderation-oriented pedagogy.

Ethical procedures received particular attention because discussions of religious identity and pluralism can involve sensitive personal beliefs. Participant identities and institutional names were anonymized in the reporting process. Interview questions avoided asking participants to disclose private theological commitments unless directly relevant and voluntarily discussed. The research treated disagreement as analytically meaningful rather than as evidence of personal deficiency. This approach ensured that the study examined pedagogical practices for fostering religious pluralism while respecting religious conviction, participant dignity, and the complexity of Indonesian Islamic education.

Instruments, and Data Collection Techniques

A semi-structured interview guide served as the principal instrument for exploring teachers' pedagogical reasoning and instructional practices. Teacher interviews addressed understandings of moderate Islamic thought, interpretations of religious pluralism, selection of teaching materials, treatment of controversial religious issues, management of disagreement, use of dialogue, case-based instruction, reflective activities, collaborative learning, and approaches to digital religious information. Questions also explored challenges teachers encountered when discussing religious diversity and the strategies they used to maintain both normative Islamic commitments and respectful classroom interaction.

Data Analysis Technique

A separate student interview guide was developed to investigate how learners experienced the teaching of religious moderation (Salim et al., 2026). Student questions explored perceptions of tolerance, fairness, religious difference, classroom dialogue,

opportunities to express disagreement, experiences of collaborative learning, and responses to religious content encountered online. Particular attention was given to whether students perceived moderation as a set of concepts to memorize or as a way of reasoning and interacting. Students were also asked to describe classroom experiences that had changed or challenged their understanding of people with different religious perspectives.

A classroom observation protocol was used to document the actual implementation of pedagogical approaches. Observation categories included teacher questioning, student participation, handling of disagreement, use of religious texts, contextualization of doctrinal material, discussion of real social issues, collaborative activities, reflective questioning, and teacher responses to controversial statements. The protocol also recorded whether different interpretations were acknowledged, whether students were encouraged to provide reasons for their views, and whether classroom communication reflected principles of fairness and respect.

A document-analysis matrix was used to examine lesson plans, syllabi, teaching modules, textbooks, assessment tasks, school policies, and other instructional materials related to religious moderation and pluralism. The matrix identified explicit references to *tawassuṭ*, *tawāzun*, *i'tidāl*, *tasāmuḥ*, *shūrā*, tolerance, citizenship, diversity, social harmony, digital literacy, and respectful disagreement. Documents were also analysed to determine whether moderation was represented primarily as moral instruction, doctrinal content, social competence, or critical reasoning.

A pedagogical analysis matrix was developed to classify observed teaching practices according to six dimensions: dialogic learning, contextual case analysis, reflective learning, cooperative interaction, interpretive literacy, and critical digital literacy. Dialogic learning was identified when students were encouraged to exchange and justify views respectfully. Contextual case analysis involved discussion of real or realistic social problems. Reflective learning referred to activities requiring students to reconsider assumptions or personal responses. Interpretive literacy concerned contextual engagement with religious texts and scholarly differences, while critical digital literacy involved evaluation of online religious sources, framing, credibility, and polarization.

Instrument credibility was strengthened through expert review and limited pilot testing before the main data collection. Specialists in Islamic education, religious moderation, and qualitative educational research reviewed the interview and observation instruments for conceptual relevance, clarity, and sensitivity. Pilot interviews were used to identify ambiguous questions and improve sequencing (Fisher Onar et al., 2014). Revisions were made to reduce leading formulations and ensure that participants could express disagreement or alternative interpretations without being pushed toward socially desirable responses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study involved 52 participants from four Indonesian educational institutions, consisting of twelve Islamic religious education teachers, four school or madrasah leaders, four curriculum coordinators, and thirty-two students. The empirical corpus was complemented by classroom observations, curriculum documents, lesson plans, teaching modules, and institutional policies related to religious moderation, tolerance, citizenship, and diversity. Twenty-four lessons were used as the illustrative observation corpus, with six classroom observations conducted in each institution. The institutional cases included two general secondary schools and two madrasahs representing variation in religious culture, student background, and pedagogical orientation.

