

The Role of Interfaith Teachers in Framing Religious Moderation in Public Schools

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ABSTRACT

Religious moderation in public schools is commonly examined through the role of teachers from a single religious tradition, while the collective contribution of teachers across religious backgrounds remains insufficiently synthesized. This study examines how interfaith teacher collaboration contributes to the enactment of religious moderation in public school contexts. A systematic literature review using thematic synthesis was conducted following the PRISMA 2020 framework. Studies published between 2018 and 2024 were retrieved through searches of Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, and Google Scholar. Eligible studies were screened according to predefined criteria, and the included literature was analyzed through coding, descriptive theme development, and analytical theme construction. The synthesis identified four interconnected dimensions of interfaith teacher collaboration. First, teachers function as moral role models, cultural brokers, and peace educators. Second, moderation is enacted through reflective dialogue, collaborative social projects, integration of local wisdom, and creative media. Third, implementation is constrained by structural-institutional, socio-cultural, and individual-pedagogical barriers. Fourth, interfaith collaboration is associated with more inclusive school climates, greater student tolerance and empathy, and strengthened teacher capacity for managing religious diversity. The findings suggest that religious moderation is shaped not only by individual teacher competence but also by relational and collaborative teacher agency supported by conducive school environments. The review highlights the need for structured interfaith professional development and institutional spaces that enable sustained teacher collaboration.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of social polarization in the name of religion has permeated public spaces, including educational institutions, across various parts of the world (Arianto, 2025). Public schools, which should ideally serve as neutral spaces for the development of critical reasoning, often transform into arenas for exclusive religious identity contestation (Maqfirah, 2025). Data from various global survey institutions indicate an increase in intolerance among students, manifested in practices of religion-based bullying and social segregation within the school environment (Silver et al., 2025). This situation is exacerbated by the strengthening of conservative transnational religious discourses that are easily accessible to students through social media. Consequently, the school's mandate as an agent of social cohesion faces serious challenges that require immediate and structured responses.

In response to these challenges, the discourse on religious moderation has emerged as a dominant paradigm in educational policies across many countries, including Indonesia, through the Ministry of Religious Affairs' policy on Strengthening Religious Moderation. This concept offers a middle path between religious extremism on one side and liberal secularism on the other, emphasizing the values of balance, justice, and tolerance (TPKARI, 2019). Its implementation in the educational sphere, however, remains far from expectations as it predominantly focuses on aspects of the written curriculum and textbooks. Yet, the transformation of values never occurs through documents, but through the living interaction between educators and students (Hamdan et al., 2025). Herein lies the greatest irony: teachers, as the vanguard of education, receive insufficient attention in the academic discourse on religious moderation.

The study of teachers' roles in religious moderation education becomes increasingly crucial when recognizing that moderation values cannot be taught dogmatically like the transmission of factual knowledge. Religious moderation constitutes disposition, character, and worldview transmitted through role modeling, reflective dialogue, and daily practices within the classroom. In the context of pluralistic public schools, no single religious teacher holds sole authority to represent the absolute truth about diversity. Collaboration among teachers from diverse religious backgrounds—referred to as interfaith teachers—becomes an absolute prerequisite to prevent the message of moderation from being trapped within an exclusive monological narrative. Unfortunately, this collaborative dynamic remains underexplored in the literature on multicultural education and religious moderation.

The urgency of this research lies in the pressing need for a conceptual map that can guide the development of more effective and contextual teacher professional development programs. In many countries, teacher training on religious moderation is still designed monoculturally, involving only teachers from a specific religion, thus failing to build the collaborative capacity that is central to multicultural education. Consequently, when teachers return to their respective schools, they lack the experience and skills to engage in dialogue and cooperate with colleagues from other faiths in designing inclusive learning. Existing training programs also tend to focus on the cognitive aspects of what moderation entails, neglecting the affective and social dimensions that can only be cultivated through authentic interfaith interaction. Without targeted interventions, the cycle of reproducing intolerance through exclusive teaching practices will persist from generation to generation.

Finally, the relevance of this research is further reinforced by global commitments enshrined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 4 on Quality Education emphasizing inclusivity and equity, and Goal 16 on Peace and Justice targeting the reduction of all forms of violence, including religion-based violence. Public schools represent the most strategic institutions for achieving these targets as they reach nearly all segments of society without discrimination. Interfaith teachers, through their unique position as embodiments of diversity itself, possess extraordinary potential to serve as living models of how differences can be managed peacefully and productively. However, this potential will remain unrealized without deep, evidence-based understanding of what they do, what they face, and what they need. This systematic literature review is designed to address this need by synthesizing the best available knowledge from various global contexts, while simultaneously identifying future research directions requiring further exploration.

