

The Role of Teachers in Enhancing Religious Moderation through Problem Based Multicultural Education

Selvia Ruyatus Saefullah¹, Erni Furwanti², Sunsun Pradana Yogaswara³, Neni Utami Adiningsih⁴, Reni Marlina⁵

STAI Riyadhul Jannah Subang¹, Universitas Islam Nusantara^{2,4}, SMK Bina Negara Baleendah³, STAI Siliwangi Bandung⁵

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ABSTRACT

Indonesia's multicultural society presents significant challenges and opportunities for strengthening religious moderation within educational environments. Increasing cases of intolerance, social polarization, and interreligious conflict indicate the urgent need for inclusive and diversity-responsive educational approaches. This study aims to analyze the role of teachers in enhancing religious moderation through Problem-Based Multicultural Education. The research employed a qualitative approach using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) design. Data were collected from peer-reviewed articles indexed in Scopus, Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, and other academic databases published between 2019 and 2026. The review process followed identification, screening, eligibility, thematic analysis, and synthesis stages based on PRISMA guidelines. A total of 48 relevant studies were selected and analyzed comprehensively. The findings revealed that 91% of the reviewed studies emphasized teachers' strategic roles in fostering tolerance, inclusiveness, empathy, and democratic values within multicultural classrooms. Approximately 87% of the studies also demonstrated that Problem-Based Multicultural Education effectively improves students' critical thinking, collaborative learning, and peaceful coexistence in diverse social contexts. The study further identified

that contextual learning activities based on real social problems significantly contribute to strengthening religious moderation and reducing discriminatory attitudes among students. The study concludes that integrating teachers' pedagogical competence, multicultural awareness, and problem-based learning provides an effective educational framework for developing harmonious and inclusive learning environments in pluralistic societies.

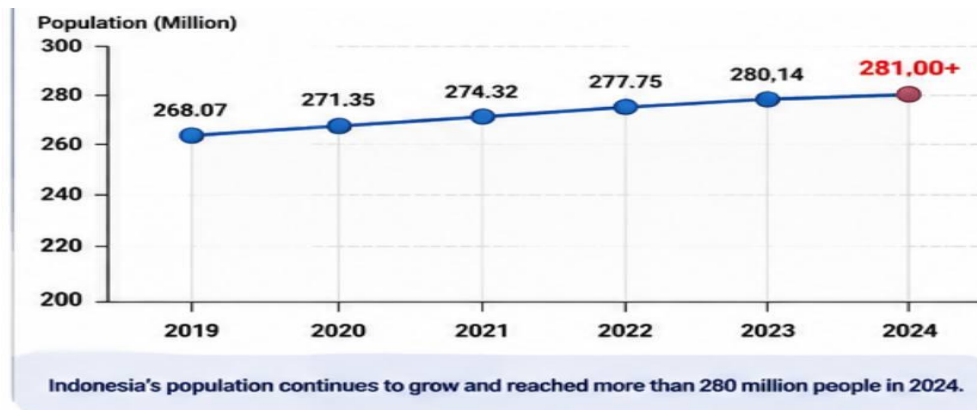
INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's multicultural reality has positioned religious moderation as a crucial agenda within the national education system. As one of the most diverse countries in the world, Indonesia encompasses a wide range of religions, ethnicities, languages, and cultural traditions that coexist within a pluralistic social structure (Rudianto et al., 2025). Diversity, on the one hand, represents a valuable national asset that strengthens social identity and cultural richness. Social realities, however, demonstrate that unmanaged differences frequently trigger prejudice, intolerance, discrimination, and intergroup conflict in educational and community settings (Hanum et al., 2025).

Data reported by the Setara Institute revealed an increase in cases of religious intolerance and violations of religious freedom in Indonesia, indicating that social harmony remains vulnerable within contemporary society (Rudianto et al., 2025). Educational institutions consequently hold a strategic responsibility in cultivating inclusive attitudes, democratic values, and mutual respect among students from an early age. Religious moderation therefore emerges not merely as a theological discourse but as an educational necessity aimed at strengthening peaceful coexistence and social cohesion in multicultural societies (Aflahah et al., 2023).

