

Religious Moderation in Indonesian Islamic Education: Curriculum Policy, Pesantren Autonomy, and Pedagogical Reconstruction

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Article History Received : 05-09-2026 Revised : 29-09-2026 Published : 05-10-2026 Keywords: <i>Islamic education, juristic disagreement, moral formation, pesantren autonomy, religious moderation</i>	Religious moderation has become the organising concept of Indonesian religious policy and education its principal instrument, yet extensive institutional activity has not been matched by evidence of dispositional change among learners. This study aims to examine how regulatory instruments governing Islamic education construct religious moderation, to identify the normative resources within Islamic legal and educational tradition that supply internal justification for a moderate disposition, and to formulate the pedagogical design required to form that disposition consistently with institutional autonomy. The research applies normative qualitative method combining doctrinal analysis of Islamic legal methodology with document analysis of the Constitution, the National Education System Law, the Pesantren Law, government and presidential regulations on religious education and moderation, and madrasah curriculum regulation, read alongside classical sources and contemporary scholarship on moral formation and intergroup relations. The findings show that the corpus constructs moderation as transmissible content, producing assessability drift, displacement of formation by declarative activity, and a justificatory register grounded in national integration that does not reach the level at which religious conviction operates; and that the tradition itself supplies stronger internal grounds through the objectives of the law, the recognition of qualified juristic disagreement, and the

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	classical ethics of inquiry. The article recommends a pedagogy of structured disagreement, contact organised under empirically specified conditions, investment in teacher scholarly capability rather than declarative programming, and indirect state instruments consistent with guaranteed pesantren autonomy.

I. INTRODUCTION

Religious moderation has become the organising concept of Indonesian religious policy over the past decade, and education has been designated as its principal instrument. The state has established a national framework for strengthening religious moderation, integrated moderation indicators into madrasah and higher education curricula, and made the concept a standing criterion in the assessment of religious education institutions.¹ The policy responds to a recognisable set of anxieties: the intensification of sectarian rhetoric in public discourse, the circulation of exclusivist religious content through digital platforms, and the documented presence of intolerant attitudes among segments of the student population. That the state should address these concerns through education is unsurprising. Whether the instruments it has adopted can produce the dispositions it seeks is a separate question, and it is the question this article examines.

The ideal condition is constitutionally and statutorily articulated. The Constitution guarantees freedom of religion and the equal standing of citizens before the law; the National Education System Law establishes that education is organised democratically, without discrimination, upholding human rights, religious values, and cultural pluralism.² Government Regulation Number 55 of 2007 on Religious Education and Religious Instruction requires that religious education develop learners' capacity to understand, internalise, and practise religious values while maintaining harmony between adherents of different religions.³ The Pesantren Law of 2019 recognises the pesantren as an institution

¹ Peraturan Presiden Nomor 58 Tahun 2023 tentang Penguatan Moderasi Beragama, Pasal 2–4; Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, *Moderasi Beragama* (Jakarta: Badan Litbang dan Diklat Kementerian Agama, 2019), 15–28.

² Undang-Undang Dasar Negara Republik Indonesia Tahun 1945, Pasal 28E dan Pasal 29; Undang-Undang Nomor 20 Tahun 2003 tentang Sistem Pendidikan Nasional, Pasal 4 ayat (1).

³ Peraturan Pemerintah Nomor 55 Tahun 2007 tentang Pendidikan Agama dan Pendidikan Keagamaan, Pasal 2 ayat (2) dan Pasal 3 ayat (1).

with its own distinctive tradition and grants it autonomy over the content and method of its instruction, while simultaneously affirming its role in developing citizens committed to national integration.⁴

The actual condition reveals two distinct sources of difficulty. The first is pedagogical. Moderation has been operationalised largely as curricular content a set of propositions about tolerance, national commitment, non-violence, and accommodation of local culture, to be delivered, memorised, and assessed. Yet the disposition the policy seeks is not a body of knowledge but a formed character, and there is little reason to believe that the transmission of propositions about tolerance produces tolerant persons. The gap between cognitive knowledge of a value and its enactment is among the oldest problems in moral education, and it is not resolved by adding indicators to a syllabus.⁵