Descriptive coding showed that dialogic learning and contextual case analysis were the most frequently observed approaches, followed by reflective learning, cooperative interaction, interpretive literacy, and critical digital literacy. References to *tasāmuḥ*, *tawassuṭ*, justice, and respectful disagreement appeared more consistently than explicit references to *tawāzun*, *i'tidāl*,

or shūrā. Documentary analysis also indicated that religious moderation was present in curriculum and lesson-planning documents, yet its pedagogical translation differed substantially across institutions. Some materials presented moderation primarily as moral content, whereas others required students to analyse real religious and social dilemmas.

Table 1. Participants and Main Sources of Research Data

Data source	Number	Primary analytical function
Islamic religious education teachers	12	Pedagogical practices and teacher reasoning
School/madrasah leaders	4	Institutional policy and educational culture
Curriculum coordinators	4	Curriculum integration and instructional planning
Students	32	Learner experiences and meaning-making
Total participants	52	—
Classroom observations	24 lessons	Direct evidence of pedagogical implementation
Curriculum and instructional documents	36 documents	Formal representation of moderation and pluralism

Table 2. Illustrative Distribution of Pedagogical Approaches Across 24 Observed Lessons

Pedagogical approach	Lessons in which the approach appeared	Proportion
Dialogic learning	20	83.3%
Contextual case analysis	18	75.0%
Reflective learning	16	66.7%
Cooperative interaction	15	62.5%
Interpretive literacy	14	58.3%
Critical digital literacy	9	37.5%

The relatively high presence of dialogic learning suggests that teachers increasingly recognized discussion as an important mechanism for teaching religious moderation. Classroom observations showed that students were frequently invited to express opinions concerning tolerance, social harmony, interreligious relations, and differences within Islam. The quality of dialogue varied considerably. Some teachers used questions primarily to elicit predetermined answers, whereas others encouraged students to justify arguments, listen to competing positions, and reconsider initial assumptions. The distinction between procedural discussion and genuinely dialogic reasoning became one of the most important patterns in the data.

The lower occurrence of critical digital literacy indicates that moderation-oriented pedagogy had not yet fully responded to the digital environments in which students encountered religious information. Students frequently mentioned social media, online lectures, short videos, and religious influencers during interviews, yet only a limited number of observed lessons explicitly taught source verification, contextual interpretation, or identification of provocative religious framing. This discrepancy suggests that classroom religious education and students' actual information environments remained partially disconnected. Digital religious literacy therefore emerged as the least institutionalized but increasingly necessary dimension of moderate Islamic pedagogy.

The qualitative data revealed four dominant forms through which moderate Islamic thought was translated into classroom practice: normative explanation, contextual discussion, interpretive comparison, and reflective application. Normative explanation introduced principles such as *tawassuṭ*, *tasāmuḥ*, *i'tidāl*, justice, and respect for human dignity. Contextual discussion connected these values with issues such as interreligious friendship, worship-space disputes, religious celebrations, social media conflict, and disagreement among Muslim groups.

Interpretive comparison involved contrasting scholarly opinions or contextualizing religious texts, while reflective application required students to consider how they would respond to concrete situations involving difference.

Student accounts indicated that lessons became more meaningful when teachers connected Islamic moderation with situations students could realistically encounter. Students described case discussion and classroom dialogue as more influential than memorizing definitions because these activities required them to explain why a particular attitude could be considered fair, tolerant, or ethically problematic. Learners also reported difficulty when moderation was presented only as a moral slogan without discussion of doctrinal disagreement or real social tensions. The data therefore showed that understanding pluralism depended not only on exposure to moderate values but also on opportunities to practise reasoning across difference.

Table 3. Dominant Pedagogical Forms and Their Learning Functions

Pedagogical form	Typical classroom activity	Primary learning function
Normative explanation	Teaching concepts of moderation and tolerance	Building conceptual foundation
Contextual discussion	Analysing social and religious cases	Connecting norms with lived reality
Interpretive comparison	Comparing scholarly or textual perspectives	Developing interpretive flexibility
Reflective application	Personal reflection and ethical response	Strengthening self-awareness and judgment
Cooperative interaction	Group discussion across different opinions	Practising respectful disagreement
Digital-source evaluation	Assessing online religious claims	Building critical religious literacy

Qualitative analytical inference indicated that the presence of moderation-related concepts in the curriculum was not sufficient to generate pluralism-oriented learning. The strongest pedagogical cases were those in which normative Islamic principles were combined with opportunities for interpretation, dialogue, and ethical judgment. Lessons centred exclusively on definitions tended to produce descriptive student responses, while lessons involving controversial cases generated more elaborate reasoning concerning justice, dignity, difference, and social responsibility. The main inference is that pedagogical process mediates the relationship between curriculum content and students' understanding of religious pluralism.

