

Transforming Islamic Education Curriculum in the Era of Religious Moderation: Between Digital Integration and the Resilience of Pesantren Values

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Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji transformasi kurikulum pendidikan Islam di tengah menguatnya wacana moderasi beragama dan percepatan integrasi teknologi digital. Dengan pendekatan kualitatif-interpretatif, studi ini menganalisis dokumen kurikulum, praktik pembelajaran, serta refleksi akademik untuk menelusuri bagaimana nilai-nilai moderasi, inovasi digital, dan tradisi pesantren dinegosiasikan dalam desain dan implementasi kurikulum. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa moderasi beragama cenderung mengalami pergeseran dari ideal moral dan praksis sosial menjadi bahasa kebijakan dan kompetensi terukur. Sementara itu, integrasi digital membuka peluang pedagogis yang signifikan, namun sekaligus mengganggu ritme belajar tradisional, relasi otoritas guru–santri, dan kedalaman pembentukan etis. Nilai-nilai pesantren seperti adab, kesabaran intelektual, dan keteladanan tidak sepenuhnya tergerus, tetapi berada di bawah tekanan untuk beradaptasi, bertahan, atau sekadar dipertahankan secara simbolik. Artikel ini berargumen bahwa ketegangan dan ambivalensi yang muncul bukanlah kegagalan reformasi, melainkan kondisi struktural dari transformasi kurikulum yang masih berlangsung. Kurikulum pendidikan Islam, dengan demikian, lebih tepat dipahami sebagai arena negosiasi yang terbuka dan belum final, di mana integritas tradisi dan tuntutan perubahan terus diuji secara etis dan pedagogis.

Kata kunci: Pendidikan Islam, kurikulum, moderasi beragama, digitalisasi pendidikan, nilai pesantren.

Abstract

This article examines the transformation of Islamic education curricula in the context of the growing discourse on religious moderation and the rapid integration of digital technologies. Employing a qualitative and interpretive approach, the study analyzes curriculum documents, pedagogical practices, and academic reflections to explore how moderation, digital

innovation, and pesantren traditions are negotiated within curriculum design and implementation. The findings indicate that religious moderation has increasingly shifted from a moral ideal and lived social practice toward policy-oriented language and measurable competencies. At the same time, digital integration offers significant pedagogical opportunities while simultaneously disrupting traditional learning rhythms, teacher–student authority relations, and the depth of ethical formation. Pesantren values such as adab, intellectual patience, and exemplarity are not simply eroded; rather, they are placed under pressure to demonstrate resilience, undergo adaptation, or persist in symbolic forms. This article argues that the resulting tensions and inconsistencies should not be understood as failures of reform, but as structural conditions of an unfinished curricular transformation. Islamic education curricula thus emerge not as fixed blueprints, but as ongoing sites of negotiation where tradition, innovation, and compliance intersect in ethically complex ways.

Keywords: Islamic education, curriculum transformation, religious moderation, digital integration, pesantren values

Introduction

Over the past two decades, Islamic education has found itself standing at an increasingly crowded crossroads. On one side, there is a growing global insistence on religious moderation, a concept that sounds reassuringly simple, yet becomes far more complex when translated into curricula, classrooms, and lived religious practices (Muis, 2025; Nasir & Rijal, 2021). On the other side, digital technology has quietly but decisively reshaped how knowledge is accessed, interpreted, and internalized (Saepurohman et al., 2025; Suresman et al., 2025). Somewhere in between lies the pesantren tradition, with its slow rhythms of learning, moral discipline, and deeply rooted values that do not always move at the speed of algorithms (Kustati, 2020; Ma'Arif, 2018).

At first glance, these developments might appear complementary. Digital platforms promise efficiency, accessibility, and innovation; religious moderation offers a normative framework for coexistence in plural societies; pesantren values provide ethical grounding and spiritual depth. Yet, in practice, their interaction is rarely smooth. I think this tension is precisely what makes the current moment so intellectually and pedagogically interesting. Islamic education is not simply being modernized, it is being renegotiated, sometimes awkwardly, sometimes creatively (Budiharso et al., 2023; Sofi et al., 2025).

In many Muslim-majority contexts, including Indonesia, the discourse of religious moderation has become a central policy narrative. It is embedded in national education frameworks, teacher training programs,

and curriculum guidelines (Kholis & Rini, 2023; Mukhibat et al., 2024). The aim, broadly speaking, is to cultivate learners who are religiously committed yet socially inclusive, rooted in Islamic ethics while open to difference. This is a noble aspiration. Still, one might wonder: when moderation becomes a curricular mandate, does it remain a moral disposition, or does it risk turning into a technical competency that can be assessed, standardized, and, perhaps unintentionally, hollowed out (Burga & Damopolii, 2022; Helmy et al., 2021)?

Digital integration adds another layer of complexity. Online learning platforms, AI-assisted tools, and digital religious content have expanded the classroom far beyond the pesantren gate or school wall (Ibda et al., 2023). Students now encounter Islamic knowledge not only from teachers and *kyai*, but also from search engines, recommendation algorithms, and short video clips whose authority is often unclear. Some educators welcome this shift as an opportunity to democratize access to knowledge. Others are more hesitant, worrying, perhaps rightly, that speed and fragmentation may erode the ethical and spiritual patience that traditional Islamic learning has long cultivated (Millie, 2025; Yasin & Khasbulloh, 2022).