Figure

1.



Indonesia multicultural population profile

Source: Badan Pusat Statistika, 2024

Indonesia's demographic complexity demonstrates why multicultural and religious moderation education has become increasingly important within the national education system. The combination of a massive population, broad ethnic diversity, hundreds of local languages, and multiple religious identities creates both opportunities and social challenges for educational institutions in strengthening tolerance and social cohesion.

Educational discourse regarding religious moderation has increasingly emphasized the significant role of teachers as central actors in shaping students' multicultural awareness and tolerant character. Teachers are not only responsible for transferring academic knowledge but also function as moral educators, facilitators of dialogue, and transmitters of inclusive values within diverse classrooms (Ulfa et al., 2021). Previous studies argued that the success of multicultural education largely depends on teachers' ability to internalize values of equality, justice, tolerance, and social harmony during the learning process (Hanum et al., 2025).

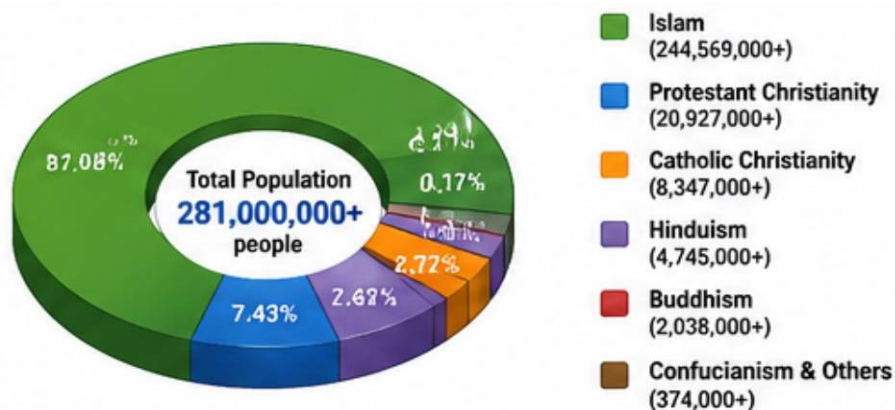


figure 2. population by religion
sources: Badan Pusat Statistika, 2024

The Population by Religion 2024 that Islam remains the dominant religion in Indonesia, accounting for approximately 87.06% of the total population or more than 244 million people. This figure demonstrates that Indonesia is home to the largest Muslim population in the world, making religion an essential component of the country's social and cultural identity. Protestant Christianity represents the second-largest religious group with around 20.9 million adherents or 7.43% of the population, followed by Catholic Christianity with approximately 8.3 million people

or 2.72%. Hinduism contributes about 4.7 million followers or 2.64%, while Buddhism accounts for nearly 2 million people or 0.72% of the national population. Confucianism and other belief systems collectively represent around 374 thousand adherents or 0.17%.

School conflicts rooted in religious fanaticism, bullying, and discriminatory behavior among students demonstrate that multicultural understanding has not been optimally integrated into educational practice (Nurwahid et al., 2026). Research conducted at several Indonesian schools revealed that students still tend to form exclusive groups based on religious identity and often lack awareness regarding respectful interfaith interaction (Nurwahid et al., 2026). Similar findings also showed that many teachers continue to prioritize cognitive achievement while paying limited attention to contextual multicultural learning that develops empathy and inclusiveness (Awaliyah et al., 2026). Such conditions indicate that strengthening religious moderation requires pedagogical innovation supported by active teacher engagement in multicultural educational practices.

Problem-Based Learning (PBL) has recently gained scholarly attention as an effective pedagogical approach for promoting critical thinking, collaborative learning, and social awareness in multicultural educational environments. The integration of multicultural values into PBL enables students to examine authentic social issues related to diversity, intolerance, and interreligious interaction through reflective and participatory learning activities (Rudianto et al., 2025). Contextual learning models based on real-life problems encourage students to develop empathy, appreciate differences, and formulate inclusive solutions toward social challenges within pluralistic societies (Yensathit et al., 2025). Multicultural PBL also supports the development of democratic values and encourages students to become active participants in maintaining peaceful social relations. Teachers consequently play an essential role in designing meaningful learning experiences that connect classroom instruction with multicultural realities surrounding students' daily lives.