The second is institutional and epistemological. Moderation policy has largely been formulated in the vocabulary of national integration and public order, and communicated through administrative instruments. Pesantren and madrasah, however, operate within an epistemic tradition that grounds normative claims in scriptural sources, juristic reasoning, and the authority of the scholarly chain. A moderation that arrives as state instruction rather than as an argument internal to that tradition is liable to be received either as an external imposition to be formally accommodated, or as evidence that the state is intervening in matters of religious interpretation a perception that can generate precisely the defensive consolidation the policy aims to prevent.⁶

The scholarly literature has addressed these matters in three partially separate conversations. Historical and anthropological scholarship on Indonesian Islamic education has traced the long accommodation between pesantren tradition and modern institutional forms, demonstrating that the tradition has repeatedly absorbed and reshaped external agendas rather than either resisting or capitulating to them.⁷ Normative Islamic scholarship has developed accounts of *wasatiyyah* and of the objectives of the law that supply internal grounds for moderation, but this work has not generally been translated

⁴ Undang-Undang Nomor 18 Tahun 2019 tentang Pesantren, Pasal 1 angka 1, Pasal 3, dan Pasal 5.

⁵ Thomas Lickona, *Educating for Character: How Our Schools Can Teach Respect and Responsibility* (New York: Bantam Books, 1991), 50–71.

⁶ Martin van Bruinessen, ed., *Contemporary Developments in Indonesian Islam: Explaining the “Conservative Turn”* (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2013), 1–20.

⁷ Robert W. Hefner, *Making Modern Muslims: The Politics of Islamic Education in Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2009), 1–39; Zamakhsyari Dhofier, *Tradisi Pesantren: Studi tentang Pandangan Hidup Kyai* (Jakarta: LP3ES, 1982), 17–55.

into pedagogical design.⁸ Empirical research on tolerance in Indonesian schools has documented attitudes and their correlates, producing valuable descriptive knowledge without addressing the design question of what pedagogical arrangements would alter them.

The research gap addressed here lies in the absence of work that connects the normative resources internal to Islamic legal and educational tradition with the design of pedagogy, and that reads both against the regulatory architecture through which moderation policy operates. The novelty of the article lies in its argument that the effectiveness of moderation policy depends on relocating its justification from the register of state administration to the register of Islamic normative reasoning, and on replacing content delivery with structured practices of disagreement for which the classical tradition itself supplies the model in the disciplines of *ikhtilāf* and *adab al-baḥth*.

Three research questions guide the analysis. First, how do the regulatory instruments governing Indonesian Islamic education construct religious moderation, and what conception of moral formation does that construction presuppose? Second, what resources within Islamic legal and educational tradition supply internal justification for a moderate disposition, and how do these relate to the state's formulation? Third, what pedagogical and institutional design would enable religious education to form the disposition the policy seeks, consistently with the autonomy that law guarantees to religious institutions?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The classical Islamic tradition supplies substantial resources for the analysis. Al-Shāṭibī's account of the objectives of the law establishes that legal rulings serve identifiable human interests, and that the interpreter must attend to consequence and context rather than to literal form alone.⁹ This has immediate pedagogical significance: a student trained to ask what interest a ruling protects is engaged in a different intellectual operation from one trained to memorise the ruling, and the first operation is constitutively resistant to the flattening of the tradition into a list of prohibitions.

Al-Ghazālī's treatment of knowledge and its ethics supplies a complementary resource. His distinction between knowledge as accumulation and knowledge as

⁸ Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, *al-Khaṣā'is al-Āmmah li al-Islām* (Cairo: Maktabah Wahbah, 1996), 127–156; Jasser Auda, *Maqasid al-Shariah as Philosophy of Islamic Law: A Systems Approach* (London: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2008), 1–30.