Pesantren, in this regard, occupy a particularly sensitive position. Historically, they have functioned not merely as educational institutions but as moral ecosystems (Kawakip, 2023). Learning in pesantren is embodied, relational, and gradual. Knowledge is transmitted alongside *adab*, discipline, and a sense of belonging to a living tradition (Samsu et al., 2021). Integrating digital tools and moderation narratives into such a system is not simply a matter of adding new subjects or platforms. It touches the very logic of how knowledge is valued, how authority is recognized, and how character is formed (Hanif et al., 2024; Mumtaz et al., 2024).

This article starts from the assumption that curriculum transformation in Islamic education cannot be understood as a linear process of progress or decline. It is, rather, a field of negotiation, between digital integration and ethical continuity, between policy-driven moderation and lived religious practice, between innovation and inheritance (Ihsan et al., 2024; Rohman & Wajdi, 2023). There are moments where these elements reinforce one another, and moments where they clearly pull in different directions. Ignoring either side would be analytically convenient, but intellectually dishonest.

Therefore, this study seeks to explore how Islamic education curricula are being reshaped in the era of religious moderation, with particular attention to the uneasy yet productive relationship between digital integration and the resilience of pesantren values. Instead of asking whether tradition or technology should prevail, the discussion asks a quieter question: how are educators, institutions, and curricula actually navigating this terrain, with all its inconsistencies, doubts, and partial

successes? In that space of imperfection, I believe, the most revealing insights emerge.

Method

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive approach. That choice was not entirely technical; it was also conceptual. When the research questions revolve around values, tensions, and lived educational practices, numbers alone tend to feel insufficient. I wanted to stay close to how curriculum transformation is experienced by educators and institutions, not merely how it is prescribed in documents. Qualitative inquiry, with all its limitations and ambiguities, seemed more honest for that purpose.

The research is designed as a multi-source curriculum analysis combined with reflective field-informed interpretation. Data were drawn from three main sources. First, policy and curriculum documents related to Islamic education and religious moderation were examined, including national curriculum frameworks, institutional guidelines, and official discourse on moderation and digital learning (Athoillah et al., 2024; Kosim et al., 2024; Muis, 2025). These texts were treated not as neutral artifacts, but as normative statements, documents that carry assumptions, aspirations, and, occasionally, silences.

Second, the study engaged with selected pesantren-based and Islamic higher education curricula that have begun integrating digital components, whether through learning management systems, blended learning models, or digitally mediated religious content (Ibda et al., 2023; Saepurohman et al., 2025; Suresman et al., 2025). Rather than attempting a broad survey, the focus was deliberately narrow and illustrative. The aim was not representativeness in a statistical sense, but depth of understanding. In some cases, curricular changes appeared carefully planned; in others, they felt more improvised, responses to external pressures rather than internal conviction. Both patterns were considered analytically meaningful.

Third, informal insights from academic practice were incorporated. These include observations from curriculum workshops, academic discussions, and conversations with educators involved in Islamic education reform. While these inputs are not framed as formal interviews, they reflect situated experiences that often escape official documentation. I realize this introduces a degree of subjectivity, but perhaps that is unavoidable. Curriculum transformation, especially in religious education, is rarely a fully transparent or purely rational process (Qorib, 2025; Syafi'i et al., 2025).

For data analysis, a thematic interpretive strategy was employed. Texts and observations were read repeatedly, with attention to recurring themes such as moderation discourse, authority of knowledge, digital pedagogy, and the preservation of pesantren values. At times, themes

overlapped or even contradicted one another. Instead of resolving these tensions too quickly, the analysis deliberately retained them, treating inconsistency as data rather than noise.

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this approach. The study does not claim to map all forms of Islamic education or pesantren practice, nor does it aim to measure outcomes in a causal sense. Its strength lies elsewhere: in tracing patterns of negotiation, hesitation, and adaptation as they unfold within curriculum discourse and practice. In that sense, the method aligns with the article's broader argument, that transformation in Islamic education is less about clear-cut transitions and more about ongoing, unfinished processes (Rohman & Wajdi, 2023). This methodological stance reflects a certain humility. Rather than presenting definitive answers, the study offers a grounded reading of how curriculum change is being imagined and enacted, with all its uncertainties still intact.

Results and Discussion

1. Reframing Religious Moderation in the Curriculum: From Moral Ideal to Policy Language

In curriculum documents, religious moderation often appears with an air of clarity and confidence. It is named, defined, and positioned as a key educational objective, sometimes even as a central learning outcome (Muis, 2025; Nasir & Rijal, 2021). Yet when one reads these texts closely, a subtle shift becomes visible. Moderation, once understood primarily as an ethical disposition shaped through lived interaction, moral struggle, and social responsibility, is increasingly reframed as a curricular category. It becomes something that can be listed, aligned, and, to some extent, measured.

At the level of policy language, moderation is translated into competencies such as tolerance, inclusivity, civic responsibility, and balanced religious understanding (Kholis & Rini, 2023; Mukhibat et al., 2024). These formulations are not wrong. In fact, they are often carefully worded and normatively appealing. However, they also signal a movement away from moderation as a way of being toward moderation as a way of performing. The curriculum asks: can students demonstrate moderate attitudes? Can they articulate pluralist views? Can they engage difference without conflict? These are reasonable questions, but they subtly recast moderation as an observable outcome rather than an internalized moral habit (Burga & Damopolii, 2022; Helmy et al., 2021).

This shift becomes even more apparent in learning outcomes and assessment frameworks. Moderation is operationalized through indicators, rubrics, and behavioral descriptors. Students are expected to “show respect for diversity” or “apply moderate religious perspectives in social contexts.” On paper, this creates clarity and accountability. In practice, though, it raises an uncomfortable question: can moderation, as a deeply moral and

relational quality, really be captured through standardized curricular language? Or does something important get lost in translation (Ichsan et al., 2024; Qorib, 2025)?