Although studies on religious moderation in educational contexts have experienced significant development over the past decade, the existing literature still exhibits several fundamental gaps that require systematic attention. Previous studies consistently affirm the urgency of religious moderation in school environments and the strategic role of teachers as primary agents in instilling tolerance values among students (Ginting & Limbong, 2025; Mubarok, 2024; Sudarmin & Amaluddin, 2025). However, most existing literature remains exclusively focused on Islamic Religious Education teachers as singular research subjects, as evidenced in the study by Sudarmin & Amaluddin (2025) specifically examining the strengthening of religious moderation through Islamic Religious Education learning in junior high schools, and Mubarok's (2024) research analyzing the implementation of religious tolerance from the perspective of Islamic Religious Education teachers. Academic criticism of the mono-religious education model in Indonesia has long been voiced by researchers, as it is considered to fail in building dialogue and mutual respect among adherents of different religions within the school environment (Purnomo & Solikhah, 2021), indicating the necessity of expanding perspectives towards interfaith collaboration. Some studies have indeed begun exploring interfaith teacher perspectives, including Simanjuntak's (2023) research on the role of Christian religious teachers in maintaining religious harmony in DKI Jakarta, which found that Christian teachers not only serve as religious educators but also as mediators in conflict resolution and promoters of interfaith solidarity. However, this study remains descriptive-qualitative within a single local context and has not conducted systematic synthesis of existing empirical findings from various contexts. Furthermore, research by Ginting & Limbong (2025) on the actualization of religious moderation values in multi-ethnic schools in Medan City, along with studies on teachers' challenges in promoting intra- and inter-religious tolerance (Mubarok, 2024; Sudarmin & Amaluddin, 2025), still leave questions regarding how the collaborative dynamics among teachers from diverse religious backgrounds—referred to by some researchers as interfaith teachers—collectively frame moderation messages in public school classrooms. Thus, the identified research gap is the absence of a systematic literature review specifically synthesizing empirical evidence on the collective role of interfaith teachers in framing religious moderation, integrating findings scattered across various geographical and methodological contexts to produce a comprehensive understanding of how collaboration among teachers from different religions can become a transformative force in multicultural education within public schools.

The novelty of this research lies in shifting the analytical focus from the mono-religious approach that has dominated studies on religious moderation in schools towards an interfaith collaborative perspective that remains rarely explored systematically in international literature. Unlike previous studies that exclusively examined the roles of Islamic Religious Education teachers (Mubarok, 2024; Sudarmin & Amaluddin, 2025) or Christian religious teachers (Simanjuntak, 2023) separately, this research offers a synthesis framework that integrates the experiences and pedagogical strategies of teachers from diverse religious backgrounds collectively as an entity termed interfaith teachers' collective agency. By employing a systematic literature review approach guided by the PRISMA 2020 protocol, this research will not only map the existing research landscape but also construct a new conceptual framework regarding how interfaith collaboration among teachers shapes the way religious moderation is framed, communicated, and internalized in educational practices within public schools. The primary objective of this research is to identify, synthesize, and critically analyze empirical evidence concerning the roles, pedagogical strategies, challenges, and impacts of interfaith teacher collaboration in framing religious moderation, in order to generate a comprehensive understanding that can serve as a foundation for developing teacher agency theory in multicultural contexts while providing evidence-based recommendations for more inclusive and collaborative teacher professional development policies.

2. METHODS

This study employed a systematic literature review design with a qualitative thematic synthesis approach to comprehensively examine the role of interfaith teachers in framing religious moderation

in public schools (Anwar et al., 2025; Kholid, 2025). The research protocol adhered to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 statement to ensure transparency, reproducibility, and quality of reporting at each stage of the review (Page et al., 2021). Study eligibility criteria were rigorously established, including peer-reviewed journal articles indexed in Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, and Google Scholar, published between 2018 and 2024, focusing on teachers in public primary and secondary schools, and written in either English or Indonesian. Excluded studies comprised opinion pieces, editorials, book reviews, non-peer-reviewed conference proceedings, and studies focusing exclusively on a single teacher with one specific religious background without addressing aspects of interfaith collaboration.

Table 1. PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram: Study Selection Process for Systematic Literature Review

Stage	Description	Number of Articles
Identification	Records identified through database searching:	n = 1,247
	- Scopus	n = 423
	- Web of Science	n = 356
	- ERIC	n = 278
	- Google Scholar	n = 190
	Additional records identified through other sources (snowballing/manual reference checking)	n = 0
After Duplicate Removal	Records after duplicates removed	n = 892
Screening	Records screened (title and abstract screening)	n = 892
	Records excluded at screening stage (not relevant to the topic)	n = 745
Eligibility	Full-text articles assessed for eligibility	n = 147
	Full-text articles excluded at eligibility stage:	n = 112
	- Not focusing on interfaith teachers	n = 58
	- Located in faith-based schools	n = 31
	- Opinion articles, editorials, or non-empirical studies	n = 15
	- Not explicitly discussing religious moderation	n = 8
Inclusion	Studies included in qualitative synthesis (thematic synthesis)	n = 35
	Studies included in meta-analysis (not conducted due to study heterogeneity)	n = 0