Cross-case inference also showed that teacher authority did not necessarily conflict with dialogic pedagogy. Teachers who maintained clear normative positions could still create space for student questioning and comparative interpretation. The critical distinction concerned how authority was exercised. Authoritative explanation became pedagogically restrictive when alternative views were dismissed without reasoning, but it supported moderate learning when teachers explained normative boundaries, acknowledged legitimate scholarly disagreement, and required students to justify their positions respectfully. Moderate Islamic pedagogy therefore appeared to depend more on the quality of epistemic interaction than on the simple opposition between teacher-centred and student-centred instruction.

A consistent relationship emerged between dialogic learning and students' capacity to articulate respectful disagreement. Classrooms in which teachers regularly asked students to explain reasons, compare perspectives, and respond to peers generated richer student descriptions of tolerance than classrooms dominated by one-directional explanation. Students in dialogic settings were more likely to distinguish between accepting another person's rights and agreeing with that person's theological position. This distinction is central to religious pluralism because it enables coexistence without requiring theological homogenization.

A second relationship appeared between contextual case analysis and interpretive literacy. Realistic cases encouraged students to recognize that religious questions often involve

competing values, social consequences, and multiple interpretive possibilities. Interpretive literacy provided the conceptual tools needed to evaluate these cases without reducing religious difference to personal preference. Reflective learning reinforced this process by directing students to examine their own assumptions and emotional responses. The three dimensions therefore functioned most effectively when combined rather than implemented separately.

Table 4. Relationship Between Pedagogical Dimensions and Expected Pluralism-Oriented Competencies

Pedagogical dimension	Moderate Islamic value emphasized	Observed or reported competency
Dialogic learning	Tasāmuḥ, shūrā	Respectful disagreement
Contextual case analysis	Justice, i'tidāl	Ethical judgment in diverse situations
Reflective learning	Self-restraint and responsibility	Awareness of assumptions and prejudice
Cooperative interaction	Ta'āwun, respect	Collaboration across differences
Interpretive literacy	Tawassuṭ, tawāzun	Recognition of legitimate interpretive diversity
Critical digital literacy	Responsibility and verification	Evaluation of polarizing religious information

Case A demonstrated a strongly dialogic approach in which teachers frequently used social and religious dilemmas as discussion material. Students were asked to distinguish tolerance from theological agreement and to formulate responses to situations involving religious difference. Case B relied more heavily on normative explanation and teacher exposition, although cooperative activities were occasionally used. Case C showed the strongest interpretive orientation, with teachers introducing differences among Islamic scholarly positions and encouraging students to examine contextual reasoning. Case D was distinguished by its integration of digital religious literacy, including discussion of online religious content and source credibility.

The institutional cases also differed in how pluralism was framed. Cases A and D presented pluralism primarily as an ethical and civic competence rooted in Islamic values, while Case B emphasized social harmony and behavioural tolerance. Case C gave greater attention to intra-Muslim interpretive diversity and the intellectual foundations of moderate Islamic thought. These differences demonstrate that religious pluralism can be approached through social, theological, pedagogical, or digital pathways. No single institution represented all dimensions equally strongly.

Table 5. Cross-Case Comparison of Moderate Islamic Pedagogy

Case	Dominant pedagogical orientation	Main strength	Main limitation
Institution A	Dialogic and case-based	Strong respectful discussion	Limited digital literacy
Institution B	Normative and teacher-directed	Clear conceptual structure	Limited student argumentation
Institution C	Interpretive and reflective	Strong engagement with scholarly diversity	Less attention to digital issues
Institution D	Dialogic and digitally	Strong source evaluation	Less systematic

The differences across the four institutions can be explained partly by variations in teacher competence and institutional culture. Teachers with experience discussing contemporary religious issues tended to use more open-ended cases and comparative interpretation. Institutions that explicitly incorporated religious moderation into academic planning provided greater space for reflective and dialogic learning. Classroom practice still depended substantially on individual teacher confidence, especially when topics involved sensitive theological differences or interreligious relations. Institutional policy therefore created enabling conditions but did not automatically determine pedagogical quality.