There is also a certain irony here. Moderation is often promoted as an antidote to rigid formalism and ideological extremism. Yet, when embedded too neatly into curriculum matrices, it risks becoming formalistic itself. I have occasionally heard educators admit, half jokingly, half seriously, that moderation has become “another box to tick.” Perhaps this is an unfair generalization, but it reflects a genuine unease. When moderation is framed primarily as policy compliance, its ethical force may soften, even if its visibility increases (Athoillah et al., 2024; Setiawan et al., 2026).

At the same time, it would be too simple to dismiss this reframing as mere bureaucratization. Policy language, after all, is not optional in contemporary education systems. Without curricular articulation, moderation might remain a vague aspiration, unevenly implemented or easily ignored. From this perspective, translating moderation into curriculum language can be seen as a strategic move, an attempt to protect and institutionalize certain values within complex educational systems (Kosim et al., 2024; Listrianti & Mundiri, 2020).

What emerges, then, is not a clear victory or loss, but a tension. Moderation lives simultaneously as a moral ideal and as an administrative construct. In some contexts, these two dimensions reinforce each other; in others, they drift apart. The curriculum becomes the site where this tension is negotiated daily, sometimes thoughtfully, sometimes mechanically. Whether moderation remains a living value or gradually hardens into an administrative term depends less on the wording of policy documents and more on how educators inhabit, interpret, and occasionally resist those words in practice (Mistar et al., 2025; Rostandi et al., 2026).

2. Digital Integration as Pedagogical Opportunity, and Cultural Disruption

Digital integration in Islamic education curricula often arrives with a friendly vocabulary: innovation, access, flexibility, engagement. And to be fair, much of that vocabulary is grounded in real experiences. When institutions introduce learning management systems, digital libraries, hybrid classrooms, or even simple WhatsApp-based learning routines, something does open up (Saepurohman et al., 2025; Suresman et al., 2025). Students who used to depend on a single textbook, or a single teacher’s explanation, suddenly have layers of resources. Lecturers can share readings instantly. Santri can revisit recorded lessons. A discussion can continue after class hours. In a busy academic week, this matters more than we sometimes admit.

Many educators describe digital tools as a kind of pedagogical “extension.” They are not necessarily replacing the classroom; they stretch

it. And this stretching has obvious benefits. A curriculum that incorporates digital components can respond more quickly to contemporary issues, including those tied to religious moderation, pluralism, civic ethics, misinformation, and the dynamics of religious discourse online (Ibda et al., 2023). In that sense, digital integration is not just about technology; it becomes an avenue for curriculum relevance. Perhaps that is why, in policy documents and institutional strategies, digitalization is often framed as a necessary condition of modernization rather than an optional add-on (Darwanto et al., 2024; Rohman & Wajdi, 2023).

But the story becomes less smooth when we shift from curriculum claims to curriculum life. Digital integration is also a cultural disruption, sometimes gentle, sometimes quite sharp. In many Islamic learning traditions, especially pesantren-based contexts, education is not simply information transfer. It is a moral formation process anchored in time, discipline, and embodied relationships (Kustati, 2020; Millie, 2025). Digital learning, by contrast, is structurally impatient. It encourages speed, multitasking, and short cycles of attention. Even when used for noble aims, the medium carries a certain tempo. And I think tempo is not a neutral thing in religious education.

One of the most visible tensions appears in the rhythm of learning. Traditional pesantren values emphasize gradual mastery, repetition, and the slow cultivation of *adab* (Kawakip, 2023; Samsu et al., 2021). A santri does not “finish” a book simply by reading it; they sit with it, often under the guidance of a teacher, sometimes for months, sometimes longer. Digital platforms can support repetition, yes, but they also invite skipping. Students may jump to summaries, search for quick answers, or rely on explanatory videos that feel easier than wrestling with a dense classical text. The curriculum may still list the same *kitab*, the same themes, the same learning outcomes, but the learning rhythm underneath it quietly shifts (Yasin & Khasbulloh, 2022).

This is where digital integration becomes a double-edged opportunity. On one hand, it can democratize access to religious knowledge. A student from a remote area can access lectures from renowned scholars, classical manuscripts, and international debates about Islamic thought. That is genuinely empowering. On the other hand, it destabilizes older hierarchies of authority. Knowledge is no longer mediated primarily by the teacher or *kyai*; it is mediated by interfaces, algorithms, and online popularity. And popularity, frankly, is not the same as credibility, though students may treat it as such, especially when the content is persuasive, beautifully edited, and emotionally satisfying (Suresman et al., 2025).

In curriculum terms, this disruption shows up in subtle ways. Educators begin to add “digital literacy” outcomes, not only as technical competencies but as ethical safeguards: critical evaluation of sources, respectful communication online, awareness of extremist content, and the

ability to differentiate scholarly authority from influencer authority (Ibda et al., 2023; Saepurohman et al., 2025). Yet, even here, there is a lingering uncertainty. Digital literacy is often written as if it can be taught like a module, week 6: digital ethics; week 7: fact-checking; quiz; done. But in reality, students' digital religious world is continuous and immersive. It is lived every day, not contained neatly in a semester plan.

The teacher–student relationship is another area where disruption becomes emotionally visible. Pesantren learning is often built on proximity: not only physical proximity, but moral and spiritual closeness. The teacher is a source of knowledge, but also a moral model (Kawakip, 2023; Samsu et al., 2021). Digital mediation can dilute that relational intensity. In online settings, the teacher risks becoming a “content provider,” while students become “users.” The language itself changes. Some educators respond by adapting, creating more interactive online spaces, maintaining mentorship through digital channels, ensuring that *adab* remains central even when learning happens remotely. Others resist, insisting that the core of pesantren education cannot be digitized without losing something essential (Millie, 2025). Both positions make sense, and I'm not sure the debate has a clean resolution.

