

Mapping the Discursive Barriers of Religious Moderation in Islamic Schools: A Systematic Literature Review of Sinta-Indexed Research (2019–2025)

Bambang Supradi^{1*}, Ali Muddin Jailani², Mustafa³, Syahrur Ramli⁴, M Yoga Habibullah⁵, Yudha Putra Pratama⁶ Radhitiya Dwi Putra⁷

^{1,2} Institut Agama Islam Lukman Edy Pekanbaru, Indonesia

³ Universitas Islam Negeri Sjech M Djamil Djambek Bukittinggi, Indonesia

⁴⁻⁷ Universitas Islam Negeri Mahmud Yunus Batusangkar, Indonesia

Abstract

Religious moderation has become a central policy agenda in Indonesian Islamic education, yet its implementation in madrasahs remains contested because state-defined moderation often intersects uneasily with local theological authority and pedagogical traditions. This study aims to map the structural and discursive barriers that shape the implementation of religious moderation in Islamic schools and to identify how these barriers are represented in Sinta-indexed scholarship. Using a systematic literature review design guided by PRISMA, the study selected and analyzed 35 articles published in Sinta-indexed journals within the 2019–2025 scope. Data were retrieved through structured keyword searches related to religious moderation, madrasahs, pesantren, resistance, curriculum, and policy implementation. The selected studies were examined through thematic extraction and critical discourse analysis to identify recurrent patterns of ideological, pedagogical, and institutional tension. The review found three dominant clusters of barriers: ideological-epistemological resistance, pedagogical-curricular constraints, and institutional policy ambiguity. The literature shows that teachers and school leaders frequently interpret state-led moderation modules as externally imposed administrative requirements, which encourages performative compliance, curriculum decoupling, and localized reinterpretation rather than substantive pedagogical transformation. These findings suggest that the main challenge is not simply insufficient teacher competence but a deeper mismatch between centralized policy narratives and the organic epistemology of Islamic education. Future research should examine school-level implementation practices more closely and develop collaborative models that integrate wasathiyah, teacher autonomy, and transparent evaluation.

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CORRESPONDING AUTHOR

***Bambang Supradi**, Institut Agama Islam Lukman Edy Pekanbaru, Indonesia. Email: bambangsupradi0608@gmail.com

Introduction

Religious moderation in Indonesian Islamic educational institutions has increasingly transitioned from an organic theological ethos into a state-imposed bureaucratic mandate, creating systemic discursive barriers among educators. This institutional shift frequently positions religious moderation not as a genuine epistemological dialogue, but rather as an administrative compliance metric that triggers latent resistance within madrasahs (Chotimah dkk., 2025). This institutional paradox necessitates a critical examination of the discursive barriers to moderation within Islamic educational settings. Current literature reveals a significant academic gap, as most contemporary studies uncritically celebrate state-led moderation programs without addressing the underlying

epistemological resistance from grassroots religious educators (Qorib & Umiarso, 2025). The theory of pedagogical dissonance explains that educators experience acute internal friction when top-down policy narratives fundamentally contradict their established theological frameworks (Wardi dkk., 2025). Therefore, identifying the specific contours of these discursive barriers is crucial for understanding the true trajectory of religious moderation in Indonesia."

Using the lens of Epistemic Injustice, we can understand how local religious perspectives are often marginalized in favor of standardized state-sponsored moderation modules (Purwanto dkk., 2024). For instance, teachers in traditional *madrasahs* may resist moderation training if the curriculum fails to acknowledge the rich, pre-existing local traditions of tolerance found in classical Islamic literature. Beyond simple resistance, an advanced analytical approach views these discursive barriers as a form of 'agency' that challenges the binary opposition between radicalism and moderation (Gulson & Webb, 2013). To capture the complexity of these strategic responses, a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) serves as the primary instrument for synthesizing diverse academic findings."

"To capture the complexity of these strategic responses, a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) serves as the primary instrument for synthesizing diverse academic findings. Specifically, this review rigorously employs the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework to ensure a transparent and reproducible selection of relevant Sinta-indexed literature (Muhajarah & Soebahar, 2024). Grounded in the Theory of Information Retrieval, this structured approach systematically filters out methodological noise to isolate high-validity empirical signals from domestic educational databases (Hidayat & Muzammil, 2025). In practice, this means intentionally discarding hundreds of conceptually broad essays to focus strictly on qualitative field studies conducted within actual Indonesian *madrasahs*. Unlike traditional narrative reviews that are often susceptible to subjective authorial bias, this PRISMA-guided extraction ensures a hyper-objective mapping of localized ideological friction (Firdaus, Salamah Zainiyati, dkk., 2025). By implementing these stringent inclusion criteria, the resulting dataset provides an undiluted look into the grassroots realities of moderation policy implementation."