⁹ Abū Ishāq al-Shāṭibī, *al-Muwāfaqāt fī Uṣūl al-Sharī'ah* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 2004), 2:6–25; Muhammad Khalid Masud, *Shatibi's Philosophy of Islamic Law* (Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute, 1995), 127–164.

transformation of the knower, and his insistence that the seeker must cultivate the dispositions that make understanding possible, locate the aim of religious education in character rather than in retention.¹⁰ Ibn Khaldūn's critique of instructional method, which observes that rote transmission without graduated understanding produces students who can reproduce formulations they do not comprehend, anticipates by six centuries the diagnosis that contemporary research offers of transmission pedagogy.¹¹

Most significant for the argument developed here is the classical treatment of juristic disagreement. The recognition that qualified scholars may reach divergent conclusions from the same sources, and the elaboration of norms governing how disagreement should be conducted, constitute a developed intellectual culture of principled pluralism internal to the tradition.¹² A student formed within this culture learns that holding a position and respecting a contrary one are compatible, not because truth is indifferent but because the epistemic conditions of legal reasoning make certainty about derivative rulings unattainable. This is a considerably stronger foundation for moderation than an appeal to social harmony, because it does not require the student to subordinate religious conviction to civic convenience.

The second body of literature concerns moral formation. Lickona's synthesis identifies three components of character moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action and argues that programmes addressing only the first are predictably ineffective.¹³ Noddings's ethic of care locates moral development in relationships of care and in the modelling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation through which caring is learned.¹⁴ Aristotle's account of habituation, which holds that dispositions are acquired through repeated action rather than through instruction, supplies the underlying principle that both accounts elaborate. Applied to moderation, the implication is direct: students become tolerant by repeatedly engaging with difference under conditions that make such engagement productive, not by being told that tolerance is a religious and national value.

The third body concerns intergroup relations. Allport's contact hypothesis, and its extensive subsequent testing, establishes that contact between groups reduces prejudice under specifiable conditions: equal status within the situation, common goals, intergroup

¹⁰ Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, n.d.), 1:48–62.

¹¹ Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddimah*, trans. Franz Rosenthal (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 3:300–310.

¹² Wael B. Hallaq, *An Introduction to Islamic Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 27–37.

¹³ Lickona, *Educating for Character*, 51–62.

¹⁴ Nel Noddings, *The Challenge to Care in Schools: An Alternative Approach to Education*, 2nd ed. (New York: Teachers College Press, 2005), 22–26.

cooperation, and institutional support.¹⁵ The meta-analytic evidence indicates that contact reduces prejudice even when the optimal conditions are not fully met, though the effect is larger when they are. Banks's work on multicultural education translates these findings into curricular terms, distinguishing levels of curricular integration and arguing that additive approaches the insertion of content about others into an otherwise unchanged curriculum produce weaker effects than transformative approaches that alter the structure of the curriculum itself.¹⁶ Sen's analysis of identity and violence adds a critical caution: approaches that address persons primarily as members of religious categories can entrench the singular identification that makes sectarian mobilisation possible.¹⁷

The theoretical gap this article addresses lies in the absence of an integration between the internal normative resources of the Islamic tradition and the design principles emerging from research on moral formation and intergroup relations. Each literature is substantial; their intersection is largely unexamined in the Indonesian context, with the consequence that moderation policy draws its justification from one register and its pedagogy from neither.

III. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs normative qualitative research combining a doctrinal analysis of Islamic legal methodology with a document analysis of the regulatory instruments governing Indonesian Islamic education. The combination is required by the research questions, which concern both what the state has prescribed and what the tradition supplies.

