

# Religious Moderation and Classical Kalam Theory in Islamic Education: *Tawassuth*, *Tawazun*, and *I'tidal* from an Ash'arite Perspective

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## Abstract

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### Keywords:

Religious moderation;  
Islamic education;  
Ash'arite theology.

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Religious moderation has emerged as a strategic issue in Islamic education in response to the growing challenges of extremism, ideological polarization, and intolerance within pluralistic societies. Although the discourse on religious moderation has been widely examined from sociological, political, and educational policy perspectives, studies that critically connect it with the epistemological foundations of classical Islamic theology remain limited. This article analyzes the convergence between the principles of religious moderation—*tawassuṭ* (the middle path), *tawāzun* (balance), and *i'tidāl* (justice)—and classical *kalām* theory, particularly within the Ash'arite theological tradition, and explores their relevance for strengthening Islamic education. This study employs a qualitative library research design using a historical-philosophical and educational approach. Primary data are drawn from classical Ash'arite theological texts, especially discussions on the synthesis of reason and revelation and the doctrine of *kasb*. In contrast, secondary data include scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and policy documents on religious moderation and Islamic education. Data analysis is conducted through thematic classification, critical-comparative reading, and conceptual synthesis. The findings indicate that religious moderation is not merely a contemporary policy agenda or a socio-political response to extremism, but a theological-educational paradigm deeply rooted in classical Islamic intellectual heritage. Ash'arite theology, through its balanced integration of reason and revelation and its doctrine of *kasb*, provides a moderate framework that affirms both divine sovereignty and human moral responsibility. These findings imply that integrating classical *kalām* into Islamic education strengthens the epistemological legitimacy of religious moderation and supports the development of curricula and pedagogical models that are critical, inclusive, and contextually responsive to contemporary challenges.

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## Abstrak

Kata kunci:  
moderasi agama;  
pendidikan Islam;  
teologi Asy'ariyah

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*Moderasi beragama menjadi isu strategis dalam pendidikan Islam sebagai respons terhadap meningkatnya ekstremisme, polarisasi ideologis, dan intoleransi di masyarakat pluralistik. Meskipun wacana moderasi beragama telah banyak dikaji dari perspektif sosial, politik, dan kebijakan pendidikan, kajian yang mengaitkannya secara mendalam dengan fondasi epistemologis teologi Islam klasik masih relatif terbatas. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis konvergensi antara prinsip-prinsip moderasi beragama—*tawassuṭ* (jalan tengah), *tawāzun* (keseimbangan), dan *i'tidāl* (keadilan)—dengan teori *kalām* klasik, khususnya dalam tradisi teologi Ash'ariyah, serta relevansinya bagi penguatan pendidikan Islam. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif melalui studi pustaka (library research) dengan metode analisis historis-filosofis dan pendidikan. Data diperoleh dari sumber primer berupa karya-karya teologi Ash'ariyah serta sumber sekunder berupa artikel jurnal, buku ilmiah, dan dokumen kebijakan terkait moderasi beragama dan pendidikan Islam. Analisis dilakukan melalui klasifikasi tematik, pembacaan kritis-komparatif, dan sintesis konseptual. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa moderasi beragama bukan sekadar*

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*agenda kebijakan kontemporer, melainkan paradigma teologis-edukatif yang berakar kuat dalam khazanah intelektual Islam klasik. Teologi Ash'ariyah, melalui sintesis akal dan wahyu serta doktrin kasb, menawarkan kerangka keseimbangan antara kedaulatan Tuhan dan tanggung jawab moral manusia. Temuan ini berimplikasi pada penguatan legitimasi epistemologis moderasi beragama dalam pendidikan Islam, sekaligus memberikan dasar konseptual bagi pengembangan kurikulum dan pedagogi yang kritis, inklusif, dan kontekstual.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Religious moderation has emerged as a crucial agenda in Islamic education in response to increasing challenges such as religious extremism, intolerance, and ideological polarization within pluralistic societies. In the Indonesian context, these challenges are intensified by the rise of radical narratives that threaten social cohesion and national stability (Arifin et al., 2025; Badruddin, 2025; Grzywacz, 2020; Wingarta, 2024). Religious moderation also addresses crises of religious identity caused by globalization by promoting balanced and inclusive understandings of faith without undermining core religious doctrines (Batubara & Yuliyana, 2025). Consequently, Islamic educational institutions are increasingly expected to function as strategic arenas for cultivating moderate, tolerant, and socially responsible religious attitudes.

Previous studies have widely examined religious moderation from sociological, political, and educational perspectives. Research highlights the role of Islamic educational institutions – such as madrasah, pesantren, and Islamic higher education – in internalizing moderation values through curriculum design, pedagogical strategies, and institutional culture (Asshidqi et al., 2023; Maulana & Wahyudi, 2024). Other studies emphasize that education fosters inclusivity, critical reasoning, and tolerance in multicultural societies (Subchi et al., 2022; Syatar et al., 2024). These findings confirm that religious moderation functions effectively as an educational strategy to prevent extremism and strengthen social harmony.

Despite the growing body of literature, most existing studies approach religious moderation primarily as a contemporary policy framework or practical response to radicalism. While valuable, these approaches often lack a deep epistemological grounding that connects moderation discourse with classical Islamic intellectual traditions (Addzaky et al., 2024; Mansouri, 2020; Singgih, 2023). Explicit scholarly investigations that link religious moderation in Islamic education with classical Islamic theology (*'ilm al-kalām*), particularly Ash'arite theology, remain limited. This gap raises concerns regarding the theological legitimacy and conceptual sustainability of religious moderation within Islamic education.