"By implementing these stringent inclusion criteria, the resulting dataset provides an undiluted look into the grassroots realities of moderation policy implementation. The primary finding extracted from the reviewed literature reveals a profound ideological and theological resistance among grassroots educators against the state's standardized definition of moderation (Zulkarnain, Maisyanah, dkk., 2025). Viewing this through Bourdieu's Theory of Symbolic Violence, the imposition of secular-leaning moderation metrics can be understood as an aggressive disruption of the traditional epistemological hierarchy within Islamic institutions (Samsul Hady dkk., 2025). For instance, many senior clerics (*kiai*) actively reject the government's specific indicators of 'tolerance', perceiving them not as a promotion of harmony, but as a subtle enforcement of religious pluralism that threatens core Islamic creed (*aqidah*). While policymakers superficially label this hesitation as latent radicalism, a critical phenomenological analysis demonstrates that it is actually a rational defense mechanism to preserve authentic theological integrity against external state hegemony (Güngen, 2013). This foundational ideological clash inevitably cascades down into the daily educational processes, deeply affecting how the curriculum is delivered in the classroom."

"This foundational ideological clash inevitably cascades down into the daily educational processes, deeply affecting how the curriculum is delivered in the classroom. Empirical evidence from recent field studies indicates that teachers frequently treat state-mandated moderation modules as superficial administrative checklists rather than transformative educational frameworks (Zulkarnain, Bulan, dkk., 2025). The Theory of Curriculum Decoupling posits that schools often separate formal policy mandates from actual teaching practices to buffer their core pedagogical activities from external bureaucratic interference (Hanafi, Saefi, Ikhsan, dkk., 2025). For example, an Islamic education teacher might diligently fill out the required institutional forms proving they taught 'moderate values', while practically continuing to employ exclusive, traditional doctrinaire methods during actual student instruction. Unlike conventional administrative evaluations that view this simply as poor teacher compliance, a critical pedagogical lens reveals this decoupling as a sophisticated strategy of passive resistance against top-down curriculum standardization (Andy dkk., 2025). Consequently, this widespread pedagogical decoupling highlights a severe lack of institutional trust between grassroots educational practitioners and government policymakers."

"Consequently, this widespread pedagogical decoupling highlights a severe lack of institutional trust between grassroots educational practitioners and government policymakers. Many educational leaders perceive the state's moderation indicators not as genuine tools for fostering harmony, but as mechanisms for political surveillance and ideological control over Islamic institutions (Firdaus, Hilmy, dkk., 2025). The Theory of Institutional Trust postulates that the successful implementation of any top-down mandate heavily relies on the perceived legitimacy, benevolence, and transparency of the policy-making authority (Faizin dkk., 2025). For instance, when *madrasah* principals are required to fill out highly ambiguous and subjective evaluation rubrics regarding their moderation efforts, they often suspect that the data will be weaponized to categorize their schools as 'radical' without due process. Rather than viewing this suspicion as mere paranoia, a critical institutional analysis reveals it as a historically valid response to a legacy of securitization policies that have disproportionately targeted Islamic educational spaces (Sativa dkk., 2023). This deep-seated institutional distrust ultimately creates a paralyzing systemic inertia, preventing any meaningful cultural transformation within the schools."

Method

This methodological rigor is initiated through a clearly defined search strategy to ensure the capture of all relevant Sinta-indexed publications. To achieve this, the primary data extraction was systematically conducted across highly reputable academic databases, specifically targeting the Sinta database, Garuda portal, and Scopus-indexed journals published between 2020 and 2025 (Jusufi, 2025). Guided by the Theory of Information Retrieval, this process utilized complex Boolean operators to precisely intersect core thematic concepts while systematically filtering out irrelevant disciplines (Gayatri & True, 2025). In practice, the search engines were queried using specific keyword combinations, such as "*Moderasi Beragama*" AND "*Madrasah*" OR "*Pesantren*" AND "*Resistensi*", to capture the exact nuances of the localized educational friction. Compared to traditional ad-hoc literature searches that often suffer from severe authorial confirmation bias, this algorithmic approach guarantees a highly objective mapping of the available academic discourse (El-Atwani, 2015).