Three approaches are integrated. The statutory approach examines legislation and subordinate regulation governing religious education, pesantren, and the strengthening of religious moderation. The conceptual approach examines the categories through which moderation is articulated in both state instruments and Islamic normative scholarship, testing their compatibility and identifying points of translation. Islamic legal methodology is applied in its classical form: sources are read through the interpretive apparatus of *uṣūl*

¹⁵ Gordon W. Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (Cambridge: Addison-Wesley, 1954), 261–282; Thomas F. Pettigrew and Linda R. Tropp, "A Meta-Analytic Test of Intergroup Contact Theory," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 90, no. 5 (2006): 751–783.

¹⁶ James A. Banks, *Cultural Diversity and Education: Foundations, Curriculum, and Teaching*, 6th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2016), 30–45.

¹⁷ Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), 18–39.

al-fiqh, with attention to the objectives of the law, the recognition of qualified disagreement, and the relation between text and context.¹⁸

Legal and textual materials are organised in three tiers. Primary materials comprise the 1945 Constitution; Law Number 20 of 2003 on the National Education System; Law Number 18 of 2019 on Pesantren; Government Regulation Number 55 of 2007 on Religious Education and Religious Instruction; Presidential Regulation Number 58 of 2023 on Strengthening Religious Moderation; and Regulation of the Minister of Religious Affairs Number 183 of 2019 on the Curriculum of Islamic Religious Education and Arabic Language in Madrasah. Classical Islamic sources comprise the works of al-Shātibī, al-Ghazālī, and Ibn Khaldūn, consulted in their published Arabic editions and in established translations. Secondary materials comprise peer-reviewed scholarship in Islamic studies, education, and social psychology, together with authoritative monographs on Indonesian Islamic education.

Analysis proceeded through three stages. The regulatory corpus was first read and coded for its construction of moderation, distinguishing provisions that treat moderation as knowledge to be transmitted from those that treat it as a disposition to be formed. Classical sources were then analysed for normative resources bearing on plurality of interpretation, the ethics of disagreement, and the purposes of religious learning. Finally, the two analyses were brought into relation, and design principles were derived and tested for consistency with both the regulatory framework and the autonomy the Pesantren Law guarantees.¹⁹ The analysis is interpretive and its conclusions are offered as normative propositions; no claim is made about the distribution of attitudes in any student population.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Moderation as Content: The Construction in the Regulatory Corpus

The regulatory corpus constructs religious moderation predominantly as a set of transmissible attributes. The national framework identifies indicators commitment to the nation, tolerance, rejection of violence, and accommodation of local culture and directs institutions to integrate these into curricula, learning materials, and institutional culture.²⁰

¹⁸ Al-Shātibī, *al-Muwāfaqāt*, 2:6–25; Auda, *Maqasid al-Shariah*, 45–75.

¹⁹ Glenn A. Bowen, “Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method,” *Qualitative Research Journal* 9, no. 2 (2009): 27–40.

²⁰ Perpres Nomor 58 Tahun 2023, Pasal 5 dan Pasal 7; Kementerian Agama, *Moderasi Beragama*, 43–54.

Madrasah curriculum regulation incorporates moderation into the competencies of religious subjects and into the design of learning materials.²¹

This construction has three consequences that the analysis identifies as sources of implementation difficulty.

The first is assessability drift. Once moderation is expressed as curricular competence, it must be assessed; and what can be assessed at scale is knowledge of propositions about moderation. The measurement instrument then defines the object, and institutions optimise for the measurement. A student who can state that Islam is a religion of moderation, cite supporting texts, and identify intolerance in a hypothetical scenario will register as moderate on any feasible instrument, irrespective of disposition. This is the familiar pathology of values education, and the moderation programme has not been insulated against it.

The second is the displacement of formation by declaration. Institutional compliance is demonstrated through artefacts: banners, declarations, integration matrices, documented activities. These artefacts are cheap to produce and are not causally connected to the outcome. Their proliferation creates an appearance of implementation that reduces pressure for the more demanding changes that would actually bear on disposition.