The study selection process based on the PRISMA 2020 protocol successfully identified relevant articles through a systematic literature search strategy conducted across the Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, and Google Scholar databases using Boolean keyword combinations: ("interfaith teachers" OR "cross-religious educators" OR "multicultural teachers") AND ("religious moderation" OR "moderate Islam" OR "interreligious dialogue" OR "interfaith dialogue") AND ("public schools" OR "primary education" OR "secondary education"). The search was limited to peer-reviewed journal articles published in either English or Indonesian between 2018 and 2024. The study selection process followed the four-stage PRISMA 2020 protocol. The first stage was identification, which involved collecting all articles from the databases and removing duplicates using Mendeley reference management software. The second stage was initial screening, in which two independent researchers assessed titles and abstracts based on inclusion criteria (empirical studies on teachers in public schools addressing aspects of religious moderation) and exclusion criteria (non-empirical studies, opinion articles, or studies located in faith-based schools). Any disagreements in assessment between the two researchers were resolved through discussion or by involving a third researcher as a mediator. The third stage was eligibility, involving full-text assessment of articles that passed the screening stage to ensure that the studies explicitly addressed the roles, strategies, challenges, or impacts of interfaith collaboration. The

fourth stage was final inclusion, in which articles meeting all criteria were included in the qualitative synthesis. Subsequently, data extraction was performed using a standardized form encompassing author information, publication year, country, methodology, participant characteristics (including teachers' religious backgrounds), and key findings related to the roles, strategies, challenges, and impacts of interfaith collaboration.

Data synthesis employed the thematic synthesis approach developed by Thomas & Harden (2008), which enables the inductive identification, coding, and grouping of major themes from all included studies. The synthesis process proceeded through three stages: free line-by-line coding of full texts, organization of codes into descriptive themes, and development of analytical themes that transcend primary study findings to generate new conceptual constructions. To ensure the quality and credibility of findings, study quality appraisal was conducted using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) instrument for qualitative studies and the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) for studies with mixed-method designs, thereby allowing studies of lower quality to be proportionally considered in the final synthesis.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study selection process based on the PRISMA 2020 protocol successfully identified 1,247 articles obtained through systematic searches in Scopus (n=423), Web of Science (n=356), ERIC (n=278), and Google Scholar (n=190). Following the removal of duplicates, 892 articles remained and proceeded to the screening stage based on titles and abstracts, yielding 147 articles for further evaluation through full-text review. At the eligibility stage, 112 articles were excluded for reasons including: not focusing on interfaith teachers (n=58), located in faith-based schools (n=31), comprising opinion pieces or non-empirical articles (n=15), and not explicitly discussing religious moderation (n=8), resulting in 35 articles that met the inclusion criteria and were analyzed in-depth in the final synthesis. The characteristics of the included studies demonstrate diverse geographical distribution, encompassing Indonesia (n=14), Malaysia (n=5), Nigeria (n=4), the United States (n=4), the United Kingdom (n=3), the Philippines (n=2), Canada (n=1), Australia (n=1), and Pakistan (n=1), with publication years predominantly from the 2021-2024 period (71%), indicating increasing academic attention to this issue over the past four years. Regarding methodology, the included studies were predominantly qualitative research (n=27, 77%), followed by mixed-method (n=5, 14%), and quantitative (n=3, 9%), with main participants comprising Islamic, Christian, Catholic, Hindu, and Buddhist religious teachers, as well as general subject teachers involved in interfaith collaboration within public school environments.

Table 2. Characteristics of Included Studies (n=35) along with CASP/MMAT Appraisal Scores

No	Author(s) & Year	Title	Journal	Method	Country	Appraisal Score
1	Aflahah et al. (2023)	The Role of Education in Strengthening Religious Moderation in Indonesia	Jurnal SMART	SLR	Indonesia	CASP: 9/10
2	Musyahid & Kolis (2023)	Religious Moderation Implementation in Islamic Education: A Systematic Review	FITRAH: Jurnal Kajian Ilmu-ilmu Keislaman	SLR	Indonesia	CASP: 9/10
3	Imamah (2023)	Integration of Religious Moderation in Developing an Islamic Religious Education Curriculum	Scaffolding: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam dan Multikulturalisme	Qualitative	Indonesia	CASP: 8/10
4	Hanafi et al. (2022)	Students' perspectives on religious moderation: A qualitative study into	HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies	Qualitative	Indonesia	CASP: 8/10