The Systematic Literature Review (SLR) methodology is employed as a rigorous means to identify, evaluate, and interpret all available research relevant to these discursive barriers (Hanafi, Saefi, Diyana, dkk., 2025). In the Indonesian context, this involves aggregating dispersed data from high-impact journals to observe how the "hybridization" of identity is documented across different religious institutions. While traditional reviews might offer anecdotal insights, the SLR approach utilizes a 'meta-perspective' that allows for the detection of systemic patterns of resistance that a single field study might miss (Lopes Cardozo dkk., 2022). This methodological rigor is initiated through a clearly defined search strategy to ensure the capture of all relevant Sinta-indexed publications."

Following the retrieval of these initial search results, the methodology dictates a rigorous screening phase to systematically eliminate studies that do not meet the strict empirical criteria. During the eligibility assessment, this study explicitly excluded conceptual essays, normative opinion pieces, and broad national surveys that lacked direct qualitative field data from authentic Islamic educational settings (Purwanto dkk., 2023). This rigorous process of elimination ultimately resulted in a highly concentrated dataset, strictly composed of articles that document authentic institutional friction. The final corpus of literature was analyzed using a thematic extraction method to identify the core ideological tensions present in the implementation of religious moderation (Alabdulhadi & Alkandari, 2024). This analysis is grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which provides a lens to examine how language serves as a site of struggle for power and ideological hegemony (Mubin et al., 2025).

Result and Discussion

Result

This analytical framework highlights that the primary barrier is not logistical, but is deeply rooted in the divergent theological interpretations held by grassroots actors. To empirically map these theological and institutional barriers, the systematic extraction from the PRISMA process yielded 35 highly relevant Sinta 2 and 3 articles focused specifically on *Madrasahs* and State Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTKIN) between 2020 and 2025 (Rustina dkk., 2025). Based on the Theory of Data Representation, the demographic concentration of this literature naturally indicates that the epicenter of policy friction is located within institutions possessing deeply rooted traditional religious legacies (Suresman & Faqihuddin, 2025). For instance, the majority of the selected case studies are situated in Islamic educational institutions across Java and Sumatra, where the interaction between national standardized curricula and traditional *pesantren* values is most intensely recorded. Unlike government evaluation reports that tend to generalize national success, the precise characteristics of these empirical studies prove that implementation barriers are highly variable and context-dependent (N. Memon, 2011). Based on the focused characteristics of this literature, the synthesized findings organically converge into three primary problem clusters that hinder the implementation of religious moderation."

Based on the focused characteristics of this literature, the synthesized findings organically converge into three primary problem clusters that hinder the implementation of religious moderation. The first cluster highlights ideological and epistemological barriers, characterized by widespread teacher resistance stemming from a perceived clash between traditional theological doctrines and state-defined concepts of tolerance (Van Es dkk., 2021). This phenomenon is best

understood through the lens of Defensive Theology Theory, which posits that educators actively reinforce their religious epistemological boundaries when confronting external policy interventions perceived as secular or alien (Somer, 2014). In practice, this barrier manifests as a profound fear of 'theological dilution' (*pendangkalan akidah*), where frontline teachers suspect that moderation modules are designed to weaken students' conviction in absolute religious truths. While the government frames this initiative as a tool for national harmony, grassroots actors frequently interpret it as an ideological imposition that threatens the autonomy of Islamic education (Ghamra-Oui, 2020). This ideological friction is further compounded by pedagogical and curricular constraints that reduce the moderation agenda to a burdensome administrative compliance.

This ideological friction is further compounded by pedagogical and curricular constraints that reduce the moderation agenda to a burdensome administrative compliance. Data extracted from the Sinta-indexed articles consistently show that instead of transforming classroom dynamics, the religious moderation mandate is often reduced to a 'paperwork exercise' due to a severe lack of structured teacher training (Zakiyah dkk., 2025). According to Administrative Burden Theory, when a complex ideological policy is introduced without adequate professional development, frontline bureaucrats naturally default to superficial compliance to satisfy institutional oversight (Fuad dkk., 2025). For example, multiple case studies in Madrasahs reveal that teachers simply copy-paste moderation values into their lesson plans (*RPP*) to pass bureaucratic inspections, without actually changing their top-down, doctrinal teaching methods in the classroom. While school inspectors frequently celebrate these perfectly formatted documents as a sign of successful policy integration, a critical pedagogical analysis reveals that this superficiality leaves the actual student experience entirely untouched by moderation principles (Lahmar, 2011). This disconnect between bureaucratic appearance and classroom reality ultimately breeds a deeper sense of institutional skepticism among educators regarding the true purpose of the state-led project.

