

Transforming Multicultural Islamic Curriculum for Religious Moderation and Global Peace

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ABSTRACT

D Amid increasing ideological polarization and global extremism, Islamic education plays a crucial role in cultivating peace. Although prior research has extensively explored the theological concepts of moderation (*wasathiyah*), current literature remains trapped within rigid epistemic dichotomies. The critical research gap systematically overlooked by previous studies is the lack of operational integration between the Independent Curriculum (*Kurikulum Merdeka*) reforms in formal schools which are often studied in isolation as technical-administrative state instruments and the organic ecosystem of traditional Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), which are frequently romanticized in a partial manner. Furthermore, a conceptual void persists regarding the operationalization of an inclusive curriculum that bridges classical sufistic ethics with 21st-century digital media resilience. This study is required to bridge the gap between macro-level policy idealism and micro-level realities on the ground. Employing a qualitative library research method with a content analysis approach toward 22 core literatures (2020–2026), the results formulate a multidimensional roadmap through integrative curriculum reconstruction (*Bayani, Burhani, Irfani*), institutional management based on cross-identity dialogue, and the digitization of peace narratives. Critical analysis reveals an emerging systemic vulnerability: a culture of absolute theological obedience (*sami'na wa atha'na*) among junior students that leaves them susceptible to manipulation within digital echo chambers. Theoretically, this study contributes by positioning religious moderation as a transformative, adaptive epistemological paradigm oriented toward universal benevolence (*Rahmatan Lil 'Alamin*).

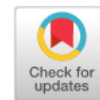
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INTRODUCTION

The escalation of global tensions triggered by religio-political sentiments demands a fundamental reconstruction of the way Islamic educational institutions position themselves in the public sphere. Epistemologically, the primary challenge faced is how to bridge the conservatism of religious texts with the demands for progressiveness in an increasingly pluralistic era (Islamy, 2022; Sovinata, 2021). This is not merely a technical problem of teaching methodology; rather, it concerns the revitalization of Islamic *wasathiyah* (moderation) reasoning capable of contextualizing the universal messages of peace within the Qur'an and Sunnah (Halim et al., 2022). Contemporary Islamic education must be able to address the criticisms of exclusivism by presenting narratives that prioritize humanity over dogmatic differences, ensuring that religion functions as a liberating and unifying force rather than a divisive mechanism (Sari et al., 2023; Yahya et al., 2025). The success of synergizing religious visions with global frameworks, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), will serve as a key parameter for the extent to which Islamic education can contribute to the stability of world civilization (Muntoha, 2024).

In Indonesia's domestic context, the dynamics of multiculturalism are frequently confronted with the phenomenon of "religious tribalism," which threatens national integration. This fragmentation is further exacerbated by educational segregation, which fosters the growth of exclusive communities devoid of adequate cross-identity interaction (Ikhwan et al., 2023; Yanto et al., 2023). Consequently, when political tensions or sensitive issues arise, society is easily fragmented into mutually suspicious groups. In such a scenario,

educational institutions emerge as highly strategic actors in the mainstreaming of religious moderation. Schools and *pesantrens* (Islamic boarding schools) are not merely sites for knowledge transfer; they serve as spaces for intensive social interaction where the character of the younger generation is forged during crucial developmental phases. As the frontline defense, educational institutions possess the structural and pedagogical authority to dismantle prejudices from an early stage. Therefore, religious moderation must not be perceived merely as political rhetoric; it must be internalized as a cultural competence for every student through the development of broad religious literacy skills (Manullang, 2025; Raidhatun Nisa, 2025). Within this framework, multicultural Islamic education operates as a social laboratory where values of tolerance are tested through interactive dialogue and real-world collaboration to solve societal problems (Arifin & Huda, 2024; Solihin & Hakim, 2024).