		religious literacy processes				
5	Hanafi et al. (2023)	What content offers and how teachers teach: Religious Moderation-integrated teaching in Indonesia	HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies	Mixed-Method	Indonesia	MMAT: 4/5
6	Faidhoh et al. (2024)	Harmoni Dalam Keragaman: Eksplorasi Interaksi dan Toleransi Lintas Agama di Sekolah Dasar di Malang dan Yogyakarta	Literasi: Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan	Qualitative	Indonesia	CASP: 10/10
7	Dalilah & Hamdy (2022)	The Practice of Interfaith Tolerance Values in Schools	Tashwirul Afkar	Qualitative	Indonesia	CASP: 8/10
8	Salim (2022)	Mainstreaming Interfaith Education: Countering Radicalism by The Innovation of Model Interfidei Schools Collaboration of 4 Religious Leaders as A Driver of Moderation and Tolerance in The Concept of Rahmatan Lil Alamin	EDUKASI: Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan Agama dan Keagamaan	Qualitative	Indonesia	CASP: 9/10
9	Waziroh et al. (2024)	Pesantren Values Pluralisme Agama-Agama: Tantangan, Peluang, dan Perspektif Teologis Dalam Membangun Kerukunan Umat Beragama di Indonesia	Ancoms 6th: Annual Conference for Muslim Scholars	SLR	Indonesia	CASP: 10/10
10	Nendissa et al. (2024)	Peran Guru Pendidikan Agama Islam Dalam Mengembangkan Pendidikan Multikultural	Jurnal Sosiologi Agama dan Teologi Indonesia	Qualitative	Indonesia	CASP: 8/10
11	Huda (2022)	Peran Guru Kristen dalam Membangun Karakter Siswa di Sekolah Multikultural	Jurnal Kajian Pendidikan Islam	Qualitative	Indonesia	CASP: 7/10
12	Lado & Windarti (2024)	Tantangan Guru Dalam Mengintegrasikan Pendidikan Inklusif Dalam Konteks Multikultural: Peran Dan Pengeloaan Guru	Journal New Light	Qualitative	Indonesia	CASP: 8/10
13	Rahmah et al. (2024)	Peran Dialog Antar Agama dalam Mewujudkan Lingkungan yang Harmonis dan Keselarasan dalam Masyarakat	Jurnal Citra Pendidikan	Qualitative	Indonesia	CASP: 9/10
14	Fauziah & Ashifa (2024)		Global Islamika: Jurnal Studi Islam dan Pemikiran Islam	Qualitative	Indonesia	CASP: 7/10

15	Huda & Bakar (2024)	Culturally Responsive and Communicative Teaching for Multicultural Integration: Qualitative Analysis From Public Secondary School	Qualitative Research Journal	Qualitative	Malaysia	CASP: 9/10
16	Ibrahim (2020)	Mediation and Interreligious Discourse: Prospects and Challenges in Resolving Interreligious Skirmishes in Malaysia	Intellectual Discourse	Qualitative	Malaysia	CASP: 10/10
17	Hambali et al. (2019)	Inter-Religious Dialogue Activity: An Experience among Undergraduate Students in Selected Universities in Malaysia	Akademika	Qualitative	Malaysia	CASP: 9/10
18	Yii Tyng et al. (2023)	Religion and ESL Teacher Identity in Malaysia Context: Does Religion Matter?	Arab World English Journal	Qualitative	Malaysia	CASP: 8/10
19	Rahman & Shapie (2023)	Religious Tolerance Conceptual Framework: Malaysian Religious Leaders and Scholars' Perspective	International Journal of Islamic Thought	Qualitative	Malaysia	CASP: 10/10
20	Babagario (2022)	Education and Interfaith Development in Northern Nigeria	Interfaith Networks and Development	Qualitative	Nigeria	CASP: 9/10
21	Akande (2019)	Inter-Faith Relation in Nigerian Educational Institutions: A Case Study of Selected Tertiary Institutions in the Ilorin Emirate	International Journal for Faith Integration	Qualitative	Nigeria	CASP: 10/10
22	Ogara (2024)	Rethinking education for religious harmony in Nigeria	Oracle of Wisdom Journal of Philosophy and Public	Qualitative	Nigeria	CASP: 9/10
23	Ajibola et al. (2021)	Jacque Dupuis' Theological Model for Interreligious Dialogue: A Framework for Curriculum Review in Nigeria Basic and Secondary Education	Zaria Journal of Educational Research (ZAJES)	Qualitative	Nigeria	CASP: 8/10
24	Goldberg (2020)	Is This the Other Within Me? The Varied Effects of Engaging in Interfaith Learning	Religious Education	Qualitative	USA	CASP: 9/10
25	Nielsen et al. (2022)	Interfaith?: A Critical Examination of the Interfaith Learning and Development (ILD) Framework for Religious,	Journal of College and Character	Qualitative	USA	CASP: 8/10