This disconnect between bureaucratic appearance and classroom reality ultimately breeds a deeper sense of institutional skepticism among educators regarding the true purpose of the state-led project. Systematic extraction from the selected Sinta literature reveals that this skepticism often hardens into a profound structural distrust, driven by the perceived politicization of the religious moderation agenda (Zabadi dkk., 2025). According to Political Instrumentalist Theory, when state-sponsored moral frameworks are implemented top-down, grassroots actors frequently interpret them as tools for regime preservation and ideological policing rather than genuine pedagogical advancement (Widana & Wirata, 2023). For instance, multiple qualitative studies note that teachers openly question why moderation monitoring intensifies during political transition periods, leading them to view the modules as an effort to neutralize political dissent within Islamic schools. While official ministry guidelines present the policy as a neutral, universal ethical standard, a critical policy analysis of the literature shows that this top-down enforcement mechanism actively alienates the very educators needed to champion the values (N. A. Memon dkk., 2025). This institutional alienation is further aggravated by the absence of transparent and objective evaluation metrics to measure what 'successful' moderation actually looks like in practice.

This institutional alienation is further aggravated by the absence of transparent and objective evaluation metrics to measure what 'successful' moderation actually looks like in practice. Data synthesized from the Sinta corpus indicates that without clear behavioral indicators, school principals and inspectors frequently experience intense procedural anxiety, rendering compliance a

game of guesswork (Widana & Wirata, 2023). Under Policy Ambiguity Theory, when a state directive lacks precise operational definitions, implementation actors either experience paralysis or construct localized, highly subjective interpretations to fill the regulatory void (Yata Mones, 2025). For instance, several qualitative studies reveal that *Madrasah* heads are deeply confused about whether a student's moderation score should be based on formal written tests or subjective behavioral observations during prayer sessions. While regional ministry offices demand strict accountability reports, this methodological ambiguity forces schools to invent superficial checklists that satisfy bureaucratic audits but fail to capture genuine ideological shifts (Khalil & DeCuir, 2018). This lack of evaluative clarity transforms the policy from a transformative pedagogical tool into a source of constant institutional anxiety.

Discussion

Ultimately, this systematic review demonstrates that the current state-led approach successfully enforces the outward rituals of moderation while inadvertently alienating the internal belief systems of both teachers and students. This critical interpretation suggests that the implementation of religious moderation in Indonesia suffers from a profound structural failure because it operates primarily as a top-down political project rather than an organic pedagogical evolution (N. L. Saada, 2013). Under Secularization Thesis Framework, when a state attempts to standardize and bureaucratize internal religious virtues, it inadvertently triggers defensive mechanisms from religious actors who view such metrics as an existential threat to their theological autonomy (G. Driessen & Valkenberg, 2000). For instance, the systematic conversion of *wasathiyah* which historically developed as a flexible, grassroots ethical framework into rigid state-sanctioned key performance indicators (*IKU*) creates an immediate epistemic disconnect in Islamic classrooms. While policymakers treat this resistance as a technical deficit that can be solved with more training, a structural-cultural lens reveals that the core issue is an institutional clash between state control and centuries-old clerical authority (Zine, 2007). Consequently, this structural enforcement transforms Islamic schools into battlegrounds of passive resistance, where actors perform compliance to survive audits while privately retaining their original theological boundaries.

Consequently, this structural enforcement transforms Islamic schools into battlegrounds of passive resistance, where actors perform compliance to survive audits while privately retaining their original theological boundaries. This operational friction uncovers a profound paradox: *Madrasahs* and *pesantrens*, which have historically functioned as the organic cradles of Islamic moderation (*wasathiyah*), fiercely resist the concept when it is packaged as a standardized state mandate (Bahhari & Willoughby, 2025). Through the lens of Institutional Isomorphism, this resistance occurs because the state's coercive pressure forces a diverse, centuries-old tradition to fit into a rigid, bureaucratic mold, stripping the local actors of their organic moral authority (Bugg & Gurran, 2011). For example, traditional teachers feel insulted when state modules imply that their classical curriculum is prone to radicalism, prompting them to reject the state's vocabulary even while continuing to teach tolerance in their own way. While government officials interpret this pushback as a sign of ideological deviance, a critical cultural analysis reframes it as a defensive maneuver to protect the epistemic purity of traditional Islamic pedagogy from political distortion (Amiruddin dkk., 2025). This defensive maneuver effectively splits the institutional identity of

Islamic schools, creating a permanent divide between external civic performance and internal theological conviction.

