

Religious Moderation in *Pesantren*-Based Islamic Higher Education: An Institutional Structuration Analysis from East Java, Indonesia

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Abstract: This study examines how religious moderation is structured and sustained within *pesantren*-based private Islamic higher education institutions (*Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam Swasta/PTKIS*) in the *Tapal Kuda* region of East Java, Indonesia. It specifically explores the roles of institutional leadership, organizational culture, and everyday academic practices in the institutionalization of moderation. This research employed a qualitative interpretive design involving six *pesantren*-based PTKIS. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis with 10 key informants, including university leaders, *pesantren* authorities, and academic managers. The data were analyzed using a structuration perspective to examine the dynamic interaction between institutional structures and human agency in reproducing moderation practices. The findings show that religious moderation is sustained through a hybrid governance model that combines formal university administration with *pesantren*-based religious authority. Within this model, moderation is institutionalized through three interconnected mechanisms: authoritative regulation grounded in leadership legitimacy, persuasive academic engagement through dialogical pedagogy, and normative cultural internalization through *pesantren* routines and mentoring practices. The originality of this study lies in the development of an institutional structuration perspective that conceptualizes religious moderation as a recursively reproduced institutional practice rather than merely a policy agenda or ideological discourse. This study contributes theoretically by offering a three-mechanism model for understanding the institutional reproduction of religious moderation in Islamic higher education and contributes practically by providing insights for policymakers and university leaders on how culturally embedded governance and leadership legitimacy can strengthen the sustainability of religious moderation.

Abstrak: Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana moderasi beragama dibentuk dan dipertahankan dalam Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam Swasta (PTKIS) berbasis pesantren di wilayah Tapal Kuda, Jawa Timur, Indonesia. Secara khusus, penelitian ini mengeksplorasi peran kepemimpinan institusi, budaya organisasi, dan praktik akademik sehari-hari dalam pelebagaan moderasi. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain kualitatif interpretatif dengan melibatkan enam PTKIS berbasis pesantren. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi nonpartisipan, dan analisis dokumen terhadap 10 informan kunci yang meliputi pimpinan perguruan tinggi, otoritas pesantren, dan pengelola akademik. Data dianalisis menggunakan perspektif strukturasi untuk menelaah interaksi dinamis antara struktur institusional dan agensi manusia dalam mereproduksi praktik moderasi. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa moderasi beragama

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dipertahankan melalui model tata kelola hibrida yang menggabungkan administrasi perguruan tinggi formal dengan otoritas keagamaan berbasis pesantren. Dalam model ini, moderasi dilembagakan melalui tiga mekanisme yang saling berkaitan, yaitu regulasi otoritatif yang bertumpu pada legitimasi kepemimpinan, keterlibatan akademik persuasif melalui pedagogi dialogis, serta internalisasi budaya normatif melalui rutinitas pesantren dan praktik pendampingan. Kebaruan penelitian ini terletak pada pengembangan perspektif strukturasi institusional yang mengonseptualisasikan moderasi beragama sebagai praktik institusional yang direproduksi secara rekursif, bukan semata-mata sebagai agenda kebijakan atau wacana ideologis. Penelitian ini berkontribusi secara teoretis dengan menawarkan model tiga mekanisme untuk memahami reproduksi institusional moderasi beragama dalam pendidikan tinggi Islam, serta berkontribusi secara praktis dengan memberikan wawasan bagi pembuat kebijakan dan pimpinan perguruan tinggi mengenai bagaimana tata kelola yang berakar pada budaya dan legitimasi kepemimpinan dapat memperkuat keberlanjutan moderasi beragama.

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INTRODUCTION

Religious moderation has emerged as a central concern in contemporary discussions of Islam, education, and social cohesion, particularly in plural societies such as Indonesia. As the world's largest Muslim-majority country, Indonesia faces the dual challenge of preserving interreligious harmony while responding to identity polarization, exclusivist religious narratives, and ideological radicalization. In this context, religious moderation (*wasatiyyah*) is increasingly understood not only as a theological orientation but also as a socio-institutional framework through which religious values are articulated, negotiated, and practiced in public life, including educational settings (Nasir, 2021; Burhanuddin & Ilmi, 2022; Qorib & Umiarso, 2025). Higher education institutions, especially Islamic universities, therefore occupy a strategic position in cultivating moderate religious understanding, intercultural awareness, and democratic citizenship (Hamami, 2021; Irham, 2025).