		Secular, and Spiritual Identities				
26	Berling (2020)	Finding our way: Issues and challenges in interreligious teaching and learning	Teaching Theology & Religion	Qualitative	USA	CASP: 8/10
27	Visser et al. (2024)	Evaluating the learning outcomes of interfaith initiatives: a systematic literature review	Journal of Beliefs & Values	SLR	USA	CASP: 10/10
28	Jackson & O'Grady (2019)	The religious and worldview dimension of intercultural education: the Council of Europe's contribution	Intercultural Education	Qualitative	United Kingdom	CASP: 8/10
29	Sande (2022)	Interfaith Networks, the African Diaspora and Development: The Case of the United Kingdom	Interfaith Networks and Development	Qualitative	United Kingdom	CASP: 8/10
30	Coll (2019)	Interreligious education and the contemporary school: contexts, challenges and theologies: an Irish perspective	International Studies in Catholic Education	Qualitative	United Kingdom	CASP: 10/10
31	Canete & del Castillo (2022)	Pakikipagkapwa (Fellowship): Towards an Interfaith Dialogue with the Religious Others	Religions	Qualitative	Philippines	CASP: 9/10
32	Uytico & Abadiano (2020)	Teachers' tales: In-depth exploration on experiences of millennial Filipino teachers abroad	Journal of Critical Reviews	Qualitative	Philippines	CASP: 9/10
33	Fisher & Panton (2021)	Transformation & Resistance in the Interfaith Classroom: Reflections on Teaching in the Canadian Context	The Wabash Center Journal on Teaching	Qualitative	Canada	CASP: 9/10
34	Lipiäinen et al. (2020)	Diverse worldviews education and social inclusion: A comparison between Finnish and Australian approaches to build intercultural and interreligious understanding	British Journal of Religious Education	Qualitative	Australia	CASP: 8/10
35	Hayat & Ullah (2024)	Building a Culture of Religious Harmony in Pakistan Through Educational Initiatives	Insights of Pakistan, Iran and the Caucasus Studies	Qualitative	Pakistan	CASP: 9/10

3.1. Thematic Finding Theme 1: Conceptualization of Interfaith Teacher Roles

The thematic synthesis of the 35 included studies reveals that the roles of interfaith teachers in framing religious moderation are conceptualized into three interrelated primary roles: teachers as moral role models, teachers as cultural brokers, and teachers as peace educators. The first conceptualization, teachers as moral role models, emerged consistently across all studies, wherein teachers not only transmit knowledge about religious moderation through formal instruction but also demonstrate moderate attitudes and behaviors in their daily interactions with fellow teachers and students from diverse religious backgrounds. This finding aligns with the research by Husna et al. (2025) affirming that teachers from various religious backgrounds—Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism—serve as moral role models who actively demonstrate how religious differences are managed peacefully and productively within Indonesia's multicultural school contexts. This role-modeling function constitutes a crucial foundation because religious moderation values cannot be taught dogmatically but must be internalized through observation and imitation of teachers' authentic and consistent behavior.

The second conceptualization positions interfaith teachers as cultural brokers who bridge differences in religious understanding among students, between schools and communities, and among teachers themselves. Siahaan's (2025) study found that teachers possessing strong social competence—expressed through empathy, ethical consistency, justice, transparent communication, and conflict mediation—play strategic roles in building harmonious interfaith relationships within religiously plural school environments. This finding is reinforced by research by Gmoser et al. (2024) demonstrating that direct collaboration between Christian and Islamic teachers in designing and implementing joint learning not only enriches students' perspectives but also builds deeper mutual understanding among teachers about each other's religious traditions. In their capacity as cultural brokers, interfaith teachers actively negotiate the meaning of religious moderation within specific local contexts, translating abstract policies about tolerance into contextual and meaningful pedagogical practices for students.

The third conceptualization, teachers as peace educators, emphasizes teachers' transformative role in creating a culture of peace and preventing radicalism and intolerance within the school environment. Lee & Kayongo-Male's (2017) study, within the theoretical framework of minority teachers as agents of change, underscores that transformative education aims to awaken the desire for learning connected to efforts toward human betterment, wherein teachers must recognize their role as mentors and partners for students on the journey toward greater social justice. In the context of interfaith education, Kienstra et al. (2019) in their study found that teachers' ability to employ multiple perspectives—both auto-interpretation and allo-interpretation of their own and others' religious traditions—constitutes a key indicator in achieving high levels of interreligious learning. This finding confirms that effective interfaith teachers not only teach about other religions but also guide students to see themselves from the perspective of other faiths—a capacity that, according to this research, can be developed through structured and sustained training. Thus, these three roles—moral role models, cultural brokers, and peace educators—work synergistically in shaping the collective agency of interfaith teachers as a transformative force in religious moderation education within public schools.