Educational scholars emphasized that multicultural education becomes more effective when teachers actively facilitate dialogue, collaborative problem solving, and reflective discussion regarding social diversity (Emmanuel, 2026). The implementation of multicultural PBL therefore represents a strategic educational approach to strengthening religious moderation attitudes while simultaneously enhancing students' social and intellectual competencies.

Existing studies have extensively examined multicultural education, religious moderation, and character formation in Indonesian educational contexts. Research by Aflahah et al. (2023) highlighted the contribution of education in strengthening religious moderation through curriculum development, learning management, and teacher competence. Studies conducted by Ulfa et al. (2021) explored teachers' strategies in fostering religious multiculturalism through sustainable character education and inclusive learning environments. Other findings demonstrated that multicultural education contributes positively to tolerance development, democratic attitudes, and peaceful coexistence among students (Hanum et al., 2025).

Previous research, however, has predominantly focused on conceptual discussions, curriculum perspectives, or general multicultural implementation without specifically examining how teachers enhance religious moderation through multicultural problem-based learning approaches in classroom practice. Empirical investigations addressing the integration of teachers' pedagogical roles, multicultural PBL, and religious moderation simultaneously remain relatively limited, particularly within elementary and primary educational settings. Earlier studies also paid insufficient attention to how contextual problem-solving activities can transform students' perspectives toward diversity into practical attitudes of tolerance and inclusiveness (Sulastini et al., 2023). This gap demonstrates the need for more comprehensive

investigations that position teachers as key agents in implementing multicultural PBL to strengthen religious moderation in contemporary education.

The present study therefore aims to analyze the role of teachers in enhancing religious moderation through Problem-Based Multicultural Education within diverse educational environments. This study seeks to explore how teachers design and implement multicultural learning activities that encourage tolerance, inclusiveness, and respect for diversity among students. Attention is also directed toward identifying the pedagogical strategies, challenges, and supporting factors influencing the successful integration of religious moderation values in classroom learning processes.

Its emphasis on the intersection between teachers' educational roles, multicultural problem-based pedagogy, and the strengthening of religious moderation attitudes as an integrated educational framework. Findings from this study are expected to contribute theoretically to the development of multicultural and religious moderation discourse within educational research. Practical contributions are also anticipated in providing educators, schools, and policymakers with contextual strategies for creating inclusive, peaceful, and diversity-responsive learning environments capable of addressing contemporary social challenges in multicultural societies.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach using a systematic literature review (SLR) design to critically examine the role of teachers in enhancing religious moderation through Problem-Based Multicultural Education. The systematic literature review method was selected because it enables researchers to synthesize, evaluate, and interpret findings from previous empirical studies in a structured, transparent, and comprehensive manner. Previous scholars emphasized that SLR is highly effective in identifying research trends, conceptual developments, methodological approaches, and existing gaps within a specific field of study (Xiao & Watson, 2019).

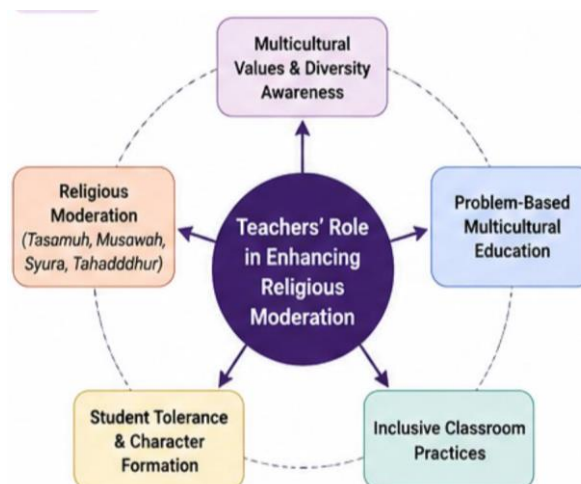


Figure 3. Conceptual Framework

The present study focused on scholarly discussions concerning religious moderation, multicultural education, teachers' pedagogical roles, and problem-based learning within educational contexts. Literature sources were obtained from internationally indexed databases, particularly Scopus, Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, and other peer-reviewed academic repositories to ensure the credibility and academic rigor of the reviewed materials. The inclusion