The threats to social cohesion are further complicated by the challenges posed by digital radicalization. In the contemporary information age, narratives of hate, intolerance, and extremism can easily inundate the cognitive space of the younger generation through social media algorithms designed to reinforce confirmation bias (Hefni, 2020). The dissemination patterns of radical ideologies no longer depend on clandestine physical meetings; instead, they operate tactically online through persuasive and manipulative visual content. This boundless and anonymous digital space frequently exploits the vulnerable religious enthusiasm of youth. Consequently, Islamic education is compelled to look beyond face-to-face classroom instruction and actively cultivate digital resilience among students, enabling them to filter out biased and provocative religious information (Aminy et al., 2024; Febriana, 2024). In this regard, the role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) expands significantly: it transforms from being a mere provider of dogmatic knowledge into a moral navigator that guides students through the wilderness of global information, thereby nurturing global citizens with high social empathy and active agency for peace (Agustiniingsih et al., 2024; Arikarani, Azman, Aisyah, & ..., 2024; Ilham Als, 2025; Shoffiyah Salsabil, 2025).

Managerially and institutionally, the transformation of Islamic education toward a more moderate paradigm in Indonesia is underpinned by two major pillars: formal curriculum policy and the traditional ecosystem. In the formal sector, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum (*Kurikulum Merdeka*), featuring the project to strengthen the Pancasila Student Profile, provides a solid juridical foundation for schools to explore more humanistic and democratic learning methods (Abas et al., 2025; Abdul Azis, 2024). PAI teachers are now required to act as facilitators of dialogue who can unravel the complexities of differing opinions (*khilafiyah*) without imposing a single, rigid truth (Hanan & Rahmat, 2023; Suprpto, 2020). Transparent and inclusive school management is paramount to ensuring that the values of moderation transcend theory on paper and become an institutionalized school culture lived out by all school members (Sumarto & Harahap, 2019; Tobondo, 2025a). On the other hand, the resilience of Islamic moderation in Indonesia cannot be separated from the institutional role of pondok pesantrens, which have historically practiced moderation through the tradition of studying classical texts (*kitab kuning*) that highly respect intellectual diversity (Khotimah & Sa'i, 2020). Pesantrens act as ideological fortresses that maintain a balance between tradition (*Al-Muhafadzatu 'ala Qadimi al-Shalih*) and innovation (*Al-Akhdzu bi al-Jadidi al-Ashlah*) (Hanan & Rahmat, 2023; Sumarto & Harahap, 2019). Internalizing moderation through Sufism and ethics, as taught by Imam al-Ghazali, introduces an emotional and spiritual touch that allows the values of peace to permeate the deepest character of the students, serving as an effective antidote to the viruses of radicalism and blind fanaticism (Ikmal, 2020; Irmawati & Mardiana, 2024; Nasri & Tabibuddin, 2023; Nasrowi, 2020).

Although a synthesis of the latest literature (2020–2026) indicates that the success of religious moderation depends heavily on the synergy between macro government policies, the pedagogical readiness of educators, and institutional cultural support (Abas, Arif, et al., 2025; Tobondo, 2025), a critical research gap remains unaddressed by previous studies.

To date, existing literature has systematically overlooked the operational integration between the newly enforced Independent Curriculum in formal schools and the traditional pesantren ecosystem within a single, unified pedagogical framework. Current research suffers

from a rigid epistemic dichotomy: one side focuses almost exclusively on national formal curriculum reforms as technical-administrative instruments of the state, while the other side examines pesantrens in isolation, often romanticizing historical *kitab kuning* studies or localized sufistic spiritual experiences. There is a distinct lack of empirical research investigating how the structural flexibility of the Independent Curriculum can be seamlessly wedded to the organic, community-based ecosystem of pesantrens. Furthermore, while previous literature extensively defines the theological concept of wasathiyah or maps out taxonomies of digital radicalization threats, it fails to provide a concrete, multi-dimensional execution roadmap. Prior researchers have treated religious moderation and digital polarization as isolated variables; they recognize the surge in digital radicalism and identify *wasathiyah* as the antidote, yet they leave a conceptual vacuum regarding *how* to operationalize an inclusive curriculum that bridges classical sufistic ethics with 21st century digital resilience and media literacy.