Islamic higher education in Indonesia plays a distinctive role in this regard because of its close relationship with religious authority, community leadership, and state governance. Unlike secular universities, Islamic higher education institutions are expected not only to pursue academic excellence but also to maintain moral and religious stewardship grounded in Islamic traditions and national values (Nasir & Rijal, 2021; Sriharini & Izudin, 2022). This role has become increasingly complex as campuses encounter transnational religious movements, digital religious discourse, and technologically mediated learning environments that may challenge moderate interpretations of Islam (Sackstein et al., 2023; Subair et al., 2024). Consequently, Islamic universities are required to move beyond symbolic commitments and develop institutional strategies that embed moderation as a sustainable organizational culture rather than a temporary programmatic agenda (Asnawi et al., 2020; Sumiati et al., 2024).

Within this broader landscape, private Islamic higher education institutions (*Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam Swasta* [PTKIS]) represent a particularly important yet still under-examined sector. Many PTKIS in Indonesia are established and managed by Islamic boarding schools, or *pesantren*, especially in regions such as *Tapal Kuda*, East Java, where *pesantren* function as long-standing centers of religious learning, moral authority, and socio-cultural leadership (Hasan, 2022; Ubaidillah & Faiz, 2025). *Pesantren*-based higher education institutions thus represent a hybrid organizational form in which traditional religious authority intersects with modern academic governance and quality assurance systems (Asnawi et al., 2020). This hybridity creates important opportunities for cultivating religious moderation rooted in local wisdom and Islamic intellectual tradition. At the same time, it generates institutional tensions concerning leadership, governance, curriculum, and organizational autonomy (Ainissyifa et al., 2024; Sumiati et al., 2024).

Pesantren have long been recognized as educational institutions that promote tolerance, balance, and communal harmony through classical Islamic scholarship, *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah* (*Aswaja*) theology, and engagement with local culture (Helmy et al., 2021; Latif et al., 2023; Zaman et al., 2024). Existing studies show that *pesantren* traditions, including *kitab kuning* learning, *kyai*-centered leadership, and contextual interpretation of Islamic texts, contribute significantly to fostering moderation and resilience against extremist ideologies (Abdullah, 2022; Nasution et al., 2024; Iswahyudi et al., 2025). The authority of the *kyai* has likewise been widely acknowledged as a crucial factor in shaping moderate religious interpretations and guiding community engagement (Humaidi et al., 2024; Ma'arif et al., 2025; Misdah et al., 2025). However, when *pesantren* extend their educational mission into higher education, the transmission of these values cannot be assumed to occur automatically. Their continuity depends on how *pesantren* traditions are translated into institutional arrangements, leadership practices, academic governance, and campus culture capable of aligning religious authority with the demands of modern higher education (Athoillah et al., 2024; Saleh, 2025).

Existing scholarship on religious moderation in Islamic education has predominantly emphasized curricular integration, pedagogical innovation, and normative discourse within *pesantren* and Islamic schools (Burga & Damopolii, 2022; Azizah et al., 2023; Syafei et al., 2020). These studies make important contributions by explaining how moderation is taught, promoted, and internalized through instructional content and educational programs. Nevertheless, they tend to approach moderation primarily as a value framework or pedagogical objective. As a result, less scholarly attention has been given to the institutional processes through which moderation becomes embedded in governance structures, leadership practices, organizational routines, and everyday academic interactions within Islamic higher education institutions (Tambak et al., 2023; Mappiasse & Hayadin, 2022).

This limitation becomes more evident in the context of *pesantren*-based PTKIS, where the dynamics of authority, governance, and cultural reproduction differ significantly from those of state Islamic universities. Leadership in *pesantren*-based institutions is often shaped by charismatic and religious authority centered on the *kyai*, whose influence extends beyond formal administrative structures (Humaidi et

al., 2024; Misdah et al., 2025). By contrast, modern higher education governance emphasizes bureaucratic rationality, accountability, legal compliance, and institutional management standards (Kisbiyanto, 2025). The interaction between these two forms of authority shapes how moderation-related policies are interpreted, negotiated, and enacted within institutional life. Yet empirical studies specifically examining how *pesantren* authority and modern university governance interact in shaping the institutionalization of religious moderation within PTKIS remain limited.

This article argues that the principal gap in the literature lies not merely in the insufficient discussion of religious moderation, but more specifically in the limited understanding of how moderation is institutionally structured, enacted, and continuously reproduced within *pesantren*-based Islamic higher education. Previous studies have tended to emphasize ideological narratives, curricular reform, or pedagogical strategies, while paying relatively little attention to the institutional mechanisms through which moderation is sustained over time. This gap is significant because the long-term durability of moderation depends not only on doctrinal commitment or educational messaging, but also on the institutional arrangements through which these values are legitimized, practiced, and normalized in everyday academic life.