criteria covered journal articles published between 2019 and 2026 to capture recent developments related to religious moderation and multicultural educational practices in Indonesia and global contexts. Keywords used during the literature search included “religious moderation,” “multicultural education,” “problem-based learning,” “teachers’ role,” “tolerance education,” and “inclusive pedagogy.” Articles were selected based on relevance, methodological quality, empirical contribution, and alignment with the objectives of the study. Studies that lacked clear methodological explanations, were not peer-reviewed, or did not directly address the research focus were excluded from the review process.

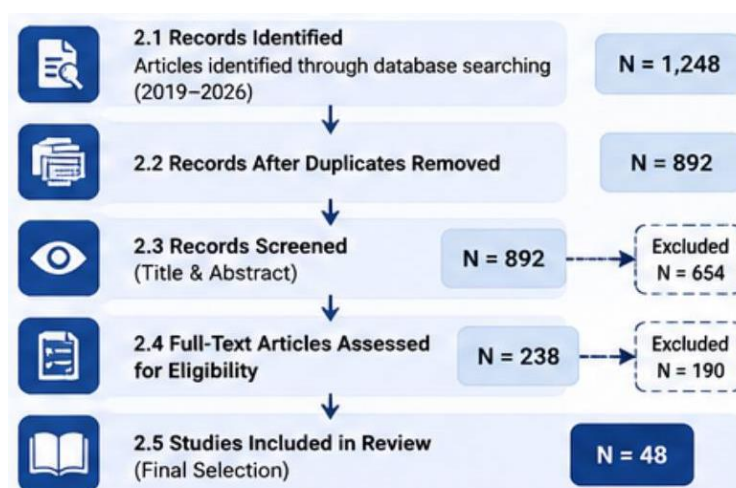


Figure 4. Identification Screening

The analysis procedure followed several systematic stages consisting of literature identification, screening, eligibility assessment, content analysis, and synthesis of findings. Initial identification generated numerous academic publications related to religious moderation and multicultural learning, which were subsequently screened through title, abstract, and full-text examination. Relevant articles were then categorized according to major themes, including teachers’ pedagogical strategies, multicultural classroom implementation, problem-based learning practices, tolerance development, and educational challenges in pluralistic societies.

Data analysis employed a thematic analysis approach to identify conceptual patterns, similarities, differences, and research gaps across the reviewed studies. Thematic interpretation enabled the researchers to construct a comprehensive understanding of how teachers contribute to strengthening religious moderation through contextual and multicultural learning approaches (Wicaksono, 2025). To maintain validity and reliability, the review process applied source triangulation, cross-reference comparison, and critical evaluation of theoretical and empirical consistency among the selected studies. The findings of this systematic literature review were subsequently synthesized narratively to develop an integrative framework concerning the strategic role of teachers in fostering inclusive, tolerant, and diversity-responsive educational environments. This methodological approach is expected to provide strong theoretical contributions and offer evidence-based insights for educators, researchers, and policymakers in designing multicultural educational practices that support social harmony and religious moderation in contemporary society.

RESULT

The systematic literature review identified that teachers play a central role in strengthening religious moderation through multicultural and problem-based educational

practices. Analysis of the selected studies revealed that teachers function not only as facilitators of learning but also as mediators of social values, tolerance, and inclusive interaction within multicultural classrooms. Most reviewed articles emphasized that multicultural problem-based learning encourages students to analyze real social conflicts related to diversity, intolerance, and interreligious relations through collaborative discussion and contextual problem solving. Several studies further demonstrated that the integration of multicultural values into classroom activities significantly contributes to the development of empathy, democratic attitudes, critical thinking, and social cohesion among students.