In response to this gap, this article aims to analyze the convergence between the principles of religious moderation – *tawassuṭ* (the middle path), *tawāzun* (balance), and *i'tidāl* (justice) – and classical *kalām* theory within the Ash'arite tradition. By examining the Ash'arite synthesis of reason and revelation and the doctrine of *kasb*, this study seeks to position classical theology as an epistemological and normative foundation for strengthening religious moderation in Islamic education. This approach contributes to existing scholarship by grounding moderation discourse within Islamic intellectual heritage rather than treating it merely as a socio-political or policy-driven construct (M. A. Abdullah, 2020; Kerwanto, 2022).

This article is structured as follows. The first section discusses religious moderation as an educational paradigm within Islamic education. The second section examines the epistemological foundations of classical *kalām*, with particular emphasis on Ash‘arite theology. The third section analyzes the convergence between religious moderation principles and Ash‘arite theological thought and explores its implications for Islamic education. Finally, the conclusion highlights the significance of integrating classical theological frameworks to enhance the legitimacy, coherence, and sustainability of religious moderation in contemporary Islamic educational contexts.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative library research design aimed at examining the convergence between religious moderation and classical *kalām* theory within the context of Islamic education. The research focuses on identifying how the principles of *tawassuṭ* (the middle path), *tawāzun* (balance), and *i‘tidāl* (justice), as articulated in Ash‘arite theology, function as epistemological and normative foundations for strengthening religious moderation in Islamic educational settings. Primary sources include classical Ash‘arite theological texts—particularly discussions on the synthesis of reason and revelation and the doctrine of *kasb*—while secondary sources consist of scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and policy documents related to religious moderation, Islamic education, and classical *kalām*. Source selection was guided by relevance, academic credibility, and thematic alignment with the research focus.

The analytical process was conducted through a historical–philosophical and educational approach. Data were analyzed in several stages: first, relevant literature was systematically identified and classified into three thematic categories, namely religious moderation in Islamic education, Ash‘arite theological thought, and classical *kalām* epistemology; second, content analysis was applied through critical and comparative readings of classical texts and contemporary educational discourse; and third, conceptual synthesis was undertaken to map points of convergence between the values of *tawassuṭ*, *tawāzun*, and *i‘tidāl* and the aims, indicators, and pedagogical orientations of religious moderation in Islamic education. This approach enables the study to articulate classical *kalām*—particularly Ash‘arite theology—as a coherent intellectual framework that informs curriculum development, pedagogical reasoning, and the cultivation of moderate religious understanding in contemporary Islamic educational institutions.

## RESEARCH RESULTS DAN DISCUSSION

### Results

#### *Religious Moderation as an Educational Paradigm in Islamic Education*

The findings of this study indicate that religious moderation in Indonesia has undergone a significant conceptual shift, evolving from a predominantly socio-political discourse into a comprehensive educational paradigm embedded within Islamic education. This transformation is closely related to the increasing challenges posed by religious extremism, ideological polarization, and intolerance that threaten social harmony in pluralistic societies. Islamic education is no longer viewed merely as a transmitter of doctrinal knowledge, but as a strategic space for shaping balanced religious understanding, ethical reasoning, and civic responsibility (Agus et al., 2025; Alhamuddin, 2025; Ibrahim et al., 2024; Mahmudulhassan & Abuzar, 2024).

Several studies emphasize that religious moderation functions as a normative orientation that seeks to maintain fidelity to core Islamic teachings while rejecting rigid fundamentalism and excessive liberalism (Subchi et al., 2022). Within educational

contexts, moderation is increasingly framed as an internal objective of learning rather than an external policy agenda imposed by the state. This perspective is particularly important in Islamic education, where theological legitimacy plays a crucial role in determining the acceptance and sustainability of educational concepts (Singgih, 2023). Before further elaborating on how moderation operates as an educational paradigm, it is necessary to outline its core dimensions as identified in the literature and reflected in Islamic educational practices.

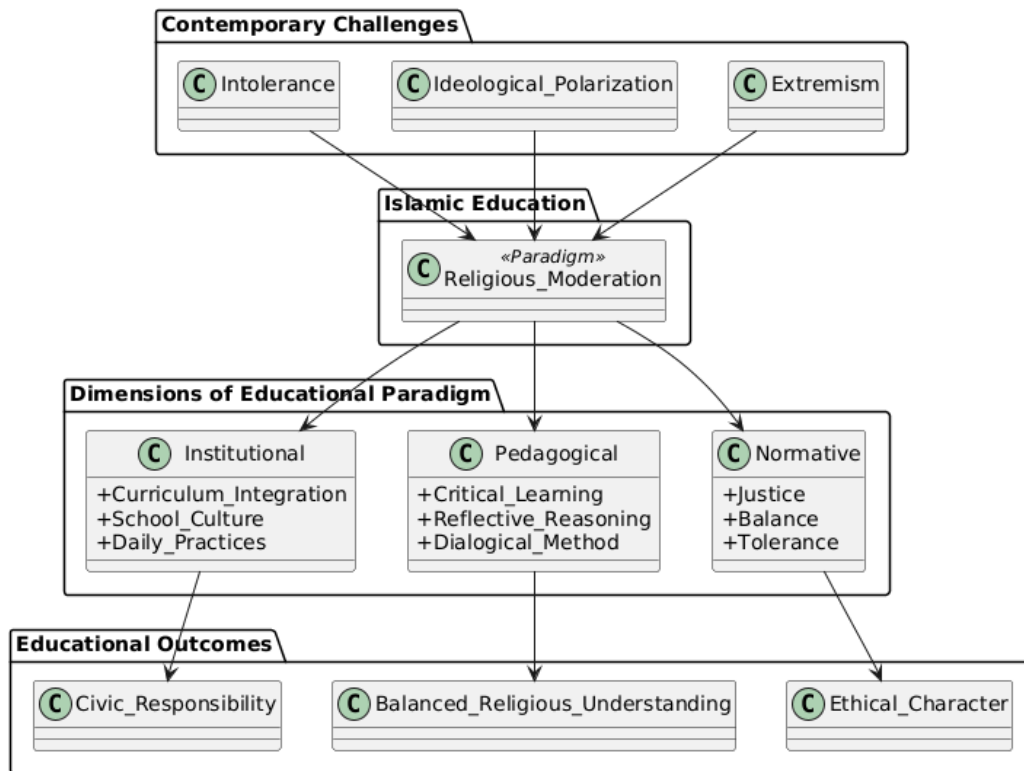
**Table 1.** *Religious Moderation as an Educational Paradigm in Islamic Education*