The tension between efficiency and depth is perhaps the most decisive theme. Digital tools make curriculum delivery efficient: materials can be distributed faster, assessments can be automated, attendance can be tracked, analytics can be generated. Institutions, understandably, like this. But religious education, especially pesantren-informed education, often measures success differently: not only by how much is covered, but by how deeply learners are shaped (Ma'Arif, 2018). Depth is harder to capture in a dashboard. It is slow, uneven, sometimes invisible. And when efficiency becomes the dominant curricular logic, depth can begin to feel like a luxury.

At this point, it is tempting to frame the discussion as “digital bad, tradition good,” but that would be too simple, and probably inaccurate. Digital integration is not inherently shallow, and traditional learning is not automatically profound. There are traditional settings where learning becomes rote and uncritical, and digital spaces where learners engage texts with surprising seriousness. The real issue is not technology itself, but what kind of educational imagination accompanies its adoption. Does the curriculum treat digital tools as mere accelerators of delivery, or as platforms that must be ethically shaped to protect the slow virtues of Islamic learning, patience, humility, attentiveness, and moral responsibility (Rohman, 2022)?

What the findings suggest, then, is a curriculum landscape marked by experimentation. Institutions are adopting digital integration because they must, socially, politically, and educationally. Yet they are also discovering, sometimes reluctantly, that digital integration is not neutral. It carries cultural consequences. It changes how students relate to

knowledge, how they relate to teachers, and how they experience religious authority (Hanif et al., 2024). The challenge is not simply to “use technology,” but to domesticate it within a moral pedagogy that remains faithful to pesantren values while still responsive to contemporary realities. And that is harder than it sounds, because it requires not only technical skills, but a kind of curricular courage: the willingness to slow down even when the system pushes for speed.

3. Authority, Knowledge, and the Shifting Role of the Teacher

One of the most quietly radical consequences of digital integration is not the technology itself, but the way it rearranges authority. In Islamic education, especially within pesantren traditions, authority has never been merely about who “knows more.” It is layered. It involves *sanad* (chains of transmission), *adab* (ethical discipline), embodied trust, and a sense that knowledge is not just information but a moral responsibility (Kustati, 2020; Millie, 2025). When knowledge becomes widely distributed online, that layered structure does not disappear overnight, but it does become harder to sustain in the same form.

In practical terms, students today often encounter Islamic knowledge before they encounter their teachers’ explanations of it. They arrive in class having watched a lecture clip, read a thread, or followed an influencer’s interpretation of a verse. Sometimes the information is accurate and even helpful. Sometimes it is shallow. Sometimes it is quietly ideological. Yet the point is that the teacher is no longer the first gate of access. The teacher becomes, increasingly, a second or third stop, someone asked to confirm, correct, or justify. And I think that can be unsettling, even when educators do not say it out loud.

This is where curriculum becomes a “pressure point.” Traditional curricular logic assumes a relatively stable hierarchy: the teacher (or *kyai*) guides, the student follows, and authoritative texts are approached through the teacher’s mediation. Digital reality disrupts that order. Students can search for answers instantly, compare multiple interpretations, or even challenge a teacher with “But I heard a different view online.” In some classrooms, this leads to richer dialogue. In others, it produces confusion or a kind of quiet cynicism: if every claim has ten competing versions online, why should one teacher’s interpretation carry weight (Mumtaz et al., 2024)?

Pesantren settings experience this tension in a distinctive way because authority there is often relational and spiritual, not only intellectual. The *kyai* is not simply an instructor; he embodies a moral world (Samsu et al., 2021). When a santri privileges online sources over the *kyai*’s guidance, it is not just a pedagogical disagreement, it can feel like a rupture in *adab*. Yet, at the same time, pesantren communities are not immune to the fact that students are living in two epistemic worlds: the slow world of the *pondok* and the fast world of the feed. The curriculum has

to navigate this duality, whether it admits it explicitly or not (Hanif et al., 2024).

What responses emerge? The findings suggest at least three curricular postures: resistance, selective adaptation, and pragmatic acceptance. They are not neat categories, and institutions often mix them, sometimes in the same semester, sometimes in the same class.

The first posture, *resistance*, appears when digital sources are framed as threats to authentic knowledge. In curriculum terms, this may show up as reaffirming classical texts, intensifying face-to-face learning requirements, or limiting digital access in certain learning spaces (Nasution et al., 2024). This posture is not simply technophobia. Often it is a protective response to real risks: misinformation, extremist content, decontextualized fatwas, and the erosion of scholarly method. Yet resistance can also be brittle. It may preserve authority externally while failing to engage the reality that students are still consuming digital content outside institutional control.

The second posture, *selective adaptation*, is more nuanced and arguably more common. Here, educators accept that digital resources are unavoidable but try to curate them. Curriculum adjustments might include recommended online channels, digitized *kitab* libraries, guided reading lists, or structured assignments requiring students to compare sources using traditional scholarly criteria (Ibda et al., 2023; Saepurohman et al., 2025). In other words, the curriculum does not surrender authority; it tries to reassert it through a new form of mediation. The teacher becomes a curator, a guide, and sometimes a translator, helping students move between the online abundance of information and the disciplined practices of Islamic scholarship.

But this posture also has its limits. Curation assumes that students will treat the teacher's recommendations as more legitimate than the endless alternatives online. Sometimes they do. Sometimes they don't. And even when they do, the teacher's role changes: instead of being the primary transmitter of knowledge, they become a kind of epistemic coach, teaching students how to evaluate, not merely what to memorize (Yasin & Khasbulloh, 2022).