This defensive maneuver effectively splits the institutional identity of Islamic schools, creating a permanent divide between external civic performance and internal theological conviction. On a global scale, this systemic disconnect mirrors international critiques of securitized education, where state-enforced moderation programs often transform schools into instruments of ideological surveillance rather than spaces for genuine civic growth (Ghamra-Oui, 2022). This phenomenon aligns with Securitization Theory, which posits that when a state frames an educational or religious issue as an existential security threat, it legitimizes top-down interventions that undermine the organic social fabric of the targeted community (Sarrouh, 2021). For example, similar to the backlash against the Prevent strategy in the United Kingdom or early PVE initiatives in France, state-led moderation in Indonesia causes Muslim educators to feel targeted, leading to counter-productive resistance rather than meaningful integration. While international bodies often advocate for school-centric deradicalization, a comparative analysis demonstrates that top-down policies globally suffer from the same fundamental flaw: they prioritize political control over pedagogical trust (Liederman, 2000). Consequently, this international pattern suggests that without re-centering the dialogue on grassroots educational autonomy, state-mandated values will continue to generate structural alienation across diverse cultural contexts."

This reflexive approach ultimately replaces bureaucratic compliance with genuine professional conviction, ensuring that teachers are intellectually equipped to cultivate critical thinking alongside tolerance. In a broader structural synthesis, the future of religious moderation in Islamic education depends on transitioning the policy from an instrument of state uniformity into a protective shield for academic freedom and student critical agency (Høigilt, 2013). According to Democratic Education Theory, a civic education framework is most successful not when it enforces uncritical loyalty to state slogans, but when it empowers students to evaluate diverse viewpoints and engage in deliberative democratic dialogue (Qoyyimah dkk., 2023). In the context of *Madrasahs*, this means that moderation should not be taught as a fixed set of answers to pass exams, but as a critical thinking methodology that allows students to navigate modern socio-political pluralism while remaining rooted in their orthodox faith. While current top-down mechanisms risk turning moderation into a superficial bureaucratic ritual, a democratic-theological framework reclaims the policy as a tool for genuine intellectual and spiritual growth (Karam, 2025). Ultimately, by decoupling religious moderation from state security agendas and re-embedding it within the organic autonomy of Islamic pedagogy, educational institutions can move past the paradox of superficial compliance and foster a truly resilient form of civic harmony.

Conclusion

This study examined the discursive and structural barriers that shape the implementation of religious moderation in Indonesian Islamic schools through a systematic synthesis of 35 PRISMA-selected Sinta-indexed articles. The findings demonstrate that the central challenge does not lie merely in technical implementation, limited training, or weak administrative compliance, but in a deeper epistemological disjunction between state-led moderation narratives and the theological-pedagogical traditions of grassroots Islamic education. The review identified three interrelated barriers: ideological-epistemological resistance, pedagogical-curricular constraints, and

institutional policy ambiguity. Together, these barriers explain why religious moderation policies are often translated into performative compliance, administrative documentation, and curriculum decoupling rather than meaningful classroom transformation. In this regard, the study answers its core research focus by showing that resistance to moderation is not necessarily a rejection of tolerance itself, but frequently reflects concern over externally imposed definitions, securitized policy language, and insufficient recognition of locally rooted wasathiyah traditions.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the literature on Islamic education, policy implementation, and religious moderation by reframing policy resistance as a discursive and institutional phenomenon rather than a simple deficit of teacher competence. Practically, the findings imply that moderation programs in madrasahs should move beyond top-down bureaucratic mandates toward collaborative governance, teacher agency, context-sensitive curriculum design, and transparent evaluation indicators. However, the study is limited by its reliance on secondary literature from Sinta-indexed publications, which may not fully capture unpublished practices, regional variations, or the lived experiences of students and teachers across diverse Islamic school contexts. Future studies should therefore employ ethnographic, longitudinal, and comparative field-based designs to examine how religious moderation is negotiated in daily pedagogical practice. Further research should also develop empirically grounded models that integrate national policy goals with Islamic pedagogical autonomy. By positioning wasathiyah as an organic educational resource rather than a merely administrative requirement, future moderation initiatives can strengthen civic harmony while preserving the epistemic integrity of Islamic education.

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