Dimension	Description	Educational Implication	Key References
Normative	Emphasis on justice, balance, and tolerance	Ethical character formation	Abdullah (2020); Subchi et al., (2022)
Pedagogical	Promotion of critical and reflective learning	Dialogical teaching methods	Maulana & Wahyudi (2024)
Institutional	Integration into curriculum and school culture	Sustainable moderation practices	Asshidqi et al., (2023)

Table 1 illustrates that religious moderation operates simultaneously at normative, pedagogical, and institutional levels. Normatively, moderation provides ethical guidelines that shape learners' attitudes toward religious difference and social responsibility. Pedagogically, it encourages instructional strategies that foster critical engagement with religious texts rather than rote memorization or dogmatic transmission. Institutionally, moderation becomes sustainable when it is embedded within curricula, school policies, and daily religious practices, particularly in pesantren and Islamic higher education institutions. These findings confirm that religious moderation is best understood as a holistic educational paradigm rather than a fragmented set of moral instructions.

To clarify the direction of the research findings and to present religious moderation as a coherent analytical framework, this study visualizes religious moderation as an educational paradigm within Islamic education. The visualization is intended to demonstrate the conceptual shift of religious moderation from a predominantly socio-political discourse into an integrated educational construct that responds to contemporary challenges such as extremism, ideological polarization, and intolerance. By presenting moderation as a paradigm embedded in Islamic education, the figure highlights how educational institutions function not merely as transmitters of doctrinal knowledge, but as strategic spaces for cultivating balanced religious understanding, ethical reasoning, and civic responsibility through structured educational dimensions.

**Religious Moderation as an Educational Paradigm in Islamic Education**



*Figure 1. Religious Moderation as an Educational Paradigm in Islamic Education*

Figure 1 illustrates religious moderation as a holistic educational paradigm in Islamic education that emerges in response to contemporary challenges, including extremism, ideological polarization, and intolerance. The figure shows that these challenges necessitate the internalization of religious moderation within Islamic education as a paradigmatic orientation rather than an external policy agenda. This paradigm operates through three interconnected dimensions: normative, pedagogical, and institutional. The normative dimension emphasizes justice, balance, and tolerance as ethical foundations; the pedagogical dimension promotes critical learning, reflective reasoning, and dialogical methods; while the institutional dimension ensures sustainability through curriculum integration, school culture, and daily religious practices. Together, these dimensions contribute to key educational outcomes, namely ethical character, balanced religious understanding, and civic responsibility. The figure confirms that religious moderation functions as an integrated and sustainable educational paradigm that aligns theological legitimacy with pedagogical practice in Islamic education.

***Educational Internalization of Religious Moderation through Curriculum and Practice***

The second major finding of this study concerns the mechanisms through which religious moderation is internalized within Islamic education. The literature consistently demonstrates that moderation values are most effectively cultivated when they are integrated into curriculum design, pedagogical strategies, and lived religious practices rather than taught as abstract concepts (Mulyana, 2023).

Pesantren provide a compelling example of how moderation is internalized through daily routines, collective worship, and communal life. In such settings, learners experience moderation not only cognitively but also affectively and behaviorally. This

process forms a religious habitus that supports inclusivity, discipline, and respect for diversity (Asshidqi et al., 2023). Similarly, Islamic schools and universities that emphasize dialogical learning and contextual interpretation of religious texts tend to produce learners with higher levels of tolerance and critical reasoning (Syatar et al., 2024). The following table categorizes the dominant modes through which religious moderation is internalized in Islamic education based on the reviewed literature.