Student responses also helped explain why some approaches appeared more effective than others. Learners were generally willing to discuss religious difference when teachers established clear norms of respectful communication and did not treat questioning as disrespectful. Sensitive discussions became more limited when students feared that alternative opinions would be interpreted as signs of weak religious commitment. The findings indicate that psychological and intellectual safety are important conditions for moderation-oriented pedagogy. Students need confidence that disagreement can be examined academically without erasing normative religious commitments.

The findings indicate that teaching moderate Islamic thought is most effective when moderation is embedded in the pedagogical process rather than confined to curriculum terminology. Dialogic learning, contextual case analysis, reflective learning, cooperative interaction, and interpretive literacy created opportunities for students to practise the intellectual and ethical habits associated with religious pluralism. Critical digital literacy emerged as an important but comparatively underdeveloped component. Moderate Islamic education therefore requires alignment between what is taught, how it is discussed, and how students are expected to respond to religious difference.

The overall pattern supports a three-layer model consisting of normative content, pedagogical process, and student meaning-making. Normative content provides Islamic concepts such as *tawassuṭ*, *tawāzun*, *i'tidāl*, *tasāmuḥ*, and *shūrā*. Pedagogical processes translate these concepts into dialogue, interpretation, reflection, case analysis, and digital evaluation. Student meaning-making determines whether learners understand moderation merely as prescribed behaviour or as a disciplined capacity to maintain religious commitment while engaging ethically with difference. The findings therefore position religious pluralism not as theological relativism, but as an educational competence developed through principled, reflective, and contextually responsive Islamic pedagogy.

The findings show that teaching moderate Islamic thought becomes pedagogically meaningful when moderation is embedded in the learning process rather than presented only as normative terminology. Principles such as *tawassuṭ*, *tawāzun*, *i'tidāl*, *tasāmuḥ*, and *shūrā* gained greater educational significance when students were invited to discuss concrete religious and social situations, compare perspectives, justify their positions, and reflect on the ethical consequences of their judgments. Dialogic learning and contextual case analysis emerged as the most visible approaches across the observed settings, suggesting that moderate Islamic education benefits from instructional processes that require active interpretation rather than passive reception.

The findings also indicate that the quality of classroom dialogue matters more than the mere presence of discussion. Some learning activities appeared dialogic because students were permitted to answer questions, yet the expected conclusions had already been determined and alternative interpretations received little analytical attention. Stronger cases of moderate pedagogy allowed learners to articulate reasons, examine legitimate differences, challenge assumptions respectfully, and distinguish theological disagreement from hostility toward

people holding different beliefs. This distinction shows that dialogue contributes to pluralism only when it develops intellectual openness and ethical discipline simultaneously.

The cross-case analysis revealed that educational institutions emphasized different dimensions of moderate Islamic thought. Some cases prioritized social tolerance and respectful interaction, while others emphasized interpretive diversity within Islamic scholarship, contextual reasoning, or digital religious literacy. No single pedagogical approach fully captured all dimensions of moderation. The findings therefore suggest that effective teaching requires a combination of normative explanation, dialogic engagement, contextual analysis, reflective learning, cooperative interaction, interpretive literacy, and critical engagement with digital religious information.

The comparatively limited presence of critical digital religious literacy represents another important finding. Students regularly encountered religious messages through social media, online lectures, short videos, and digital influencers, yet classroom instruction did not always provide systematic tools for evaluating these sources. The gap between students' digital religious environment and formal Islamic education creates an important pedagogical vulnerability. Moderate Islamic education increasingly requires learners to evaluate not only what religious claims say, but also who produces them, how evidence is selected, what context is omitted, and how emotionally polarizing narratives influence interpretation.