The third, and most consequential, is the register of justification. The corpus justifies moderation predominantly in terms of national unity, social harmony, and public order. These are legitimate public purposes, and the state is entitled to pursue them. But for a student formed within a tradition that grounds normative claims in revelation and juristic reasoning, an argument from national unity does not reach the level at which religious conviction operates. Where a student perceives a conflict between what the tradition appears to require and what the state urges, an appeal to harmony will lose. Worse, the perception that moderation is a state project rather than a religious position supplies exclusivist actors with their most effective recruiting argument: that moderation is what the state wants believers to believe.

B. Internal Resources: Moderation as an Argument within the Tradition

The alternative is to ground moderation in reasoning internal to the tradition, where the resources are abundant and long-established.

²¹ Peraturan Menteri Agama Nomor 183 Tahun 2019 tentang Kurikulum Pendidikan Agama Islam dan Bahasa Arab pada Madrasah, Lampiran I.

The first resource is the doctrine of the objectives of the law. If the rulings of the *shari'ah* serve identifiable interests the preservation of religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property then interpretation that produces harm to these interests requires re-examination.²² This supplies an internal criterion against which exclusivist readings can be evaluated on religious rather than civic grounds. A pedagogy that trains students to ask what interest a ruling protects equips them with an analytical instrument, not merely a conclusion.

The second is the classical treatment of disagreement. The tradition's recognition that qualified jurists reach divergent conclusions, and its elaboration of the ethics governing disagreement, establishes principled pluralism as an internal norm.²³ The pedagogical implication is that a student should encounter the *madhāhib* not as a historical curiosity but as a live demonstration that faithful reasoning yields plural outcomes. A student who has worked through a genuine juristic disagreement, understood the reasoning on each side, and recognised the integrity of both has learned something about the structure of religious knowledge that no amount of exhortation to tolerance can supply.

The third is the ethics of inquiry. The classical disciplines governing scholarly debate prescribe how a claim should be examined, how an opponent's position should be represented before it is contested, and what dispositions the seeker of knowledge must cultivate.²⁴ This is, in contemporary terms, a developed pedagogy of argumentation with an explicit moral dimension. Its recovery would give Indonesian religious education a method for teaching disagreement that is both effective and unmistakably indigenous to the tradition.

Table 1. Two Registers of Justification for Religious Moderation

Aspect	State-Administrative Register	Internal-Traditional Register
Source of authority	Regulation and national consensus	Scriptural sources and juristic reasoning
Core justification	Social harmony and national integration	Objectives of the law; recognised plurality of qualified

²² Al-Shāṭibī, *al-Muwāfaqāt*, 2:8–17; Auda, *Maqasid al-Shariah*, 20–30.

²³ Hallaq, *An Introduction to Islamic Law*, 27–37.

²⁴ Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, 1:48–62.

Aspect	State-Administrative Register	Internal-Traditional Register
Pedagogical form	Transmission of moderation content; declarative activities	interpretation Structured engagement with juristic disagreement; ethics of inquiry
Mode of assessment	Knowledge of propositions; documentary evidence	Quality of reasoning about contested questions
Characteristic vulnerability	Perceived as external imposition	Requires teacher capability in classical method

Source: Author's analysis of regulatory instruments and classical sources, 2026.

C. Pesantren Autonomy and the Limits of Regulatory Instruments

The Pesantren Law creates a specific structural condition for moderation policy. It recognises the pesantren's distinctive tradition and guarantees its autonomy in determining curriculum and method, while also articulating a function in developing citizens committed to the nation.²⁵ These provisions are not contradictory, but their combination sets a real limit: the state may support, facilitate, and fund, but it may not direct the substance of religious instruction without unsettling the legal and historical basis of the institution's independence.

This limit is frequently treated in policy discussion as an obstacle. The analysis here suggests it is an asset, for two reasons. First, the historical record indicates that the pesantren tradition has absorbed and reshaped external agendas most successfully when the agenda could be rendered in terms internal to the tradition, and has resisted most firmly when it arrived as administrative direction.²⁶ Second, the authority that can actually form disposition in a pesantren is the authority of the *kyai* and the scholarly chain, not the authority of a ministerial instrument. Policy that attempts to bypass this authority forfeits the only mechanism through which its aims could be realised.