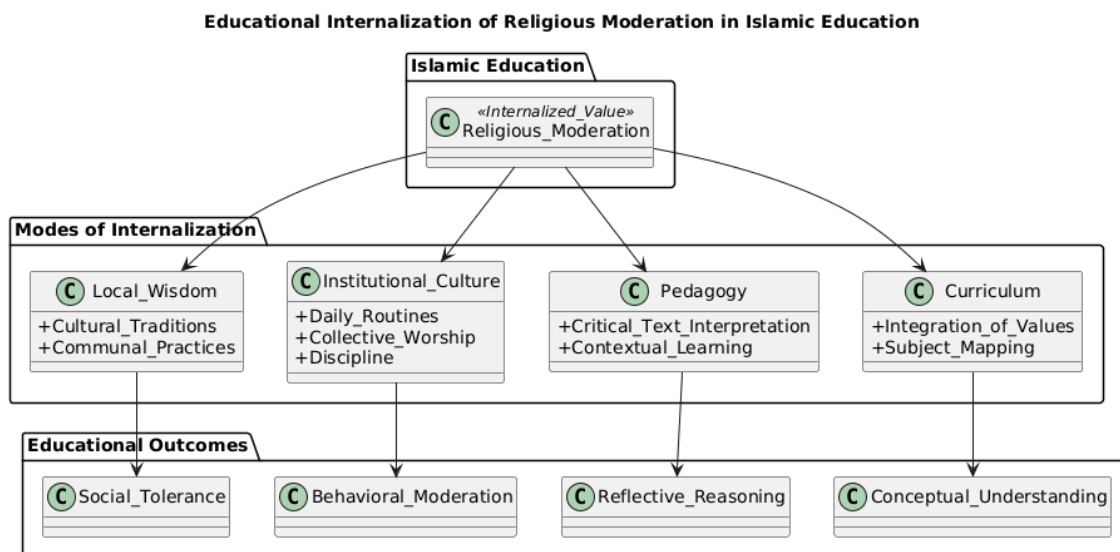
Table 2.

*Modes of Internalizing Religious Moderation in Islamic Education*

Mode	Educational Mechanism	Outcome	Supporting Studies
Curriculum	Integration of moderation values into subjects	Conceptual understanding	Mulyana (2023)
Pedagogy	Critical and contextual interpretation	Reflective reasoning	Syatar et al. (2024)
Institutional Culture	Daily religious practices and discipline	Behavioral moderation	Asshidqi et al. (2023)
Local Wisdom	Cultural and communal traditions	Social tolerance	Rerung (2023)

As shown in Table 2, the internalization of moderation occurs through multiple, mutually reinforcing pathways. Curriculum integration ensures that moderation is conceptually understood, while pedagogical strategies translate this understanding into reflective reasoning. Institutional culture and local wisdom further reinforce moderation by embedding it within lived experiences. Importantly, empirical studies indicate a positive correlation between religious literacy and moderate attitudes, suggesting that deeper engagement with religious knowledge strengthens moderation rather than undermining it (Subchi et al., 2022). This finding challenges the assumption that moderation weakens religious commitment and instead positions it as an outcome of sound religious education.

To illustrate the mechanisms through which religious moderation is internalized within Islamic education, this study presents a conceptual visualization that maps the dominant modes of internalization identified in the literature. The figure is intended to demonstrate that religious moderation is not cultivated through abstract instruction alone, but through an integrated educational process involving curriculum design, pedagogical strategies, institutional culture, and local wisdom. This visualization helps clarify how moderation values are progressively embedded within cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of learners' religious development.



**Figure 2.** Educational Internalization of Religious Moderation through Curriculum and Practice

Figure 2 illustrates the internalization of religious moderation within Islamic education through four interconnected modes: curriculum, pedagogy, institutional culture, and local wisdom. The figure shows that curriculum integration facilitates conceptual understanding of moderation values, while pedagogical approaches emphasizing critical and contextual interpretation foster reflective reasoning. Institutional culture—particularly daily routines, collective worship, and discipline in settings such as pesantren—contributes to behavioral moderation, whereas local wisdom transmitted through communal and cultural practices promotes social tolerance. Together, these modes demonstrate that the internalization of religious moderation occurs holistically across cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains, confirming that moderation is most effective when embedded in lived educational experiences rather than conveyed as abstract moral instruction.

**Classical Kalām as an Epistemological Foundation for Religious Moderation**

A central contribution of this study lies in demonstrating that religious moderation in Islamic education possesses a strong epistemological foundation within classical Islamic theology (*ilm al-kalām*). Historically, *kalām* developed as an intellectual discipline aimed at resolving theological disputes through rational argumentation while remaining anchored in revelation. This positioning enabled *kalām* to function as a mediating framework between extreme rationalism and rigid textualism (Kerwanto, 2022).

The principles of *tawassuṭ* (middle path), *tawāzun* (balance), and *i’tidāl* (justice) are intrinsic to *kalām* discourse and resonate strongly with contemporary educational ideals of moderation. From an epistemological perspective, these principles guide how religious knowledge is constructed, validated, and transmitted. In educational contexts, this orientation equips learners with intellectual tools to navigate doctrinal diversity and ethical complexity without resorting to absolutism or relativism (Hafid & Soleh, 2023). To clarify the epistemological contribution of *kalām* to moderation, the following conceptual mapping is presented.

Table 3.  
Epistemological Contribution of Classical Kalām to Religious Moderation

<b>Kalām Principle</b>	<b>Epistemological Function</b>	<b>Educational Relevance</b>
<i>Tawassut</i>	Avoidance of extreme positions	Balanced religious reasoning
<i>Tawāzun</i>	Synthesis of reason and revelation	Critical yet faithful learning
<i>I'tidāl</i>	Ethical proportionality	Moral discernment

Table 3 demonstrates that *kalām* provides more than theological doctrines; it offers an epistemic framework that shapes educational reasoning. By emphasizing proportionality and balance, *kalām* fosters intellectual humility and ethical responsibility—qualities essential for sustaining moderation in pluralistic societies. These findings suggest that integrating *kalām* into Islamic education strengthens the epistemological legitimacy of moderation discourse.

To clarify the epistemological contribution of classical Islamic theology to religious moderation, this study presents a conceptual visualization that positions *‘ilm al-kalām* as an epistemological framework mediating between extreme rationalism and rigid textualism. The figure is intended to demonstrate that religious moderation in Islamic education is grounded not merely in ethical or policy considerations, but in a structured epistemic tradition that guides how religious knowledge is constructed, interpreted, and transmitted within educational contexts.