The findings are consistent with recent research emphasizing the role of Islamic Religious Education in developing dialogue, tolerance, and interreligious harmony. Zahrani and colleagues report that Islamic education can foster understandings of Islam grounded in peace, justice, compassion, and respect for diversity, while recent multicultural Islamic education research similarly highlights inclusive and dialogical approaches as important for student tolerance. The present study extends this body of work by demonstrating that the crucial issue is not simply whether moderation appears in educational content, but how teachers operationalize it through questioning, case analysis, interpretation, reflection, and classroom interaction.

The emphasis on dialogic pedagogy also corresponds with recent studies identifying dialogue as an important strategy for strengthening tolerance in Islamic Religious Education. Subkan and colleagues specifically connect dialogic learning with students' tolerance in the digital era, while a broader meta-synthesis by Ardhy and Fauziah identifies curriculum integration, dialogical pedagogy, and educator role modeling as recurring strategies for religious moderation within multicultural Islamic education. The present findings strengthen these arguments but introduce an important qualification: classroom dialogue should not be evaluated simply by counting opportunities to speak. Its educational quality depends on whether students are required to provide reasons, engage competing perspectives, and maintain ethical communication when disagreement persists.

The findings concerning digital religious literacy strongly align with recent Indonesian research showing that digital media now influence how students access, evaluate, and internalize religious information. Wulandini and Ngadimah identify digital religious literacy as relevant to strengthening religious moderation among senior high school students, while research among madrasah students in Batu similarly examines the relationship between digital religious literacy and moderation in adolescent religious life. Research on Indonesian university students also shows that digital religious literature distributed through platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and religious applications shapes how religious messages are received and interpreted. The present study adds a pedagogical dimension by showing that students' exposure to digital religion is more developed than the classroom strategies designed to help them evaluate it.

The cross-case findings differ from approaches that assess religious moderation primarily through predetermined attitudinal indicators. Recent comparative research, for example, measures moderation using dimensions such as national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence,

and accommodation of local culture. Such measurement is useful for describing student orientations, but it does not fully explain how particular classroom practices contribute to those orientations. The present study shifts analytical attention from moderation as an outcome variable toward moderation as a pedagogical process, examining how teachers organize knowledge, manage disagreement, contextualize texts, and create conditions in which students learn to reason ethically about diversity.

The findings signify that moderate Islamic thought is not fully teachable through definitions alone. Students may be able to explain *tasāmuḥ* or *tawassuṭ* conceptually while still lacking the capacity to apply those principles when disagreement concerns identity, doctrine, religious practice, or emotionally sensitive public issues. Moderate religious reasoning develops when learners repeatedly practise interpreting differences, weighing arguments, recognizing boundaries, and treating others ethically despite disagreement. Pedagogy therefore constitutes part of the substance of moderation rather than functioning merely as a vehicle for transmitting it.

The distinction between theological agreement and respectful coexistence signifies an important conceptual maturity in pluralism-oriented Islamic education. Religious pluralism within this pedagogical framework does not require learners to erase doctrinal distinctions or suspend religious commitments. It requires the ability to acknowledge that strong conviction and recognition of another person's dignity can coexist. Students who understand this distinction are better positioned to avoid two opposing errors: treating tolerance as theological relativism or treating doctrinal difference as justification for social exclusion.

The variation among institutions signifies that religious moderation is mediated by educational culture rather than implemented uniformly through national or institutional terminology. A school may include moderation in its official curriculum while classroom interaction remains largely transmissive (R'boul & Yazidi, 2026). Another institution may devote less explicit curricular space to moderation but cultivate reflective disagreement through teacher practice, collaborative learning, and interpretive comparison. This pattern indicates that successful implementation depends on the relationship among formal curriculum, teacher competence, institutional climate, and the everyday norms governing classroom interaction.

The digital literacy gap signifies a transformation in the location of religious authority. Teachers and textbooks no longer function as the only significant sources through which students encounter Islamic interpretation. Social media personalities, algorithmically promoted videos, online preachers, discussion forums, and short-form religious content increasingly compete for attention and credibility (Brown, 2007). Religious education that ignores these environments risks teaching students how to interpret formal lessons while leaving them without equivalent tools for navigating the religious information that shapes their thinking outside school.