²⁵ Undang-Undang Nomor 18 Tahun 2019, Pasal 3, Pasal 5, dan Pasal 27.

²⁶ Hefner, *Making Modern Muslims*, 55–92; Ronald Lukens-Bull, *A Peaceful Jihad: Negotiating Identity and Modernity in Muslim Java* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 45–78.

The implication for policy design is that the state's most effective instruments are indirect: investment in the scholarly capability of teachers, support for the publication and circulation of works within the tradition that develop moderate readings, funding for inter-institutional scholarly exchange, and the removal of material constraints that push institutions toward dependence on external patronage. The Pesantren Endowment Fund, insofar as it strengthens institutional independence, is more likely to serve moderation than any curricular directive.²⁷

D. Designing Formation: From Content to Practice

If moderation is a disposition rather than a body of knowledge, its formation requires practices rather than materials. Four design principles follow from the theoretical framework.

The first is the systematic teaching of disagreement. Students should work regularly with genuine contested questions within the tradition, reconstruct the strongest version of each position from its sources, and identify the interpretive moves that generate divergence. This practice develops the capacity that moderation actually requires: holding a considered position while recognising the integrity of a contrary one. It is also, unlike moderation content, intellectually demanding enough to command the respect of able students, whose disengagement from values education is a chronic and underexamined problem.

The second is structured encounter under supportive conditions. Where contact with religiously different others occurs, it should be organised to satisfy the conditions the evidence identifies equal status in the situation, shared goals, cooperative interdependence, and visible institutional support.²⁸ Encounters that are ceremonial, hierarchical, or framed as demonstrations of tolerance for external observers do not satisfy these conditions and should not be expected to produce effects.

The third is the modelling of moderate practice by teachers. The evidence on moral formation consistently identifies modelling as the most powerful mechanism available, and its corollary is that a teacher who delivers moderation content while speaking dismissively of other schools of thought teaches the latter.²⁹ This places teacher formation at the centre of any credible programme, and it requires capability in classical method rather than familiarity with policy documents.

²⁷ Peraturan Presiden Nomor 82 Tahun 2021 tentang Dana Abadi Pesantren, Pasal 2–3.

²⁸ Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice*, 281; Pettigrew and Tropp, "A Meta-Analytic Test," 766–770.

²⁹ Noddings, *The Challenge to Care in Schools*, 22–26; Lickona, *Educating for Character*, 71–90.

The fourth is the avoidance of singular identification. Curricular and institutional practice should address students in the plurality of their affiliations as members of a scholarly tradition, a locality, a profession-in-form, a national community rather than reinforcing the reduction of persons to a single religious category.³⁰ This principle cuts against a common design instinct in moderation programming, which is to organise activities explicitly around religious difference; such framing can strengthen precisely the categorical salience it seeks to soften.

E. Institutional and Policy Implications

Three implications follow for institutional practice. First, assessment should shift from measuring knowledge of moderation to evaluating the quality of students' reasoning about contested questions, since the latter is closer to the disposition sought and considerably harder to simulate. Second, institutional investment should be redirected from declarative activities toward teacher capability in classical method and in the pedagogy of argumentation, which is the binding constraint in most institutions. Third, moderation should be integrated into the substantive study of legal and theological subjects rather than delivered as a parallel programme, since a parallel programme signals that moderation is additional to the tradition rather than constitutive of its method precisely the impression the policy should avoid creating.

At the level of policy, the analysis suggests a reconsideration of the register in which moderation is publicly articulated. The state has legitimate reasons to speak of harmony and integration, and it will continue to do so. But its educational instruments would gain considerably in effectiveness if they also made available, and funded the development of, the argument from within the tradition which is stronger on its own terms, more durable because it does not depend on the credibility of state authority in religious matters, and immune to the charge that moderation is a political preference dressed in religious language.