The third posture, *pragmatic acceptance*, can look like surrender, but it is not always that simple. In many institutions, digital integration is driven by structural pressures: accreditation demands, modernization policies, student expectations, even budget constraints (Darwanto et al., 2024). The curriculum adapts because it must. Teachers are asked to use platforms, upload materials, and conduct assessments digitally. In this scenario, the role shift is less philosophical and more functional. Teachers become content managers. Kyai may delegate digital tasks to younger staff. Authority is maintained symbolically, while the operational structure changes underneath. This is where mild contradictions emerge:

institutions may speak about preserving traditional authority while simultaneously adopting systems that push educators into managerial roles (Mumtaz et al., 2024).

A deeper question sits behind these postures: what counts as legitimate knowledge in the digital age? In classical Islamic education, legitimacy is tied to method, transmission, and ethical responsibility. In digital environments, legitimacy is often tied to visibility, rhetorical confidence, and emotional resonance. This is not only a student problem; it is a cultural shift. The curriculum may attempt to reinforce epistemic discipline, introducing critical thinking, source evaluation, and moderation frameworks, but the gravitational pull of digital culture remains strong (Suresman et al., 2025).

Interestingly, the shifting role of the teacher is not entirely negative. Some educators find that digital disruption forces them to become more dialogical and less authoritarian in unproductive ways. Students' access to diverse interpretations can open space for critical engagement, comparative fiqh discussions, and deeper reflection on moderation itself (Rohman, 2022). Yet this benefit depends on one crucial condition: the teacher must still be able to anchor discussion within scholarly ethics. Without that anchoring, pluralism becomes relativism, and "many opinions" becomes "no standards."

So, where does this leave Islamic education curricula? It leaves them in a delicate balancing act. The curriculum must protect legitimate authority without turning that protection into mere control. It must acknowledge students' digital lives without romanticizing them. And it must redefine the teacher's role in a way that is neither nostalgic nor purely technocratic. Perhaps the most realistic conclusion here is that authority is not disappearing; it is being reconfigured. The question is whether the curriculum will shape that reconfiguration deliberately, grounded in pesantren values and scholarly ethics, or whether it will happen by default, driven by the invisible logic of platforms (Syafi'i et al., 2025).

4. Pesantren Values under Pressure: Resilience, Adaptation, or Symbolic Preservation?

When people talk about pesantren values, they often mention them as if they were a stable package, *adab*, patience, discipline, sincerity, respect for teachers, and the habit of learning slowly. And yes, those values are real, and they still matter (Kustati, 2020; Ma'Arif, 2018). But in a curriculum that is increasingly digital and increasingly shaped by the language of religious moderation, these values do not simply "remain." They are pressured, reinterpreted, sometimes even repackaged. That is why the more interesting question is not whether pesantren values survive, but how they survive: through resilience, adaptation, or, more awkwardly, symbolic preservation.

Adab is perhaps the most frequently cited value. It is the easiest to mention, and perhaps the hardest to translate into curricular language without flattening it. In pesantren life, *adab* is not a chapter in a textbook. It is a social atmosphere: how a student speaks, listens, walks, waits, and even disagrees. It is learned through repetition, correction, and example (Kawakip, 2023; Samsu et al., 2021). Yet when curriculum frameworks formalize *adab*, it often appears as “character education,” “ethics,” or “religious attitudes.” These are not inaccurate labels, but they shift the meaning. They turn *adab* into a topic rather than a lived practice. And once it becomes a topic, it is tempting, almost inevitably, to assess it with checklists. That is the beginning of a subtle reduction: *adab* becomes something students can display during observation, rather than something they steadily inhabit.

The pressure intensifies in digital learning environments. Online interaction compresses the cues that pesantren rely on for moral formation. A student in an online class can appear attentive while actually disengaged. A respectful tone can be performed with polite emojis while the deeper posture of humility is absent. Even a simple act like “sitting properly” before a teacher, which carries symbolic weight in traditional learning, becomes irrelevant behind a screen. I do not mean this as romantic nostalgia. I just mean that the medium rearranges what can be witnessed and corrected. And pesantren values have long depended on being witnessed (Millie, 2025).

Intellectual patience, *sabr* in learning, faces a different kind of pressure. Pesantren education is built on endurance: repeating texts, revisiting difficult passages, accepting that understanding comes slowly (Yasin & Khasbulloh, 2022). Digital culture, by contrast, normalizes immediate retrieval. Students can search a term, find a quick explanation, and move on. Sometimes this is helpful. But it can also train the mind to avoid struggle. The curriculum might still aim for deep comprehension of *turāth*, *ushul*, or classical fiqh debates, yet the learning habit gradually shifts toward convenience. I have seen this in many contexts: students are not less intelligent, but they become less willing to sit with difficulty. And a curriculum that fully embraces efficiency without protecting spaces for slowness will unintentionally undermine one of the core virtues pesantren try to cultivate.

Then there is learning by exemplarity, *keteladanan*, which is central in pesantren but fragile in modern curricular systems. Teachers and *kyai* function as living references, not only for knowledge but for comportment and moral judgment (Samsu et al., 2021). Digital integration can weaken this in two ways. First, it displaces attention. Students begin to model themselves not only after local teachers but after distant figures who are digitally charismatic. Second, it changes the teacher’s role. When teachers become content managers, uploading files, monitoring submissions, handling digital administration, their presence as moral

exemplars can shrink. They are still respected, perhaps, but their pedagogical time is reorganized. And moral formation is often what gets squeezed when time is reorganized (Mumtaz et al., 2024).