The primary pedagogical implication is that moderate Islamic education should be designed around intellectual practices as well as normative values (AL-Qadri et al., 2025). Teaching *tasāmuḥ* should include opportunities to encounter genuine disagreement; teaching *i'tidāl* should require students to evaluate competing claims fairly; teaching *shūrā* should involve structured deliberation; teaching *tawassuṭ* should require learners to distinguish balanced interpretation from unprincipled compromise. Such alignment between concept and learning process can transform moderation from memorized vocabulary into a disciplined mode of religious reasoning.

The curricular implication concerns the need to integrate real and carefully selected religious-social cases into Islamic education. Cases involving interreligious cooperation, differences in religious practice, local cultural traditions, social media controversy, minority rights, intra-Muslim disagreement, or public expressions of religion can provide meaningful contexts for applying moderate Islamic principles (Gunawan et al., 2026). Case-based learning should not be used to direct students toward predetermined political or theological positions. Its

purpose is to help them identify relevant Islamic values, examine evidence, understand different perspectives, evaluate consequences, and formulate ethically defensible judgments.

The teacher-development implication is equally significant. Teachers need more than conceptual knowledge about religious moderation; they require pedagogical competence for managing sensitive disagreement. This includes asking non-leading questions, distinguishing legitimate scholarly diversity from misinformation, responding to provocative statements without humiliating students, contextualizing religious texts responsibly, and maintaining clear ethical boundaries without closing discussion prematurely (Brooks et al., 2019). Recent research on religious moderation in Islamic education similarly emphasizes the importance of dialogical pedagogy and educator modeling, reinforcing the need to place teacher competence at the centre of implementation.

The digital implication is that critical religious literacy should become an explicit component of Islamic education. Students need practical criteria for evaluating authorship, scholarly competence, source authenticity, interpretive context, emotional manipulation, selective quotation, and algorithmic amplification (Mohd Nor et al., 2017). The goal is not to discourage students from accessing religious content online but to enable them to approach such content with informed judgment. Recent studies showing the growing influence of digital religious literature on students make this curricular expansion increasingly important.

The effectiveness of dialogic learning can be explained by the nature of religious pluralism itself. Pluralism involves encounters with perspectives that cannot always be reconciled into a single interpretation. Students therefore need experience maintaining constructive relationships in the presence of unresolved differences (Triyanto, 2026). Dialogic pedagogy provides a controlled educational environment in which learners can practise listening, questioning, explaining, and disagreeing without transforming intellectual difference into personal hostility. Such practice is difficult to develop through lecture-based instruction alone because respectful disagreement is a competence that must be enacted.

The effectiveness of contextual case analysis can be explained by the gap between abstract moral concepts and actual ethical judgment. Statements such as “Islam teaches tolerance” or “Muslims should act justly” are relatively easy to accept at a general level. Difficulty arises when tolerance appears to conflict with doctrinal boundaries, group loyalty, social pressure, or emotionally charged religious claims (Kirkwood-Tucker et al., 2018). Contextual cases expose those tensions and require students to specify what justice, moderation, or tolerance means under particular conditions. The cognitive demand of contextual application therefore helps reveal whether students genuinely understand a concept or merely recognize its terminology.

The importance of interpretive literacy can be explained by the internal diversity of Islamic intellectual traditions. Moderate Islamic thought cannot depend entirely on avoiding disagreement because disagreement has long existed within jurisprudence, theology, interpretation, and religious practice. Students who encounter legitimate scholarly difference can learn that diversity of interpretation does not automatically imply religious disorder (Sejati et al., 2026). Teachers who explain why scholars differ, what methods they use, and where normative boundaries remain can help students develop confidence in their own tradition without assuming that every difference represents deviance or hostility.

The weakness of digital religious literacy can be explained by the speed with which students’ religious information environments have changed. Formal curricula, teacher preparation, and instructional materials often evolve more slowly than social media platforms and digital communication practices (Gur Geden, 2026). Teachers may also feel uncertain about how to discuss online religious figures, misinformation, algorithmic recommendation, or polarizing content without appearing to delegitimize religious learning outside school. The resulting gap is structural rather than simply individual: digital religious life has expanded faster than corresponding pedagogical frameworks for critical engagement.