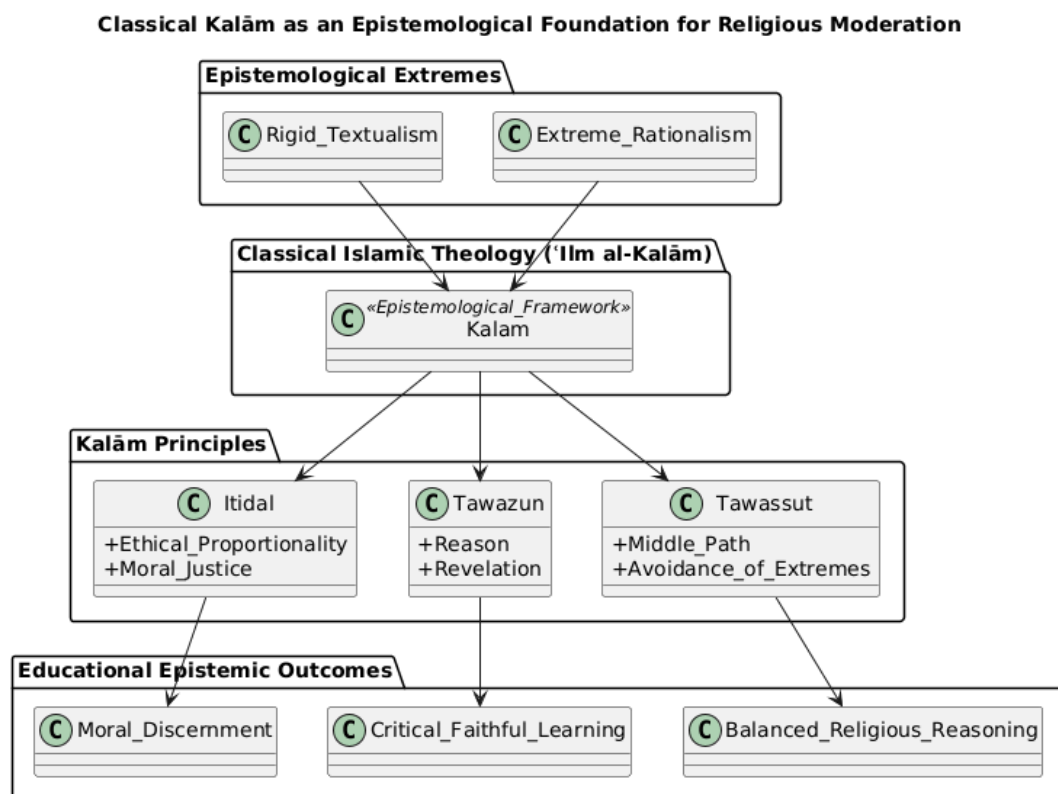


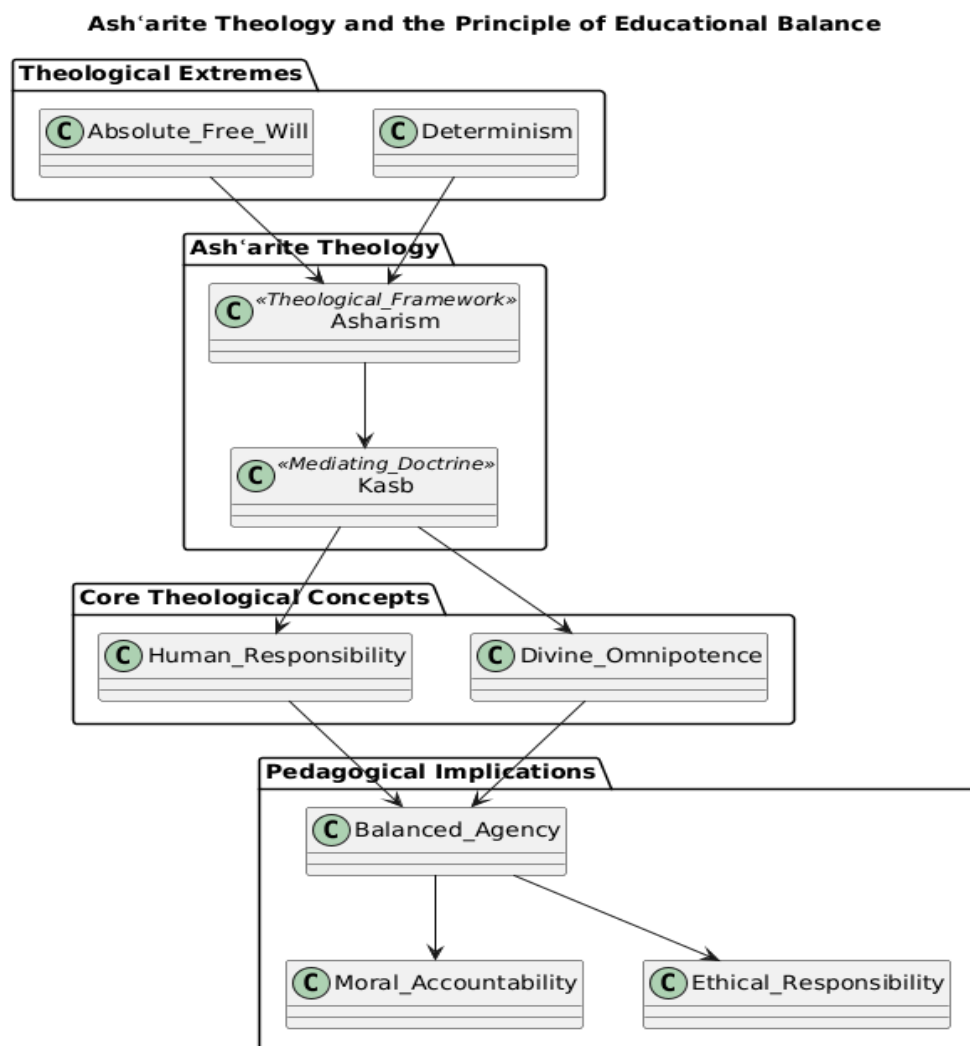
Figure 3. Classical Kalām as an Epistemological Foundation for Religious Moderation