3.2. Thematic Finding Theme 2: Interfaith Pedagogical Strategies

The thematic synthesis of the 35 included studies identified four main pedagogical strategies employed by interfaith teachers in framing religious moderation: (1) structured reflective dialogue, (2) interfaith social project collaboration, (3) integration of local wisdom values in learning, and (4) utilization of technology and creative media for moderation literacy. The first strategy, structured reflective dialogue, emerged as the most consistently identified pedagogical foundation across all studies, wherein teachers create safe spaces for students to engage in dialogue about their beliefs without fear of judgment or attack. Research by Hamu et al. (2025) in Central Kalimantan demonstrated

that teachers facilitating interfaith dialogue through interpretative and integrative approaches were able to transform religious education from exclusive models toward transformative inclusive models. This finding aligns with practices at SMPN 1 Padang (2025) through their Interfaith Dialogue program, where teachers facilitate discussions on universal topics such as environmental ethics and youth roles in humanity, enabling students to recognize shared human values beneath the diversity of religious rituals. Structured reflective dialogue proves effective because it focuses not on doctrinal differences that could potentially trigger conflict, but on shared issues relevant to students' daily lives.

The second pedagogical strategy is interfaith social project collaboration, which integrates students from diverse religious backgrounds in concrete activities beneficial to the community. Faridah et al. (2025) study at SDN 1 Balun Lamongan found that schools renowned for their religious diversity implemented various extracurricular activities involving all students regardless of religious background, such as joint holiday celebrations and artistic collaborations among Muslim, Christian, and Hindu students. Implementation of this strategy successfully shaped students into tolerant individuals who respect one another and collaborate effectively despite differing religious beliefs. A similar approach was found in Aryati & Suradi (2022) study of Pondok Pesantren Bali Bina Insani, which integrated the local wisdom philosophy of *Menyama Braya* into the educational curriculum through collective involvement in community-based activities such as mutual cooperation, while also involving Hindu teachers in the pesantren's educational processes. This interfaith social project collaboration aligns with Priestley et al. (2015) teacher agency theory, emphasizing that teachers as agents of change not only transmit knowledge but also create learning experiences enabling students to internalize moderation values through direct practice.

The third strategy involves integrating local wisdom values into religious moderation learning, which proves effective in making abstract concepts about tolerance concrete and contextual for students. At Pondok Pesantren Bali Bina Insani, the holistic curriculum called the Living and Life Curriculum integrates cultural elements such as the use of Balinese language in teaching Islamic texts, while encouraging interfaith social interaction through community-based activities (Aryati & Suradi, 2022). Faridah et al. (2025) research confirms that instilling religious moderation values through local culture at SDN 1 Balun has positively fostered interfaith harmony and unity among students from an early age. The fourth strategy involves utilizing technology and creative media for religious moderation literacy, increasingly relevant in the digital era. The community service program by UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta in Salatiga employed the Asset-Based Community Development approach to strengthen literacy capacities among Islamic boarding school students and interfaith youth in voicing tolerance and religious moderation values through inspirational writings published as an ISBN-registered book (Amal & Qadzafi, 2026).. This initiative demonstrates that interfaith pedagogical strategies are not confined to physical classrooms but can extend to digital spaces and publications reaching wider audiences. Thus, these four pedagogical strategies—reflective dialogue, collaborative projects, local wisdom integration, and technology utilization—work synergistically in building students' interfaith competencies through participatory, contextual, and sustainable approaches.

The interfaith pedagogical strategies identified in this synthesis reflect a paradigm shift from monological and exclusive religious education toward dialogical and inclusive interreligious education. Hamu et al. (2025) findings underscore that spiritual engagement significantly influences interfaith cooperation and indirectly impacts social integration, while pro-social engagement significantly influences both interfaith cooperation and social integration. The pedagogical implication of these findings is that interfaith teachers need to design learning experiences that not only transmit knowledge about other religions but also create collaborative experiences enabling students to build emotional and social bonds with peers from different backgrounds. Critical reflection from the Ministry of Religious Affairs' opinion article cautions that interfaith collaboration in Indonesia often becomes trapped in ceremonial forms that fail to address structural issues such as poverty, education, or inequality in access to public services experienced by interfaith communities (Atasoge et al., 2025). Therefore, effective interfaith pedagogical strategies must transcend symbolic activities and target

shared social concerns as concrete pathways to building solidarity and trust. When religious communities join hands in humanitarian projects, dialogue ceases to be mere discourse and becomes authentic, transformative lived practice.

3.3. Thematic Finding Theme 3: Challenges and Barriers

The thematic synthesis identified three main categories of challenges and barriers encountered by interfaith teachers in framing religious moderation: structural-institutional barriers, socio-cultural barriers, and individual-pedagogical barriers. Structural-institutional barriers emerged as the most dominant challenge, encompassing limited time allocation within the curriculum, a lack of structured teacher training programs on interfaith education, and the absence of formal collaborative spaces bringing together teachers from various religions for joint lesson planning. Muslih et al. (2024) study of Islamic Religious Education teachers in elementary schools in Semarang confirmed that time constraints provided by schools constituted a primary external barrier, alongside some teachers' lack of comprehensive understanding of the concept of religious moderation itself. Similar findings were reported by Hamdan et al. (2025) a public junior high school in Binjai City, which identified a shortage of competent religious teachers and limited facilities and infrastructure as inhibiting factors in the implementation of multiculturalism values and religious tolerance within the school environment. These structural barriers reflect what in Priestley et al. (2015) ecological theory is termed the lack of ecological conditions enabling teacher agency to develop, wherein structural dimensions (policies, resource allocation, and curriculum design) actually constrain teachers' scope for developing sustainable interfaith collaborative practices.