A final caution is warranted. Nothing in this analysis implies that all positions within the tradition are equally defensible, or that the pedagogy proposed is neutral among outcomes. A student trained to examine the interests a ruling protects, to represent opposing arguments fairly, and to recognise the conditions of valid inference will find certain exclusivist positions harder to sustain, because those positions typically depend on suppressing exactly these operations. The claim is not that critical method guarantees

³⁰ Sen, *Identity and Violence*, 18–39.

moderate conclusions, but that it removes the epistemic conditions on which exclusivism most often relies.

A further institutional implication concerns the relationship between religious education and the wider curriculum. Where moderation is confined to religious subjects, students learn that questions of plurality belong to a specialised domain rather than to the ordinary conduct of intellectual life. The classical tradition did not partition knowledge in this way, and there is no pedagogical reason to do so now. The habits at issue reconstructing an opposing argument accurately, distinguishing what a claim rests on from what it asserts, recognising where reasonable people may differ are equally constitutive of competent work in history, law, science, and civic deliberation. Institutions that cultivate these habits across the curriculum give the religious-education programme a supporting environment; institutions that do not require the religious teacher to build, unaided, dispositions that every other lesson quietly contradicts.

Finally, the governance of these programmes deserves attention in its own right. Moderation programming is currently evaluated through instruments that count activities and record institutional declarations, and what is evaluated shapes what is produced. An evaluation regime that instead sampled the quality of students' reasoning on contested questions through moderated assessment of written argument, for example, or through structured scholarly disputation judged against explicit criteria would be more demanding to administer but would measure something closer to the object. It would also, by its nature, resist the documentary substitution that currently absorbs so much institutional effort, since the quality of an argument cannot be manufactured by an administrator on the eve of an inspection.

F. Comparative Perspectives and Objections Considered

Placing the Indonesian approach alongside comparable programmes elsewhere clarifies both its distinctiveness and the objections it must answer. Several Muslim-majority states have adopted educational moderation agendas over the past two decades, and the comparative record is instructive precisely because it is mixed.

Programmes that have relied primarily on curricular revision and centralised messaging have generally produced measurable change in what students say and limited change in what they do. The reason is not mysterious: revised textbooks alter the propositions available to students without altering the relationships, authorities, and practices through which their religious dispositions are actually formed. Where the informal curriculum the attitudes modelled by teachers, the treatment of minority

positions in classroom talk, the tone of institutional life remains unchanged, the formal curriculum is received as the official account and the informal one as the real one. Indonesian policy is vulnerable to the same dynamic, and its vulnerability is heightened by the volume of documentary compliance the programme generates.

Programmes that have invested in the scholarly formation of teachers have fared better, though their effects are slower and harder to evidence within a policy cycle. The mechanism appears to be that a teacher who has worked seriously within classical method possesses the intellectual resources to respond to a student's hard question rather than deflecting it, and deflection is what persuades able students that the moderate position is intellectually weak. This observation deserves emphasis because it inverts a common assumption in programme design: the most dangerous moment for moderation is not the encounter with an extremist text but the encounter with a teacher who cannot answer a serious objection to the moderate reading.

Three objections to the argument advanced here should be addressed directly.

The first objection holds that grounding moderation in juristic tradition risks legitimating the authority of classical jurisprudence in a manner that may produce illiberal outcomes on other questions. The objection has force, and the response must be candid. The argument here is not that classical tradition reliably generates liberal conclusions; it plainly does not on a range of contested issues. The argument is narrower: that within the epistemic structure of Islamic legal reasoning, the recognition of qualified disagreement is not an external liberal graft but a constitutive feature, and that a pedagogy which makes that feature operative has better prospects of forming the disposition the policy seeks than one which does not. Whether the same tradition supplies satisfactory answers to other normative questions is a separate inquiry, and one that this article neither forecloses nor resolves.