Figure 3 illustrates classical *kalām* as an epistemological foundation for religious moderation in Islamic education. The figure shows that *kalām* functions as a mediating framework between epistemological extremes by operationalizing three core principles: *tawassuṭ* (the middle path), *tawāzun* (the synthesis of reason and revelation), and *i'tidāl* (ethical proportionality). *Tawassuṭ* enables balanced religious reasoning by avoiding extreme positions, *tawāzun* supports critical yet faithful learning through the integration of rational inquiry and revelatory authority, and *i'tidāl* fosters moral discernment by emphasizing justice and proportionality. Together, these principles demonstrate that *kalām* provides an epistemic structure that equips learners to navigate doctrinal diversity and ethical complexity without falling into absolutism or relativism, thereby strengthening the epistemological legitimacy of religious moderation in Islamic education.

#### ***Ash'arite Theology and the Principle of Educational Balance***

Among various *kalām* traditions, Ash'arite theology emerges as particularly relevant for strengthening religious moderation in Islamic education. Its historical synthesis of reason and revelation has significantly shaped Sunni orthodoxy and Islamic educational traditions in Indonesia, especially within pesantren and Islamic higher education institutions (Nasir & Rijal, 2021).

The Ash'arite doctrine of *kasb* (acquisition) exemplifies the principle of *i'tidāl* by mediating between divine omnipotence and human moral responsibility. God is understood as the ultimate creator of actions, while humans are accountable for the actions they acquire. This theological position avoids both determinism and absolute free will, offering a balanced understanding of agency that has profound pedagogical implications. To further specify the theological dimension of educational balance, this study visualizes Ash'arite theology as a mediating framework that strengthens religious moderation in Islamic education. The figure is presented to clarify how the Ash'arite doctrine of *kasb* functions as a theological mechanism that reconciles divine omnipotence with human moral responsibility, thereby offering a balanced understanding of religious agency with direct pedagogical relevance.



**Figure 4.** *Ash'arite Theology and the Principle of Educational Balance*

Figure 4 illustrates Ash'arite theology as a framework of educational balance that mediates between theological extremes of determinism and absolute free will. The figure shows that the doctrine of *kasb* operates as a central mediating concept through which divine omnipotence and human responsibility are simultaneously affirmed. By positioning God as the ultimate creator of actions while holding humans morally accountable for the actions they acquire, Ash'arite theology avoids fatalistic and permissive interpretations of religious agency. This balanced theological position has significant pedagogical implications, as it fosters moral accountability, ethical responsibility, and a disciplined understanding of agency among learners. Consequently, Ash'arite theology provides a coherent theological foundation for cultivating moderation and responsibility within Islamic education.

***Convergence between Religious Moderation and Educational Objectives***

The final finding of this study reveals a strong convergence between the values of religious moderation and the epistemological structure of classical *kalām*, particularly within the Ash'arite tradition. At the level of values, *tawassuṭ*, *tawāzun*, and *i'tidāl* align directly with educational goals such as tolerance, justice, and civic responsibility. At the methodological level, *kalām*'s emphasis on critical engagement and rational

argumentation parallels contemporary pedagogical approaches that prioritize reflective and dialogical learning.

This convergence enables Islamic education to ground religious moderation within its own intellectual heritage, enhancing both its legitimacy and sustainability. Rather than presenting moderation as an external or policy-driven concept, educators can frame it as an intrinsic outcome of sound theological reasoning. This approach equips Islamic educational institutions to address contemporary challenges—such as extremism, ideological polarization, and digital radicalization—through internally grounded religious knowledge.

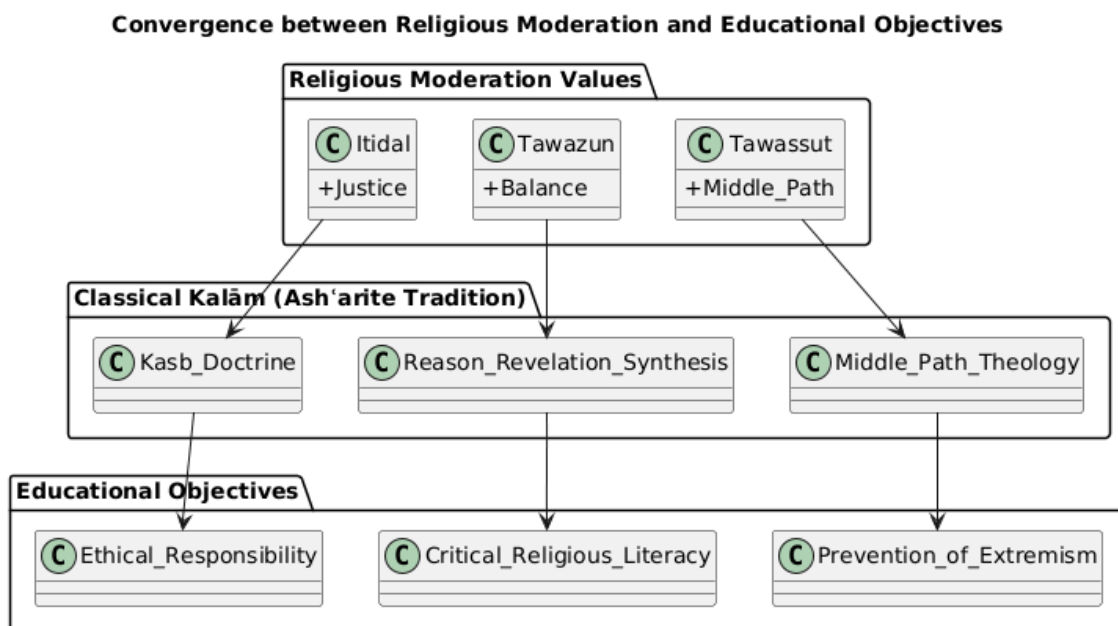
Table 4.