Now, where does religious moderation fit into this? Moderation discourse often overlaps with pesantren values, at least in principle. Many pesantren traditions already teach coexistence, humility, and avoidance of unnecessary conflict (Helmy et al., 2021; Qorib, 2025). In that sense, moderation can feel like a familiar ethical orientation. Yet moderation as a policy framework can also redirect pesantren values into more outward-facing, civic-friendly language. *Adab* becomes “respect for diversity.” Patience becomes “emotional regulation.” *Keteladanan* becomes “role modeling.” Again, these translations are not wrong. But they can alter the inner texture of the values. Pesantren values are often inwardly religious, anchored in spiritual discipline and accountability before God, whereas moderation discourse is frequently outwardly social, anchored in national harmony and citizenship (Bulan & Fuad, 2025; Setiawan et al., 2026). The two can align, but not always perfectly.

The first is *resilience*, where pesantren values remain substantively central and digital tools are subordinated to them. In this pattern, technology is used, but the learning ecology is still governed by *adab* and discipline. Digital resources support, not replace, teacher-mediated learning. Students may use online materials, but they are expected to bring them back into a disciplined discussion space. The curriculum, in this case, does not treat pesantren values as decorative; it treats them as the organizing logic (Kustati, 2020). This is arguably the healthiest scenario, but it requires strong institutional confidence and teachers who are not easily overwhelmed by digital demands.

The second is *adaptation*, where pesantren values are reinterpreted to fit digital pedagogies and moderation frameworks. Here, *adab* might be taught explicitly in online etiquette guidelines; patience might be cultivated through long-form assignments that resist quick answers; *keteladanan* might be extended through mentoring via digital channels (Ibda et al., 2023; Saepurohman et al., 2025). There is creativity in this. And I think it deserves recognition, because it shows that pesantren values are not inherently anti-technology. They can travel, to some extent. Yet adaptation also risks dilution. The more values are translated into procedural rules, the more they can lose their depth. Still, perhaps some dilution is the price of survival in modern systems. I’m not entirely sure, but I can see why institutions make that compromise.

The third pattern is *symbolic preservation*, where pesantren values are retained mainly as identity markers rather than lived pedagogical principles. This is the most sensitive pattern to discuss, because it can sound accusatory. But it is visible in the way institutions sometimes highlight pesantren vocabulary in mission statements, banners, or curriculum introductions, while daily learning practices increasingly follow

the logic of modern schooling and digital efficiency (Hanif et al., 2024; Sofi et al., 2025). *Adab* is celebrated rhetorically, but not cultivated structurally. Patience is praised, but the system rewards speed. *Keteladanan* is affirmed, but teachers are stretched thin by administrative workloads. In this scenario, pesantren values remain present as cultural symbols, but their formative power weakens.

What seems to matter most is not whether pesantren values are mentioned in the curriculum, but whether the curriculum creates conditions for them to operate. *Adab* requires relational space, not just moral slogans. Intellectual patience requires time and protected slowness, not just “deep learning” rhetoric. *Keteladanan* requires teachers who are not reduced to platform operators. If these conditions are absent, pesantren values may still be displayed, beautifully, even, but they will function more like identity decoration than educational substance (Amal et al., 2025; Ubaidillah & Faiz, 2025).

This is why the pressure on pesantren values in the era of digital integration and moderation discourse is not merely ideological; it is structural. Values do not survive by being announced. They survive by being practiced, repeated, and protected. And in the current landscape, protecting them may require a kind of curricular intentionality that is, frankly, difficult: the willingness to limit certain efficiencies, to slow down certain processes, and to insist that not everything valuable can be optimized.

5. Curriculum as a Site of Negotiation: Between Tradition, Innovation, and Compliance

If we treat curriculum as a finished product, something stable, coherent, and logically arranged, then we will keep missing what is actually happening in many Islamic education institutions today. Because the curriculum, in practice, is less like a blueprint and more like a negotiation table. It is where different pressures meet, sometimes politely, sometimes awkwardly. Tradition sits there, with its long memory and moral claims. Innovation arrives with promises of relevance and efficiency. Compliance enters with deadlines, accreditation rubrics, and policy indicators. The curriculum is where they try, not always successfully, to share the same page (Ihsan et al., 2024; Rohman & Wajdi, 2023).

This negotiation is particularly visible in the era of religious moderation. Moderation is not only a pedagogical concern; it is a public expectation and, increasingly, a regulatory orientation. Institutions feel a need to demonstrate alignment: with national priorities, with social harmony narratives, with measurable outcomes (Kholis & Rini, 2023; Mukhibat et al., 2024). In curriculum documents, this often shows up as explicit statements about moderation values, civic ethics, and inclusive learning environments. In some settings, it reads like a sincere educational commitment. In others, it reads, how should I say this, like careful

positioning. Not necessarily dishonest, but strategic (Athoillah et al., 2024).

At the same time, pesantren-based institutions and Islamic education programs carry internal commitments that do not always fit neatly into policy templates. They operate with their own moral hierarchies: the centrality of *adab*, the authority of tradition, the value of slow learning, the importance of communal discipline (Kawakip, 2023; Ma'Arif, 2018). These commitments are not easily expressed in the language of modern curriculum design, which tends to favor competencies, measurable indicators, and standardized outcomes. So a negotiation happens: how to translate what feels sacred and lived into what must be documented and evaluated (Listrianti & Mundiri, 2020; Syafi'i et al., 2025).