Consequently, this research exists to bridge the widening gap between macro-policy idealism and the micro realities of implementation within classrooms and boarding schools. By offering a comprehensive, actionable roadmap that integrates localized wisdom, sufistic values, and the rigorous demands of modern multiculturalism, this article intentionally moves beyond isolated case studies or purely speculative theological arguments. Through a systematic and descriptive content analysis of contemporary literature, this study dissects the multi layered dynamics of internalizing religious moderation via three integrated strategic pathways: inclusive curriculum reconstruction, intercultural dialogue-based school management, and the digitization of peace narratives. This article makes a substantial and timely contribution to the enrichment of contemporary Islamic education theories repositioning them as an adaptive, transformative, and active paradigm oriented toward universal benefit (*Rahmatan Lil 'Alamin*).

METHOD

This qualitative library research focuses on an in-depth analysis of scientific literature concerning the internalization of religious moderation within Islamic education (Shoffiyah Salsabil, 2025). To ensure high data relevance to the ongoing transformation of the Independent Curriculum (*Kurikulum Merdeka*) and the contemporary *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) ecosystem in Indonesia (Abas et al., 2025; Abdul Azis, 2024) the literature was compiled electronically using the *Publish or Perish* (PoP) software. The data search explored four reputable databases Scopus, Web of Science (WoS), Google Scholar, and Dimensions by applying a combination of the following keywords: "*religious moderation*" AND "*Islamic education*" AND "*multiculturalism*" AND "*peace education*". During the initial identification phase, this search query successfully retrieved a total of 500 potential literary documents.

This extensive initial corpus was subsequently filtered through a strict set of inclusion and exclusion criteria. The first screening phase subjected the 500 documents to a rapid appraisal based on their titles and abstracts to eliminate redundant articles, non-peer reviewed papers, popular articles, and publications outside the 2020–2025 chronological boundary. This initial selection narrowed the database down to 85 generally relevant articles. Following this, a second screening phase involving a full-text review was conducted to ensure deep substantive alignment. Documents excluded at this stage were those that only superficially mentioned moderation without a core focus on Islamic curriculum implementation, sufistic ethics, or digital resilience. This multi-tiered screening process ultimately narrowed the corpus down to 22 core references characterized by the highest theoretical relevance and significant citation metrics.

The 22 selected references were then classified into four primary analytical clusters: philosophical foundations (Nasri & Tabibuddin, 2023; Nasrowi, 2020) curriculum policies (Maharani & Rahmani, 2023; Suprpto, 2020) institutional ecosystem management (Maharani & Rahmani, 2023; Suprpto, 2020) and digital challenges (Hefni, 2020; Ikmal, 2022). Data analysis was operationalized using a descriptive-analytical content analysis

method through systematic steps comprising text unit coding, categorizing, theme development, and in-depth interpretation to formulate a practical moderation roadmap (Halimah et al., 2024; Muntoha, 2024b; Patih et al., 2023). To ensure data trustworthiness and validity, this study employed a data source triangulation technique by critically confronting various literary perspectives, spanning classical sufistic epistemology to current constitutional policies of the Independent Curriculum (Abdul Azis, 2024; Nasri & Tabibuddin, 2023).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Reconstruction of the Epistemology of Religious Moderation in Islamic Education

The internalization of religious moderation within educational institutions must transcend mere curriculum formalities or bureaucratic jargon; rather, it must commence with a fundamental reconstruction at the most baseline epistemological level. Contemporary Islamic education is frequently caught in a sharp dichotomy between a textualist scripturalist reasoning that tends to be rigid, literal, and ahistorical, and a liberal-secularistic reasoning that loses its transcendental anchor and becomes detached from the roots of revelatory tradition. The results of the literary discourse analysis demonstrate that religious moderation (*Wasathiyah*) serves not merely as a pragmatic social ethic or a political strategy, but as an epistemological solution that harmoniously and proportionately balances the authority of revelation (*Naql*) and the sovereignty of reason (*Aql*) (Islamy, 2022; Sovinata, 2021).