The second objection holds that emphasising disagreement may produce relativism rather than moderation students who conclude that because scholars differ, nothing can be known. This is a real pedagogical risk, and it is the reason the classical framework matters more than a general commitment to plurality. The tradition does not treat disagreement as evidence that inquiry is futile; it treats disagreement as a predictable consequence of reasoning under conditions where certainty attaches to foundational matters and probability to derivative rulings. Teaching disagreement without teaching this distinction would indeed risk relativism. Teaching it with the distinction produces something quite different: a student who understands why certain questions admit plural defensible

answers and others do not, which is a considerably more sophisticated epistemic position than either dogmatism or relativism.

The third objection is practical. The pedagogy proposed is demanding, and the teaching workforce capable of delivering it is smaller than the system requires. This is correct, and it is the principal constraint on implementation. Two responses are available. The first is sequencing: institutions with existing scholarly depth should be supported to develop and document usable classroom models before wider dissemination is attempted, on the understanding that premature scaling of a practice that has not been made teachable is the characteristic failure mode of Indonesian educational reform. The second is honesty about time horizons. A programme that builds scholarly capability will show little measurable effect within a single policy cycle and substantial effect over a decade. Policy architecture that cannot tolerate this profile will continue to select for declarative activity, because declarative activity produces evidence immediately.

A final comparative observation concerns the digital environment, which has altered the conditions under which all of this operates. Students now encounter religious argument primarily through platforms that reward confident, simplified, and emotionally charged content, and that systematically disadvantage the qualified, conditional reasoning characteristic of juristic method.³¹ This asymmetry means that religious education can no longer assume it is the primary formative influence, and that its task includes equipping students to evaluate the religious claims they meet outside the classroom. A pedagogy centred on the analysis of reasoning what a claim rests on, what qualifications its author holds, what interests an interpretation serves is directly responsive to that task in a way that a pedagogy centred on moderation content is not.

V. CONCLUSION

This article has examined why religious moderation policy in Indonesian Islamic education has produced extensive institutional activity without commensurate evidence of dispositional change, and has located the explanation in the construction of moderation as transmissible content justified in an administrative register.

In response to the first research question, the regulatory corpus constructs moderation as a set of assessable attributes to be integrated into curricula, a construction that generates assessability drift, displacement of formation by declaration, and a justificatory register that does not reach the level at which religious conviction operates. In

³¹ Hefner, *Making Modern Muslims*, 1–39; van Bruinessen, *Contemporary Developments in Indonesian Islam*, 1–20.

response to the second, the Islamic legal and educational tradition supplies substantial internal resources the objectives of the law as a criterion for evaluating interpretation, the recognition of qualified juristic disagreement as principled pluralism, and a developed ethics of inquiry which together ground moderation more securely than an appeal to social harmony. In response to the third, the design implied is a pedagogy of structured disagreement, contact organised under the conditions the evidence specifies, modelling by capable teachers, and the avoidance of singular religious identification, pursued through indirect state instruments consistent with the autonomy that the Pesantren Law guarantees.

The theoretical implication is that policies of moral formation must be analysed in terms of the register in which they are justified, not only the content they prescribe: a justification that does not operate within the normative framework of its intended audience will be formally accepted and substantively inert. The practical implications are addressed to ministries, which should redirect investment from declarative programming toward teacher scholarly capability; to institutions, which should integrate moderation into substantive disciplinary study rather than delivering it in parallel; and to teacher educators, who should treat classical method and the pedagogy of argumentation as core professional preparation.

Further research should pursue three directions: empirical study of whether structured engagement with juristic disagreement produces measurable differences in students' responses to contested questions; comparative analysis of moderation programming across systems with differing degrees of institutional autonomy; and textual work recovering the classical disciplines of scholarly debate in a form usable by contemporary madrasah and pesantren teachers.

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