Innovation complicates the negotiation further. Digital integration, for instance, is rarely adopted in a vacuum. It is often pushed by external incentives: modernization agendas, student expectations, institutional branding, or even simple necessity (especially after the pandemic period, which many institutions still reference as a turning point) (Suresman et al., 2025). Innovation is presented as inevitable. Yet, inside the institution, innovation must be reconciled with questions that are not technical: Who controls content? How do we protect *adab* in online spaces? How do we preserve scholarly authority when students learn from platforms? These are not trivial questions, and curricula often respond with partial answers rather than definitive resolutions (Ibda et al., 2023; Mumtaz et al., 2024).

What the findings suggest is that curricular negotiation produces compromises that are, frankly, not always consistent. But inconsistency here is not automatically a weakness. It can be a sign that institutions are managing multiple realities. For example, a curriculum may officially endorse blended learning, yet still require certain core religious subjects to be taught face-to-face under direct teacher supervision (Hanif et al., 2024). It may adopt digital literacy outcomes, but also emphasize the primacy of *sanad*-based knowledge (Nasution et al., 2024). It may celebrate moderation discourse while simultaneously maintaining strong boundaries around doctrinal authority (Helmy et al., 2021; Qorib, 2025). If one reads this as contradiction, it looks messy. If one reads it as negotiation, it looks realistic.

This is where the idea of compliance becomes especially important. In many Islamic education institutions, compliance is not merely obedience; it is survival. Accreditation systems, funding mechanisms, and national policy frameworks shape institutional choices. Curriculum documents must align with prescribed formats. Learning outcomes must be stated in standardized terms. Evidence of implementation must be produced. In such conditions, the curriculum becomes a document that speaks two languages at once: the language of internal values and the language of external accountability (Mistar et al., 2025; Muliadi et al., 2025).

Sometimes these languages harmonize. Moderation discourse can resonate with pesantren ethics of avoiding *fitnah*, maintaining social harmony, and prioritizing ethical conduct (Rostandi et al., 2026; Zaman et al., 2024). Digital integration can be framed as a tool for *da'wah*, scholarly access, and global engagement (Saepurohman et al., 2025). In these cases, negotiation feels smooth, almost natural. But other times, the languages clash. Moderation, when interpreted narrowly as political neutrality or conflict avoidance, can feel like an attempt to depoliticize religious critique (Bulan & Fuad, 2025). Digital integration, when driven by efficiency, can feel like a threat to the slow moral labor of traditional learning (Millie, 2025; Yasin & Khasbulloh, 2022). And compliance, when it becomes overly procedural, can exhaust educators and reduce curriculum to paperwork (Aripin et al., 2025).

One pattern that emerges is what might be called “dual-layer curriculum.” On the surface layer, the curriculum aligns with policy expectations: moderation outcomes, digital competencies, measurable indicators. On the deeper layer, the lived curriculum, what teachers actually emphasize, what students internalize, what the institution truly values, may still be guided by pesantren logic (Kawakip, 2023; Sofi et al., 2025). This dual-layer reality is not necessarily deceptive; it is often a pragmatic strategy. Institutions learn to “speak” to regulators while maintaining internal continuity. Yet the risk is that the surface layer gradually shapes the deeper layer over time. What begins as strategic compliance can slowly become genuine transformation, sometimes welcomed, sometimes regretted.

Negotiation also occurs at the level of actors. Curriculum committees, administrators, senior religious scholars, young digitally fluent teachers, and students themselves all bring different interests. Senior figures may prioritize preserving tradition and authority. Younger educators may push for digital innovation and pedagogical experimentation. Administrators may focus on compliance and institutional reputation. Students may desire flexibility and relevance, but also seek spiritual depth, sometimes both, sometimes neither. The curriculum becomes the place where these interests are condensed into formal statements. That condensation inevitably produces compromises (Budiharso et al., 2023; Darwanto et al., 2024).

And perhaps this is the most honest conclusion of this subdiscussion: curriculum transformation in Islamic education is not a clean transition from “traditional” to “modern.” It is a continual bargaining process. It involves selective preservation, selective reform, and occasional improvisation. It is shaped by policy pressures and public expectations, but also by internal moral commitments that do not easily disappear (Sofi et al., 2025). The resulting curriculum may look uneven, even contradictory. Yet that unevenness may be exactly what reveals the truth of the moment:

Islamic education is trying to remain itself while learning to speak in a new world, and that effort, by its nature, is rarely perfectly coherent.

6. Unfinished Transformation: Ambivalence as an Educational Condition

By this point, it becomes difficult, almost artificial, to describe curriculum transformation in Islamic education as a clean story of “success” or “failure.” What appears instead is something more human, and honestly more believable: ambivalence. Doubts. Mixed signals. Contradictions that do not resolve neatly. At first, one might want to treat these as temporary problems, implementation gaps, weak planning, inconsistent leadership. But the findings suggest a deeper reading. Ambivalence is not merely an accident of transition; it is, in many ways, the condition of transition itself (Rohman & Wajdi, 2023).

This is an important shift in how we interpret what is happening. If we assume that a good curriculum must be fully coherent, stable, and perfectly aligned, then Islamic education curricula today will always look “unfinished.” There will always be tension between pesantren values and digital efficiency, between moderation discourse and doctrinal boundaries, between institutional identity and regulatory compliance (Ihsan et al., 2024; Muliadi et al., 2025). Yet perhaps the expectation of coherence is itself too modern, too managerial. Religious education has long lived with layered meanings and negotiated practices. It has always involved interpretation, contestation, and gradual adjustment (Budiharso et al., 2023). In that sense, ambivalence might not be a crisis. It might be a familiar mode of survival, only now amplified by the speed and visibility of digital change.