Theoretically, this reconstruction reflects Jack Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory through the deconstruction of erroneous cognitive assumptions and the restructuring of cognitive frames of reference. Through this paradigm, Islamic education transforms from a repressive, one-way process of indoctrination into an active dialectical process between the absolute, eternal messages of the sacred text and a multicultural, dynamic social reality (Basid & Halimi, 2023; Islamy & Susilo, 2022). Operationally, this is achieved by interconnecting three epistemological domains: *Bayani* (text as guidance), *Burhani* (reason as an operational framework), and *Irfani* (spirituality as a mitigating and softening element in implementation) (Nasri & Tabibuddin, 2023).

Philosophically, this reconstruction is deeply rooted in Imam al-Ghazali's sufistic ethics concerning *Tazkiyatun Nafs* (purification of the soul) and the integration of sharia (legal aspect), tarekat (methodological-spiritual path), and hakikat (essential truth), which prioritizes universal compassion (*Rahmah*) over group fanaticism (Irmawati & Mardiana, 2024; Nasri & Tabibuddin, 2023). Al-Ghazali asserts that knowledge unaccompanied by gentleness (*lathafah*) only breeds intellectual arrogance and sparks social division. Locally in Indonesia, this concept finds its practical manifestation in the "Indigenization of Islam" (*Pribumisasi Islam*) proposed by KH. Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur), which positions humanity above narrow identity politics (Nasrowi, 2020). This inclusive model of Islamic education guides students to perceive diversity as the divine will (*sunnatullah*) and shifts the educational paradigm from a rigid absolute truth claim toward a dialogical truth (Arikarani, Azman, Aisyah, Ansyah, et al., 2024; Ilham Alsi, 2025). This integration of science and religion expands students' horizons of thought, enabling them to distinguish between unalterable religious principles (*tsawabit*) and dynamic interpretations (*mutaghayyirat*), thereby equipping them with Critical Religious Literacy and cognitive immunity against radical narratives (Ikmal, 2020; Suprpto, 2020; Tobondo, 2025).

However, in practical terms, this epistemological reconstruction faces severe ideological resistance from conservative literalist groups who suspect that the concepts of dialogical truth and epistemological integration are forms of "doctrinal dilution" or a disguised Western-driven secularization agenda. This barrier is further exacerbated by the continued dominance of rote learning cultures within madrasas, which structurally shackles students' critical thinking and impedes their capacity to delineate foundational dogma from dynamic, contextual interpretations.

The dimensions of this epistemological reconstruction are visually summarized below:

Table 1: Reconstruction of the Epistemology of Moderate Islamic Education (*Wasathiyah*)

Dimension	Dichotomous Reason (Old)	Moderate Paradigm (<i>Wasathiyah</i>)	Theoretical Connection	Primary References
Logic of Thinking	Rigid Textualist-Scripturalist vs Liberal-Secularistic.	Harmonization between the Authority of Revelation (<i>Naql</i>) & the Sovereignty of Reason (<i>Aql</i>).	<i>Transformative Learning</i> (Mezirow): Reconstruction of frames of reference.	Islamy (2022); Sovinata (2021)
Method of Knowledge	Partial/ Atomistic (Focusing on text or logic in isolation).	Integration-Interconnection: A combination of <i>Bayani</i> , <i>Burhani</i> , & <i>Irfani</i> reasoning.	Integrative Epistemology: Eliminating the dichotomy between secular sciences and religious knowledge.	Hefni (2020); Nasri & Tabibuddin (2023)
Educational Character	Dogmatic, repressive, and one-way indoctrination.	Active-contextual dialectic between sacred texts and dynamic realities.	Emancipatory Approach: Students as critical interpreters of knowledge.	Halim et al. (2022)
Philosophical Foundation	Group fanaticism and intellectual arrogance.	Compassion (<i>Rahmah</i>): Focus on <i>Tazkiyatun Nafs</i> & social empathy.	Sufistic Ethics: Knowledge as a means of softening the soul, not dividing society.	Al-Ghazali; Irmawati & Mardiana (2024)
Social Orientation	Exclusivism and closed absolute truth claims.	Progressive Inclusivism: Championing human dignity over identity politics.	Theological Humanism: Religion as a unifying and liberating instrument.	Gus Dur; Nasr (2020)
Intellectual Capacity	Memorizing textual arguments (<i>rote learning</i>) devoid of context.	Critical Religious Literacy: Deconstructing radical narratives via <i>Maqashid Sharia</i> .	Cognitive Immunity: Critical filtering against religious disinformation and hoaxes.	Ikmal (2022); Tobondo (2022)