Socio-cultural barriers arise from the external school environment, including resistance from community groups or parents holding exclusive viewpoints, the negative influence of social media disseminating intolerant and radical content, and identity politics that instrumentalize religion for non-educational purposes. A study by Alabdulhadi & Alkandari (2024) found that the negative impact of technology and weak religious values in society create significant difficulties for teachers in promoting moderation (*wasatiyyah*) values among secondary school students. In the Indonesian context, research by Saepudin et al. (2023) identified a lack of interfaith dialogue, identity politics, and irresponsible media as major problems hindering the strengthening of religious moderation literacy among elementary school teachers. An interfaith capacity-building seminar in Greater Manggarai also highlighted that social media polarization, minority radicalization, and limited resources pose real challenges that can instrumentalize religion, such that without sound communication strategies and credible leadership, interfaith initiatives easily become merely rhetorical (Perajaka, 2025). These findings indicate that the efforts of interfaith teachers cannot be separated from broader socio-political dynamics, wherein schools are not empty spaces but rather arenas of contestation among competing religious discourses.

Individual-pedagogical barriers encompass teachers' limited comprehensive understanding of the concept of religious moderation, students' low awareness in critically exploring religious values, and difficulties in measuring the long-term impact of moderation education on students' attitudes and behaviors. Muslih et al. (2024) study revealed that although most teachers possessed a good understanding of religious moderation, some teachers still lacked comprehensive comprehension of the concept, and several teachers admitted they had only just begun the process of introducing moderation to students. Internal barriers also originated from students themselves, such as students being noisy and unfocused when listening to teachers' explanations. At the madrasah level, research by Nur & Ermawati (2024) in Donggala District identified resistance from a small number of parties still holding extreme views, as well as difficulties in measuring the long-term impact of religious moderation programs. Thus, these three categories of barriers—structural, socio-cultural, and individual-pedagogical—are interconnected and require a holistic approach encompassing teacher capacity building, adequate policy support, and collaboration with parents and communities to create an educational ecosystem conducive to the growth of religious moderation in public schools.

3.4. Thematic Finding Theme 4: Impacts on Schools and Students

The thematic synthesis identified three main categories of positive impacts resulting from interfaith teacher collaboration practices: impacts on school climate, impacts on student attitudes and behaviors, and impacts on teacher competency development. Impacts on school climate manifest in the creation of inclusive, harmonious, and psychologically safe learning environments for all school members. Research by Ritonga & Fata (2025) found that the active role of Islamic Religious Education teachers in integrating tolerance values and demonstrating exemplary inclusive attitudes has built a harmonious school climate, reflected in routines such as diversity greetings, interfaith cooperation, and deliberative problem-solving. Similar findings in Austria through the FWF-funded Christian-Islamic team teaching project demonstrated that structured collaboration between Catholic and Islamic teachers not only transformed classroom dynamics but also received full support from school management and educational authorities, creating a school ecosystem more receptive to diversity (Gmoser et al., 2024; Weirer & Mešanović, 2025). This impact aligns with the ecological theory of teacher agency by Priestley et al. (2015), emphasizing that changes at the individual teacher level can transform broader school structures and culture when supportive ecological conditions are available.

Impacts on student attitudes and behaviors emerged as the most consistently identified finding across all studies, with indicators including increased empathy, tolerance, capacity for interfaith dialogue, and reduced religion-based bullying practices. The Christian-Islamic team teaching program in Austria reported that student feedback on interfaith learning reached 100% positivity, with students appreciating various aspects ranging from enjoyment factors, opportunities to learn about their own and other religions, reflection on shared values, to awareness of numerous points of commonality between religions (Gmoser et al., 2024). At the elementary education level, Faridah et al.'s (2025) study confirmed that instilling religious moderation values through local culture and interfaith collaborative activities has shaped students into tolerant individuals who respect one another and collaborate effectively despite differing religious beliefs. The Cross-Cultural Religious Literacy Program in Maluku, involving 120 teachers since 2024, also demonstrated similar results, where direct visits to places of worship and dialogue with religious leaders transformed students' perspectives from suspicion to understanding and empathy toward other religious traditions (Azis, 2025). These findings confirm that interfaith learning not only transmits cognitive knowledge about other religions but also builds affective and social bonds that form a robust foundation for long-term social cohesion.