Ambivalence becomes visible in the way institutions talk about technology. Digital integration is praised as necessary, but also treated with suspicion. Platforms are adopted, but certain subjects are protected from full digitization. Teachers encourage students to explore online resources, yet simultaneously warn them not to trust what they find online (Saepurohman et al., 2025; Suresman et al., 2025). It is not that educators are confused. It is that they are trying to hold together two truths: technology is unavoidable, and technology is not morally neutral. Both are true, and living with both produces ambivalence.

A similar ambivalence appears in moderation discourse. Institutions promote moderation as a civic virtue and educational goal, but they also fear that moderation could become a shallow slogan, or worse, a politicized label that marginalizes certain expressions of piety (Bulan & Fuad, 2025; Muis, 2025). Some educators seem to embrace moderation as a continuation of pesantren ethics, humility, social harmony, avoidance of extremism (Helmy et al., 2021; Qorib, 2025). Others worry that moderation might be used to domesticate religious critique, to turn faith into a polite performance (Setiawan et al., 2026). These are not trivial anxieties. They

reflect real experiences of how public discourse can shape, and sometimes distort, religious education.

What is striking is how ambivalence often produces hybrid curricular forms. Institutions do not fully reject tradition, nor fully embrace digital-modern reforms. They build mixtures: classical texts plus digital supplements; face-to-face *halaqah* plus online assignments; pesantren etiquette plus digital citizenship modules; authority-based teaching plus inquiry-based activities (Ibda et al., 2023; Rohman, 2022). These hybrids can look inconsistent from the outside, but they can be internally rational. They represent attempts to keep moral depth while staying institutionally legible in a modern education system.

Of course, there is also a risk here. Ambivalence can become paralysis. If institutions endlessly hedge, adopting reforms without conviction, preserving traditions without updating them, then curriculum transformation may become superficial. The curriculum can end up as layered rhetoric: moderation in mission statements, digitalization in strategic plans, pesantren values in slogans, but little structural change in daily pedagogy (Hanif et al., 2024; Sofi et al., 2025). In that case, ambivalence functions less as thoughtful caution and more as a way of avoiding hard decisions. The findings hint at this possibility, especially where compliance pressures are high and educators are exhausted by administrative demands.

Yet I hesitate to treat this as the dominant narrative. Many educators seem to inhabit ambivalence in a constructive way. They use it as a space for discernment. They do not pretend to have final answers, because final answers might be premature. Instead, they experiment cautiously: trying digital tools, observing their effects on students' learning habits, adjusting methods, re-emphasizing *adab* when it begins to thin out, reasserting scholarly standards when online content becomes too influential (Kawakip, 2023; Yasin & Khasbulloh, 2022). This is slow work, and it rarely looks like a "finished model." But it might be exactly what ethical curriculum transformation requires.

In a way, ambivalence can be read as a form of responsibility. To be overly confident about digital integration would be naïve, given the risks of misinformation, ideological manipulation, and shallow learning. To be overly confident about tradition's resilience would also be naïve, given the reality that students' lives are already digitized and their epistemic worlds have changed (Mumtaz et al., 2024; Suresman et al., 2025). Ambivalence keeps institutions from rushing too quickly into either romantic preservation or technocratic modernization. It is uncomfortable, yes, but discomfort is sometimes the price of moral seriousness.

So, instead of concluding that Islamic education is "behind" because it has not produced a unified curriculum model for moderation and digital learning, the findings suggest a different framing: Islamic education is

undergoing an unfinished transformation, one that is still negotiating its ethical boundaries (Aripin et al., 2025). The curriculum is not yet a settled blueprint because the world it responds to is not settled either (Amal et al., 2025). And perhaps that unfinishedness is not merely a weakness. It might be a sign that Islamic education, particularly in pesantren-informed contexts, is still trying to change without losing its soul, an effort that cannot be rushed, even if the digital world keeps pushing it to move faster.

Conclusion

This article has argued that transforming the Islamic education curriculum in the era of religious moderation and digital integration is neither a linear reform nor a settled achievement. Rather, it is an ongoing process of negotiation, uneven, cautious, and often ambivalent. Moderation, once rooted in ethical disposition and social practice, is increasingly articulated through policy language and curricular outcomes. Digital technologies, while opening unprecedented pedagogical opportunities, simultaneously disrupt long-standing rhythms of learning, authority structures, and moral formation. Pesantren values, far from disappearing, are placed under pressure to prove their relevance in systems that privilege efficiency, measurability, and visibility.

What emerges from the discussion is not a simple opposition between tradition and modernity, but a complex landscape of compromises. Curricula reflect efforts to remain faithful to pesantren ethics while responding to regulatory demands and social expectations. These efforts are not always consistent, and they rarely produce a single, coherent model. Yet this inconsistency should not be hastily interpreted as failure. In many cases, it represents a realistic response to competing obligations: preserving moral depth, embracing innovation, and ensuring institutional legitimacy.

Perhaps the most important insight lies in recognizing ambivalence as an educational condition rather than a flaw. Doubt, hesitation, and partial adaptation signal that curriculum transformation is still alive, still contested, and still ethically attentive. Islamic education, particularly in pesantren-informed contexts, appears to be resisting the temptation to resolve all tensions too quickly. In doing so, it keeps open a space for reflection, correction, and moral discernment.

Ultimately, the challenge ahead is not to finalize a perfect curriculum for moderation and digital learning, but to sustain conditions in which values such as *adab*, intellectual patience, and scholarly responsibility can continue to operate meaningfully. This requires curricular intentionality, institutional courage, and a willingness to accept that some forms of educational integrity cannot be optimized or fully standardized. In an age that demands speed and clarity, the unfinished character of Islamic education reform may well be its most honest, and most hopeful, feature.

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CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest associated with this study. We also confirm that this manuscript is original and has not been submitted to, nor is it under consideration by, any other publisher.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

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