Pesantren as the Epicenter of Moderate Character Education

Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) are not merely the oldest Islamic educational institutions in the Indonesian archipelago rather; they constitute a unique sociocultural and religious entity that is methodologically and philosophically rooted as a primary bastion of religious moderation (*Wasathiyah*). When viewed through the lens of Social Cohesion Theory, *pesantren* function as vital socio-educational spaces that facilitate both *bonding* social capital among internally diverse student bodies and *bridging* social capital that connects the institution to a pluralistic wider society. The fundamental strength of the *pesantren* lies in its historical ability to maintain a harmonious dialectic between the preservation of viable classical traditions (*Al-Muhafadzatu 'ala Qaddimi al-Shalih*) and the courage to adapt and innovate progressively for the public good (*Al-Akhdzu bi al-Jadidi al-Ashlah*) (Khotimah & Sa'i, 2020; Riyanti, 2023). Moderate character within this environment is not forged through topdown political slogans or brief indoctrination instead it is organically sustained through four systemic pillars the pluralistic epistemology of the classical texts (*turats/kitab kuning*), the pedagogical exemplarity of the Kiai, the sociology of inclusive-communal dormitory life, and structural institutional independence (Hanan & Rahmat, 2023; Sumarto & Harahap, 2019).

The epistemology of *pesantren*, which relies dynamically on the systematic study of *kitab kuning*, provides a robust cognitive foundation against extremist ideologies. From an early stage, students (*santri*) are exposed to the structured methods of *Ikhtilaf* (scholarly divergence of opinion) among classical Islamic jurists across various schools of thought (*mazhab*). Through the *Sorogan* method (individualized text-reading guidance) that sharpens textual accuracy, and the *Bandongan* method (collective lectures) that expands contextual insights, *santri* are trained to navigate multi-dimensional legal alternatives and interpretative layers. Furthermore, the tradition of democratic deliberation known as *Bahtsul Masail* trains students in rigorous textual criticism and contemporary contextual analysis. In this forum, a legal

question cannot be answered by isolated literalism; it must be rigorously debated using diverse multi-century references. This tradition directly fosters an ontological awareness that religious interpretation outside the immutable core tenets (*ushul*) possesses a broad and fluid spectrum. Consequently, mutual tolerance (*Tasamuh*) evolves into a naturally grounded intellectual competence (Habibie et al., 2021; Khotimah & Sa'i, 2020), instilling a high degree of "cognitive immunity" that shields students from the rigid truth claims that typically serve as gateways to radicalism (Agustin Sri Ningsih et al., 2024; Ikmal, 2020).