*Convergence of Religious Moderation and Classical Kalām in Islamic Education*

Moderation Value	Kalām Concept	Educational Outcome
<i>Tawassut</i>	Middle-path theology	Prevention of extremism
<i>Tawāzun</i>	Reason–revelation synthesis	Critical religious literacy
<i>I’tidāl</i>	<i>Kasb</i> doctrine	Ethical responsibility

Table 4 confirms that religious moderation and classical *kalām* are not conceptually separate domains but mutually reinforcing frameworks. Their convergence positions Islamic education as a powerful medium for cultivating moderate, inclusive, and socially responsive religious understanding grounded in authentic Islamic intellectual tradition.

To synthesize the overall findings of this study, a conceptual visualization is presented to illustrate the convergence between religious moderation values, classical *kalām* epistemology, and educational objectives in Islamic education. This figure is intended to demonstrate that moderation values are not conceptually detached from Islamic intellectual tradition, but are deeply rooted in theological reasoning that directly informs educational aims and outcomes.



*Figure 5. Convergence between Religious Moderation, Classical Kalām, and Educational Objectives*

Figure 5 illustrates the convergence between religious moderation values and the epistemological structure of classical *kalām* within Islamic education. The figure shows that *tawassuṭ* aligns with middle-path theology, contributing to the prevention of extremism; *tawāzun* corresponds to the synthesis of reason and revelation, fostering critical religious literacy; and *i'tidāl* is grounded in the Ash'arite doctrine of *kasb*, reinforcing ethical responsibility. This convergence confirms that religious moderation and classical *kalām* are mutually reinforcing frameworks that enable Islamic education to cultivate moderate, inclusive, and socially responsive religious understanding grounded in authentic Islamic intellectual heritage.

## Discussion

This study demonstrates that religious moderation in Islamic education cannot be adequately understood as a merely contemporary policy initiative or socio-political response to extremism. Instead, the findings confirm that religious moderation represents an educational paradigm deeply embedded within Islamic intellectual and theological traditions, particularly classical *kalām* and Ash'arite theology. This position both corroborates and extends previous studies on religious moderation by providing a stronger epistemological grounding for moderation discourse in Islamic education.

Previous research has largely emphasized the sociological and policy dimensions of religious moderation. Studies by Arimatea & Sukarna (2024), Gule (2025), Nugroho (2024), Sholeh & Rahman (2025), and Subchi et al (2022), for example, highlight the role of moderation in promoting tolerance and social harmony in plural societies. Similarly, Nasir & Rijal (2021), Hanif et al (2025), Maulana & Wahyudi (2024), Nurbayani & Amiruddin (2024), Prasetyo et al (2025), and Shalahuddin et al (2024) underline the strategic role of Islamic educational institutions in mainstreaming moderation values through curriculum and pedagogy. While these studies convincingly demonstrate the practical importance of moderation, they tend to frame moderation primarily as a response to contemporary social challenges rather than as an epistemologically grounded educational construct. The findings of this study complement these works by showing that moderation is not an external corrective mechanism imposed upon Islamic education, but an intrinsic outcome of sound theological reasoning rooted in Islamic intellectual heritage.

The internalization of religious moderation through curriculum, pedagogy, institutional culture, and local wisdom, as identified in this study, is consistent with constructivist and holistic theories of education, which emphasize that values are most effectively learned through lived experience rather than abstract instruction. Elfarisyah et al (2024), Fasyiransyah et al (2025), Imamah (2023), Muis (2025), and Mulyana (2023) argues that the integration of moderation values into Islamic religious education curricula strengthens learners' conceptual understanding and ethical orientation. This is further supported by Darmawansah et al (2024), Shaukat et al (2024), and Syatar et al (2024), who demonstrate that dialogical and contextual pedagogical approaches enhance students' critical reasoning and tolerance. The present study extends these findings by showing that such educational practices are not merely pedagogical innovations, but are epistemologically aligned with classical *kalām*'s emphasis on proportional reasoning and balance.

A key theoretical contribution of this study lies in its articulation of classical *kalām* as an epistemological foundation for religious moderation. Historically, *kalām* developed as a rational-theological discipline aimed at mediating between extreme rationalism and rigid textualism (Kerwanto, 2022; Rahman, 2022). This mediating function resonates

strongly with contemporary educational ideals of moderation, particularly in pluralistic and ideologically polarized contexts. Hafid & Soleh (2023), Mohammed (2024), Ruhullah & Ushama (2024), and Shaukat (2024) note that *kalām*'s epistemic framework encourages disciplined reasoning and ethical discernment, qualities essential for navigating doctrinal diversity. The findings of this study reinforce this argument by demonstrating that the principles of *tawassuṭ*, *tawāzun*, and *i'tidāl* are not only theological concepts but also educational orientations that shape how religious knowledge is constructed and transmitted in Islamic education.