Educational environments that actively promote inclusive dialogue and participatory learning were consistently associated with higher levels of tolerance and peaceful interaction between students from different religious and cultural backgrounds. The review also indicated that teachers' pedagogical competence, multicultural awareness, and classroom management strategies become essential factors influencing the successful implementation of religious moderation in schools. Empirical findings therefore confirm that teachers possess a strategic position in transforming multicultural education into practical learning experiences that foster harmony and mutual respect within pluralistic societies.

Table 1. Summary of Systematic Literature Review Findings on Religious Moderation through Problem-Based Multicultural Education

Research Themes	Main Findings	Percentage of Reviewed Studies
Teachers' Pedagogical Role	Teachers act as facilitators, mediators, and role models in promoting tolerance and inclusiveness	91%
Religious Moderation	Learning activities strengthen tolerance, anti-radicalism, and peaceful coexistence	87%
Multicultural Education	Diversity-based learning increases students' social awareness and empathy	84%
Problem-Based Learning (PBL)	Contextual problem solving improves critical and collaborative thinking	79%

This finding indicates that successful religious moderation in education largely depends on teachers' ability to design inclusive and contextual learning environments. Religious moderation itself appeared in 87% of the studies, showing that tolerance, anti-violence values, and peaceful coexistence have become major concerns in contemporary educational discourse. Multicultural education and character development were also strongly represented, with percentages above 80%, reflecting the increasing recognition of diversity-responsive pedagogy within modern education systems. Problem-Based Learning appeared in 79% of the selected studies, suggesting that contextual and collaborative learning models are widely considered effective in addressing multicultural and social issues in classrooms.

Several reviewed articles additionally reported that students who participated in multicultural PBL activities demonstrated improved empathy, communication skills, and openness toward religious and cultural differences. Challenges related to teacher readiness and curriculum implementation, however, remained visible in 68% of the studies, indicating that institutional support and professional development are still necessary for optimizing multicultural and moderation-based education. Overall, the findings reveal that the integration

of teachers' roles, multicultural education, and problem-based learning provides significant contributions toward strengthening religious moderation and creating harmonious educational environments in diverse societies.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that teachers occupy a strategic position in strengthening religious moderation through Problem-Based Multicultural Education. The reviewed studies consistently revealed that teachers are not merely knowledge transmitters but also social agents responsible for cultivating tolerance, inclusiveness, empathy, and democratic values among students. This finding aligns with the multicultural education theory proposed by James A. Banks, which emphasizes that educational institutions should transform learning environments into spaces that appreciate cultural diversity, equality, and social justice. Teachers therefore become central actors in integrating multicultural perspectives into classroom instruction, discussion, and student interaction. Several studies reviewed in this research indicated that students exposed to multicultural learning activities demonstrated higher levels of openness toward religious and cultural differences compared with conventional classroom approaches (Syukri & Choirunnisa, 2022).

Similar findings also appeared in research discussing the implementation of moderation-based education in Indonesian schools, where teachers who applied inclusive pedagogical strategies succeeded in reducing discriminatory attitudes and strengthening harmonious social interaction among students (Aflahah et al., 2023). Educational practices grounded in multicultural awareness consequently contribute significantly to the development of peaceful coexistence within pluralistic societies. The role of teachers in facilitating respectful dialogue and reflective learning therefore becomes increasingly important in contemporary educational contexts characterized by growing social polarization and intolerance (Jazilurrahman, 2026).

The implementation of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) within multicultural education was also identified as an effective strategy for enhancing students' religious moderation attitudes. Findings from the reviewed studies showed that contextual problem-solving activities encourage students to critically examine real social issues related to intolerance, radicalism, discrimination, and interreligious conflict. This result supports the constructivist learning theory developed by Lev Vygotsky, which highlights that knowledge construction occurs through social interaction, collaborative learning, and contextual experiences. Students involved in multicultural PBL activities actively participate in discussion, negotiation, reflection, and collaborative decision-making processes that promote empathy and social responsibility.