Sociologically, the *pesantren* operates as a "total institution," playing a crucial role in the psychosocial internalization of moderate values. For 24 hours a day, *santri* from diverse ethnic groups, geographical regions, local languages, and socio-economic strata coexist within a singular, shared living ecosystem. This residential dynamic serves as a tangible operationalization of peaceful co-existence. Within this space, moderation is lived out through the traditional practices of *Khidmat* (selfless devotion to the community) and *Roan* (communal sanitation and maintenance work), teaching students to actively subordinate personal egos to collective wellbeing. Furthermore, *pesantren* often lead grassroots deradicalization initiatives through a theological-humanist paradigm. Rather than marginalizing individuals exposed to extremist groups, *pesantren* provide a compassionate "safe space" (*Rahmah*) to dialogue and deconstruct radical thinking (Hanan & Rahmat, 2023; Ikmal, 2020). The inherent sociology of the institution reinforces the understanding that brotherhood spans three vital concentric circles: fraternal Islamic brotherhood (*ukhuwah Islamiyah*), national brotherhood (*ukhuwah wathaniyah*), and universal human brotherhood (*ukhuwah basyariyah*) (Nasri & Tabibuddin, 2023b; Sumarto & Harahap, 2019).

Kiai Authority and the Hidden Curriculum

The role of the Kiai as the center of spiritual, intellectual, and social gravity is the primary linchpin for the successful internalization of *Wasathiyah* (moderation) within the *pesantren* ecosystem. Viewed through Jack Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory, the Kiai's charismatic leadership acts as a cognitive trigger for students (*santri*) to reconstruct their religious frames of reference through critical reflection on the Kiai's moral exemplarity (*Uswah Hasanah*) within a pluralistic society. This inclusive stance toward diversity and localized wisdom serves as a highly effective hidden curriculum, embedding moderation into the students' psychological framework far more permanently than formalized textual memorization (Arifin & Huda, 2024; Sumarto & Harahap, 2019). Concurrently, Social Cohesion Theory demonstrates that the Kiai's structural authority reinforces bridging social capital, positioning the *pesantren* as a neutral mediator and a safe space for local conflict resolution aimed at the public good (*al-maslahah al-ammah*) and sustainable peacebuilding (Tobondo, 2025).

However, critical analysis reveals that this centralized model of charismatic authority harbors profound systemic vulnerabilities. Due to a culture of absolute theological obedience (*sami'na wa atha'na*), the Kiai's unilateral power can function as an institutional double-edged sword; in the absence of institutionalized check-and-balance mechanisms, any ideological infiltration by radical-transnational networks into the figure of the Kiai can rapidly re-engineer the entire *pesantren* ecosystem toward intolerance. Furthermore, this extreme reliance on a singular figure induces structural fragility regarding institutional sustainability. Upon the Kiai's demise, the *pesantren* is highly susceptible to acute leadership crises or ideological fragmentation among successors, threatening to stall the organic transmission of moderate values.

National Loyalty and Ideological Resilience

Socio-politically, Indonesian Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) demonstrate an unconditional allegiance to the foundational national consensus (Pancasila, the 1945 Constitution, NKRI, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*) that is deeply rooted in the inclusive citizenship identity dimension of Multicultural Education Theory. Guided by a moderate framework of political jurisprudence (*Fiqh Siyasa*), religious loyalty synergizes seamlessly with national

commitment; here, nationalism is conceptualized as a manifestation of faith (*hubbul wathan minal iman*), and safeguarding the state is viewed as an integral component of preserving religion (*hifdz ad-din*) (Nasrowi, 2020). Self-reliant economic independence combined with an authoritative, unbroken chain of intellectual-spiritual transmission (*sanad*) provides *pesantren* with high ideological resilience against the infiltration of transnational extremism. This synergy of the Kiai's authority, pluralistic *turats* literacy, and residential tradition not only produces religiously competent scholars (*tafaqquh fiddin*) but also cultivates inclusive citizens who actively contribute to grassroots peacebuilding within a fragmented world (Arikarani, Azman, Aisyah, Ansyah, et al., 2024; Hanan & Rahmat, 2023; Khotimah, 2020; Tobondo, 2025).

However, critical analysis reveals a new point of vulnerability resulting from the penetration of contemporary digital disinformation. Physical isolation no longer guarantees cognitive immunity for students (*santri*), as information technology delivers transnational ideologies directly into their hands via personal devices. A lack of adequate digital media literacy in traditional *pesantren* leaves students susceptible to internet echo chambers, which erode their balanced character (*tawazun*) through the propagation of sectarian hoaxes. Furthermore, external conservative groups frequently exploit global injustice narratives to trigger political radicalization among younger students. Consequently, a culture of absolute obedience devoid of critical thinking training at the junior level creates a severe risk of manipulation by partial jihadist narratives online, quietly undermining the national commitment painstakingly taught by the Kiai offline.