Within the spectrum of classical *kalām* traditions, Ash'arite theology emerges as particularly relevant for strengthening religious moderation in Islamic education. The Ash'arite synthesis of reason and revelation has historically shaped Sunni orthodoxy and educational traditions in Indonesia, especially within pesantren and Islamic higher education institutions (Nasir & Rijal, 2021). This synthesis aligns with contemporary educational theories that advocate critical engagement without undermining normative foundations. The doctrine of *kasb*, which mediates between divine omnipotence and human moral responsibility, exemplifies the principle of *i'tidāl* and provides a balanced understanding of agency that is pedagogically significant. Unlike deterministic or libertarian theological models, the Ash'arite position fosters moral accountability while maintaining theological coherence, a balance that is crucial for ethical education in religious contexts (Uyuni & Adnan, 2024).

The convergence between religious moderation values and educational objectives, as identified in this study, further strengthens the argument that moderation is best understood as an internally grounded educational outcome rather than a policy-driven agenda. *Tawassuṭ* aligns with middle-path theology and supports the prevention of extremism, echoing Ell (2024) and Meiloud (2024) assertion that moderate Islam offers a viable alternative to both rigid fundamentalism and unrestrained liberalism. *Tawāzun*, through the synthesis of reason and revelation, promotes critical religious literacy, a key competence in countering ideological manipulation and digital radicalization (Syatar et al., 2024). Meanwhile, *i'tidāl*, grounded in the Ash'arite doctrine of *kasb*, reinforces ethical responsibility and civic engagement, which are central goals of Islamic education in plural societies (Abdullah, 2020).

By grounding religious moderation within classical *kalām* and Ash'arite theology, this study addresses a critical gap in existing literature. While many studies emphasize the importance of moderation for social cohesion and national stability (Badruddin, 2025; Singgih, 2023), few provide a rigorous epistemological justification that connects moderation discourse with Islamic intellectual tradition. This study contributes to the field by demonstrating that moderation is not a dilution of religious commitment, but rather an expression of theological maturity and intellectual balance inherent in Islamic scholarship. Such grounding enhances the legitimacy, coherence, and sustainability of moderation initiatives within Islamic education.

Overall, the discussion confirms that religious moderation, when anchored in classical theological epistemology, functions as a comprehensive educational paradigm capable of addressing contemporary challenges without sacrificing doctrinal integrity. This finding has important implications for curriculum development, teacher training, and institutional policy in Islamic education. By integrating *kalām*-based epistemological reasoning into educational practice, Islamic educational institutions can cultivate learners who are intellectually grounded, ethically responsible, and socially responsive, thereby contributing to harmonious religious life in pluralistic societies.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study reveals that religious moderation in Islamic education is not merely a contemporary socio-political agenda or a pragmatic response to extremism, but a theological-educational paradigm deeply rooted in classical Islamic intellectual tradition. A key and somewhat unexpected finding is that the core principles of religious moderation – *tawassut* (the middle path), *tawāzun* (balance), and *i'tidāl* (justice) – are not external ethical constructs imposed on Islamic education, but intrinsic epistemological orientations embedded within classical *kalām*, particularly Ash'arite theology. The study demonstrates that religious moderation gains its strongest legitimacy and sustainability when grounded in the synthesis of reason and revelation and the doctrine of *kasb*, which balances divine omnipotence with human moral responsibility. This finding highlights that moderation emerges organically from within Islamic theology and educational reasoning, rather than being a policy-driven or reactive construct.

Academically, this study contributes to the literature on religious moderation and Islamic education in several significant ways. First, it confirms previous studies that emphasize the strategic role of Islamic education in fostering moderation, tolerance, and social harmony, while extending them by providing a rigorous epistemological foundation rooted in classical *kalām*. Second, this study challenges the dominant tendency in existing research to frame religious moderation primarily as a sociological or policy-oriented concept by demonstrating that moderation is an intrinsic outcome of sound theological reasoning. Third, the study offers a conceptual contribution by positioning Ash'arite theology – particularly its doctrine of *kasb* – as a normative and epistemological framework for educational balance. By integrating theological epistemology with educational objectives, this research offers a new perspective that bridges classical Islamic intellectual heritage with contemporary challenges in Islamic education, thereby enriching both theoretical discourse and pedagogical reflection.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research relies on qualitative library research, which limits its findings to conceptual and theoretical analysis without empirical validation in specific educational settings. Second, the focus on classical *kalām* – particularly the Ash'arite tradition – means that other theological schools and regional educational contexts are not explored in depth. Third, the study does not examine how the proposed epistemological framework is operationalized in classroom practices, curriculum implementation, or teacher training programs.

Future research is therefore encouraged to expand this inquiry through empirical studies involving diverse Islamic educational institutions, including madrasah, pesantren, and Islamic universities across different socio-cultural contexts. Quantitative or mixed-methods approaches could be employed to assess how *kalām*-based moderation frameworks influence learners' attitudes, ethical reasoning, and civic engagement. Further studies may also compare different theological traditions within Islam to explore alternative epistemological foundations for religious moderation. Such research would generate more comprehensive findings and provide stronger empirical support for educational policies and pedagogical strategies aimed at strengthening religious moderation in pluralistic societies.

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Religious Moderation and Classical Kalam Theory in Islamic Education: Tawassuth, Tawazun, and I'tidal from an Ash'arite Perspective

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