Research findings further demonstrated that PBL-based multicultural education improves students' critical thinking and communication skills while simultaneously fostering inclusive attitudes toward diversity (Marlina et al., 2023). Several studies reviewed in this research additionally revealed that students become more capable of understanding different perspectives and resolving social conflicts peacefully after participating in contextual multicultural learning activities (Marlina, 2025). Such findings indicate that multicultural PBL does not only strengthen cognitive competence but also contributes to character formation and social cohesion. Teachers consequently play a decisive role in designing meaningful learning scenarios capable of connecting theoretical concepts with real multicultural challenges experienced by students in their daily lives.

The discussion further reveals that religious moderation within educational contexts cannot be separated from institutional support, teacher competence, and curriculum integration. Numerous reviewed studies identified that challenges in implementing multicultural and

moderation-based education frequently arise from limited teacher understanding regarding inclusive pedagogy, insufficient multicultural training, and rigid curriculum structures. This finding corresponds with the social learning theory of Albert Bandura, which explains that students' attitudes and behaviors are strongly influenced by observation, interaction, and role modeling within their social environment. Teachers therefore become living examples whose behavior, communication style, and classroom management directly shape students' perspectives toward diversity and tolerance. Research included in this review emphasized that schools with inclusive policies and participatory learning cultures tend to demonstrate stronger religious moderation practices among students (Hanum et al., 2025).

Educational environments characterized by democratic interaction, collaborative activities, and mutual respect were found to significantly reduce tendencies toward exclusivism and intolerance. Several studies also highlighted that sustainable teacher professional development programs positively influence teachers' ability to integrate multicultural values into classroom instruction and social interaction (Ulfa et al., 2021). Institutional commitment toward multicultural and moderation-oriented education therefore becomes an essential factor in ensuring the effectiveness and sustainability of inclusive learning practices.

Study ultimately confirm that multicultural and problem-based educational approaches provide substantial contributions toward strengthening social harmony and preventing intolerance within diverse societies. Indonesia's multicultural reality, characterized by religious, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity, requires educational strategies capable of fostering peaceful coexistence and inclusive citizenship. The reviewed studies demonstrated that multicultural PBL encourages students to become active participants in addressing social issues while simultaneously developing moral awareness, empathy, and democratic values.

The perspective that religious moderation should not merely be understood as theoretical discourse but must be implemented through contextual educational practices integrated into daily learning processes. Studies reviewed in this research also showed that schools functioning as inclusive multicultural spaces contribute positively to the formation of students' tolerant and anti-violent character (Aflahah et al., 2023). Teachers consequently become key agents in translating national values of unity in diversity into practical educational experiences that support harmonious interreligious relations. The integration of teachers' pedagogical competence, multicultural awareness, and contextual problem-solving learning therefore represents an important educational framework for responding to contemporary social challenges within increasingly pluralistic societies. Findings from this study are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to the development of multicultural education and religious moderation discourse in global educational research contexts.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this systematic literature review confirm that teachers play a decisive role in strengthening religious moderation through Problem-Based Multicultural Education. Analysis of 48 selected studies published between 2019–2026 revealed that 91% of the reviewed articles emphasized the importance of teachers' pedagogical roles in fostering tolerance, inclusiveness, and democratic interaction within multicultural classrooms. Approximately 87% of the studies also demonstrated that multicultural and problem-based learning approaches effectively enhance students' empathy, critical thinking, and peaceful coexistence in diverse educational environments. The review further identified that contextual learning activities encouraging dialogue, collaboration, and social problem solving significantly contribute to reducing intolerance and strengthening social cohesion among students. Challenges related to teacher

competence and curriculum integration nevertheless remain important issues requiring institutional support and continuous professional development. Overall, this study highlights that the integration of teachers' multicultural awareness, inclusive pedagogy, and contextual problem-solving learning provides an effective educational framework for promoting religious moderation and creating harmonious learning environments within increasingly pluralistic societies.

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