Islamic Education as an Instrument of Global Peace and Conflict Resolution

The ultimate expected impact of internalizing religious moderation is the transformation of learners into active peace agents. Rooted in Peace Education Theory, education serves as an instrument of social reconstruction to eradicate structural and cultural violence. Literary discourse analysis demonstrates that aligning the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum with universal principles positions Indonesian Islamic education as a strategic partner in achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Goal 16, which champions peace, justice, and strong institutions (Basid & Halimi, 2023; Muntoha, 2024).

On an international scale, this paradigm has emerged as a global reference point for an expression of Islam that is compatible with democracy, human rights, and scientific progress (Yahya et al., 2025). Graduates are equipped with Religious Cultural Intelligence, enabling them to interact effectively across faiths without compromising their theological identity (Basid & Halimi, 2023). This competence serves as vital social capital in Second Path Diplomacy, where academics and religious leaders actively participate in defusing international tensions through intercultural dialogue (Solihin & Hakim, 2024).

At the operational level, Islamic educational institutions hold a moral mandate to deconstruct and rectify theological terms frequently co-opted by extremist groups—such as *Jihad*, *Kafir*, *Thaghut*, and *Hijrah*—re-framing them within proportional and contextual parameters (Ikmal, 2020). This education-based deradicalization strategy is profoundly effective because it engages the deepest cognitive layers through the value of universal human brotherhood (*Ukhuwah Basyariyah*) (Ilham Als, 2025). Furthermore, integrating local wisdom and cultural arts into the learning process establishes a grassroots peacebuilding model that sociologically and psychologically mitigates potential conflicts (Yosita et al., 2023).

However, critical analysis reveals that the ambition to position Indonesian Islamic education as an instrument of global peace continuously collides with macro-regulatory constraints and ideological resistance. In the international arena, the Indonesian moderation model is frequently critiqued by the wider global Muslim community as being overly localized (*Indonesiacentric*), rendering it difficult to replicate in regions experiencing acute geopolitical conflicts, such as the Middle East.

Domestically, conservative groups consistently reject this multicultural curriculum framework tied to SDG Goal 16; they view narratives of "global peace" and "religious cultural intelligence" with suspicion, labeling them as a disguised agenda for religious syncretism that blurs theological boundaries. In the absence of standardized peace diplomacy competencies

for PAI teachers, coupled with weak institutional defenses against the onslaught of global digital disinformation, the role of Islamic education as an anchor for world peace risks stagnating as a mere utopia confined to academic documents.

CONCLUSIONS

This study contributes theoretically to multicultural Islamic education by bridging the long-standing divide between national curriculum reforms and the traditional pesantren system through an integrated pedagogical framework grounded in Transformative Learning Theory and Social Cohesion Theory. It reconceptualizes religious moderation (wasathiyah) as a transformative epistemological paradigm that harmonizes revelation (Bayani), reason (Burhani), and spirituality (Irfani), moving beyond both literalist and secularist perspectives to address contemporary pluralism comprehensively. The study further positions Islamic education as a catalyst for global peace by integrating the cultural leadership of the *Kiai*, the hidden curriculum, and the social dynamics of pesantren life within Peace Education Theory, thereby fostering Religious Cultural Intelligence and preparing learners to become active peacebuilders and contributors to SDG 16. At the same time, it exposes an important theoretical vulnerability by demonstrating that unquestioned theological obedience without critical thinking creates structural susceptibility to digital disinformation, ideological echo chambers, and conservative infiltration. Therefore, the study advocates institutionalizing moderate leadership and strengthening critical digital media literacy as essential cognitive foundations for resilient, inclusive, and future-oriented Islamic education.

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