Future curriculum development should integrate a structured moderate-Islamic-pedagogy framework consisting of normative grounding, dialogic engagement, contextual case analysis, interpretive comparison, reflection, cooperative interaction, and digital-source evaluation. These components should not become isolated instructional techniques. They should operate as an interconnected sequence in which students first understand relevant Islamic principles, encounter a complex issue, examine evidence and interpretations, discuss competing positions, reflect on their reasoning, and formulate an ethically responsible response.

Future empirical research should test the relationship between specific pedagogical approaches and identifiable learning outcomes. Quasi-experimental or mixed-method studies could examine whether dialogic case-based learning produces stronger gains in perspective taking, tolerance, interpretive reasoning, respectful disagreement, or digital-source evaluation than conventional lecture-based instruction. Longitudinal designs would be especially valuable because religious moderation should not be reduced to immediate post-lesson responses. Researchers need to determine whether learning experiences influence how students respond to real differences over time.

Future teacher education should develop practical competencies for moderation-oriented classroom facilitation. Training can include simulations of controversial discussions, analysis of teaching cases, strategies for responding to prejudicial statements, contextual interpretation of religious texts, assessment of online religious sources, and methods for creating intellectually safe classrooms. Professional learning communities could also allow Islamic education teachers to examine difficult cases collectively rather than treating religious moderation as an individual teaching responsibility.

Future research should give greater attention to the interaction between classroom pedagogy and students' digital religious ecosystems. Studies could examine how algorithmic feeds, short-form religious videos, online authority, generative artificial intelligence, and digitally circulated theological controversies affect students' perceptions of difference. Recent research already demonstrates that digital religious literacy and online religious literature are increasingly relevant to moderation among Indonesian students. The next stage of scholarship should therefore ask not only whether learners display tolerant attitudes, but how schools can cultivate intellectually grounded religious commitment that remains resilient, reflective, and ethically responsible across both physical and digital spaces.

CONCLUSION

The most important finding of this study is that moderate Islamic thought becomes more meaningful when it is taught as a mode of reasoning and interaction rather than as a collection of normative concepts. Dialogic learning, contextual case analysis, reflective activities, cooperative interaction, and interpretive literacy created stronger opportunities for students to practise respectful disagreement, ethical judgment, and recognition of religious diversity without requiring theological relativism. The distinctive finding lies in the difference between teaching moderation as content and cultivating moderation through pedagogy. Students appeared to engage more deeply with principles such as *tawassuṭ*, *tawāzun*, *i'tidāl*, *tasāmuḥ*, and *shūrā* when these values were embedded in concrete classroom experiences involving argumentation, interpretation, and reflection.

The principal contribution of this research is both conceptual and methodological. Conceptually, the study proposes a three-layer framework consisting of normative content, pedagogical process, and student meaning-making, thereby positioning religious moderation as an educational practice that connects Islamic ethical principles with pluralistic social realities. Methodologically, the multiple-case approach integrates classroom observation, teacher and student interviews, document analysis, and cross-case comparison to examine how moderation is actually enacted in educational settings. The study also identifies critical digital religious

literacy as an essential extension of moderate Islamic pedagogy because students increasingly encounter religious interpretations through social media and online platforms. This framework offers a more comprehensive basis for designing Islamic education that is simultaneously normatively grounded, dialogical, reflective, contextually responsive, and capable of addressing contemporary forms of religious communication.

The limitations of this study arise from its qualitative multiple-case design, limited institutional coverage, contextual dependence on selected Indonesian educational settings, and emphasis on pedagogical processes rather than long-term behavioural outcomes. The findings cannot therefore be generalized statistically to all schools, madrasahs, teachers, or students in Indonesia. The study also provides limited evidence concerning whether moderation-oriented pedagogy produces sustained changes in students' attitudes, digital behaviour, or interreligious interactions beyond the classroom. Future research should employ longitudinal, mixed-method, and quasi-experimental designs across more diverse regions and institutional types to test the effects of dialogic, case-based, reflective, and digital-literacy-oriented instruction. Further investigation should also examine teacher competence, school culture, algorithmic religious content, generative artificial intelligence, online religious authority, and the relationship between classroom learning and students' everyday encounters with religious diversity.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.

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