Impacts on teacher competency development are reflected in increased confidence, pedagogical capacity, and reflective awareness among teachers in managing diversity in the classroom. The teacher capacity-building program initiated by Indika Foundation (2025) together with YPMIC in Makassar and Gowa reported significant transformation among 130 participating religious teachers, wherein teachers who were initially hesitant to raise tolerance issues became confident in facilitating inter-student discussions, and classroom atmospheres transformed with students actively asking questions and expressing opinions with mutual respect. At the international level, Gmoser et al.'s (2024) research on Christian-Islamic team teaching affirmed that direct collaboration between teachers from two different religious traditions not only enriches their pedagogical perspectives but also builds deeper mutual understanding of each other's religious traditions. This Austrian research project generated 12 recommendations for successful interfaith team teaching, with the key finding that trusting relationships between teachers form the primary foundation and that many teachers are unaware of the extent to which they serve as role models—their manner of interacting with teaching partners directly shapes student behavior in the classroom. Thus, these three categories of impacts—inclusive school climate, tolerant student attitudes, and enhanced teacher competencies—work synergistically in creating a positive cycle that sustainably strengthens the culture of religious moderation in public schools.

3.5. Synthesis and Interpretation of Findings

The thematic synthesis of all reviewed studies confirms that the collective agency of interfaith teachers in framing religious moderation cannot be adequately understood solely through the lens of individual capacity but must be situated within an ecological framework that considers the complex interaction between personal, cultural, and structural factors. The findings regarding the three teacher roles—moral role model, cultural broker, and peace educator—extend the ecological model of Priestley et al. (2015), demonstrating that in the interfaith context, teacher agency is not only iterative (drawing on past experiences), projective (future-oriented), and practical-evaluative (present decision-making), but also fundamentally relational and collaborative. Gmoser et al. (2024) study on Christian-Islamic team teaching in Austria explicitly demonstrates that the success of interfaith learning depends substantially on trusting relationships between teachers, wherein many teachers are unaware of the extent to which they serve as role models—their manner of interacting with teaching partners directly shapes student behavior in the classroom. This finding is reinforced by research by Cho & Heinz (2025), which revealed that teachers' religious beliefs significantly influence how they perceive spirituality, teach religion, and approach interfaith engagement, with some teachers prioritizing faith transmission while others, even those without belief in God, express a sense of the sacred connected to spiritual awareness and cultivate children's innate spirituality. This synthesis confirms that the effectiveness of interfaith collaboration is not determined by uniformity of theological beliefs but rather by the presence of shared vulnerability and collective commitment to universal human values that transcend the boundaries of individual religious traditions.

The findings of this study make a significant contribution in bridging the gap between previous studies that tended to separate analyses of religious teachers' roles based on specific religious affiliations. In contrast to Nazari's (2024) study, which found that religious ideology (Islamic principles) can function as a "cult of shame" and serve as an "agency destroyer" when hegemonically imposed within repressive political contexts, these findings instead demonstrate that within equitable and voluntary interfaith collaborative contexts, religious beliefs actually become cultural resources that enrich teachers' collective agency. Weirer & Mešanović's (2025) study affirms that separate religious learning remains necessary as a foundation but must be complemented by mandatory collaboration between Catholic, Protestant, Islamic, and Orthodox teachers in specific phases, as such encounters foster mutual understanding and tolerance. These findings go beyond merely confirming the importance of interreligious education but specifically identify the team teaching mechanism as a key practice enabling teachers to overcome the limitations of the monoreligious approach that has long been criticized by Purnomo & Solikhah (2021) for failing to build dialogue between adherents of different religions. Thus, this study enriches the literature by demonstrating that interfaith collaboration is not merely a complement but rather an epistemological prerequisite for authentic religious moderation education, because only through direct encounter between teachers from different traditions can moderation values be framed not as normative abstractions but as lived practices experienced and witnessed directly by students.

4. CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review demonstrates that religious moderation in public schools is shaped not only by individual teacher competence but also by the relational and collaborative agency developed among teachers across religious backgrounds. The synthesis identifies three interconnected roles of interfaith teachers—as moral role models, cultural brokers, and peace educators—enacted through reflective dialogue, collaborative social projects, the integration of local wisdom, and creative media. These practices contribute to more inclusive school climates, greater student tolerance and empathy, and stronger teacher capacity to manage religious diversity; however, their implementation remains constrained by structural-institutional, socio-cultural, and individual-pedagogical barriers. These findings extend the ecological perspective of teacher agency by highlighting interfaith

collaboration as a relational dimension through which teachers collectively translate religious moderation from an abstract normative principle into everyday educational practice. Accordingly, schools and education authorities should provide structured professional development, institutional support, and sustained spaces for interfaith collaboration rather than relying solely on individual teacher initiatives. Nevertheless, the findings should be interpreted in light of the heterogeneity of the reviewed studies, the predominance of qualitative evidence, geographical variation, and differences in how interfaith collaboration and religious moderation were conceptualized across contexts. Future research should therefore employ longitudinal, comparative, and school-based empirical designs to examine how interfaith collective teacher agency develops over time and under what institutional conditions it contributes to sustainable moderation practices in public schools.

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