To address this gap, this study adopts structuration theory as its primary analytical framework. Structuration theory explains how social practices are produced and reproduced through the recursive relationship between structure and agency. Structures consist of rules, norms, and resources that shape human action, while agency refers to the capacity of actors to interpret, negotiate, and transform these structures through practice (Tetteh et al., 2021; Woon & Tee, 2025). In the context of Islamic higher education, this perspective provides an analytical lens for examining how institutional regulations, leadership authority, and *pesantren* cultural traditions interact with the actions of university actors in shaping religious moderation. More specifically, three dimensions of structuration are particularly relevant in this study: first, the role of institutional rules and governance mechanisms in regulating organizational practices; second, the distribution of authority and resources that enables leaders such as rectors and *kyai* to direct institutional orientation; and third, the reproduction of cultural norms through everyday academic and religious practices. Through this perspective, religious moderation can be understood not merely as a normative discourse or policy slogan, but as a socially constructed and institutionally reproduced practice.

The relevance of this framework is particularly evident in the *Tapal Kuda* region of East Java, which has a dense concentration of *pesantren*-based PTKIS and strong traditions of religious leadership and community engagement (Hasan, 2022; Zaman et al., 2024). In this region, *pesantren*-based higher education institutions function not only as academic organizations but also as influential actors in shaping grassroots religious discourse and social harmony. Despite this significance, empirical studies that systematically examine how these institutions structure and institutionalize moderation through governance, leadership, and cultural practice remain limited. *Tapal Kuda* therefore offers a compelling setting for analyzing how moderation is reproduced within a hybrid institutional environment shaped simultaneously by *pesantren* authority and university administration.

Based on this gap, the study addresses the following research question: How is religious moderation structured and sustained within *pesantren*-based Islamic higher education institutions? More specifically, the study examines how leadership authority, institutional governance, and cultural practices interact to reproduce moderation as a lived institutional orientation. In doing so, the article seeks to move beyond understanding moderation solely as a policy agenda, moral ideal, or curricular theme, and instead explain how it operates as an institutional process.

This study employs a qualitative interpretive design because such an approach is particularly suitable for examining educational settings in which social meaning, lived experience, and institutional practice intersect (Negou et al., 2023; Isik, 2025; El-Yazidi, 2025). By focusing on *pesantren*-based PTKIS in *Tapal Kuda*, this study contributes to broader debates on Islamic education and social cohesion. Higher education institutions play an increasingly important role in fostering intercultural understanding and countering religious extremism through education and civic engagement (Gholami, 2021; Owusu-Kwarteng, 2021). However, the effectiveness of this role depends on how moderation is embedded in institutional structures and everyday academic practices rather than merely articulated in policy documents or public discourse (Nasir & Rijal, 2021; Burhanuddin & Ilmi, 2022).

This study contributes to the literature in three ways. First, it provides an empirical account of religious moderation in a relatively under-researched sector, namely *pesantren*-based PTKIS in the *Tapal Kuda* region. Second, it offers a theoretical contribution by applying structuration theory to explain how moderation is reproduced through the recursive interaction between institutional structures and human agency. Third, it contributes analytically by proposing that moderation in *pesantren*-based Islamic higher education is sustained through the interplay of hybrid governance, leadership legitimacy, and cultural reproduction. In this respect, the novelty of this article lies not merely in discussing religious moderation within *pesantren*-based universities, but in conceptualizing it as an institutionally reproduced practice shaped by the interaction between formal governance, *pesantren* authority, and everyday academic life.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design with an interpretive and exploratory orientation to examine how religious moderation is structured and sustained within *pesantren*-based private Islamic higher education institutions (PTKIS). A qualitative design was considered most appropriate because the study aimed to explore social meanings, institutional practices, and cultural processes embedded in educational settings that cannot be adequately reduced to quantitative measurement (Negou et al., 2023; Isik, 2025). In this study, religious moderation is understood not simply as a normative doctrine, but as a socially constructed and institutionally reproduced practice shaped by leadership, governance arrangements, and organizational culture in Islamic higher education (Nasir & Rijal, 2021; Burhanuddin & Ilmi, 2022; Qorib & Umiarso, 2025). The interpretive orientation enabled the study to capture how institutional actors understood, negotiated, and enacted moderation in their everyday academic and religious

practices, while the exploratory orientation was relevant because empirical studies specifically examining this issue in *pesantren*-based PTKIS remain limited.

The research was conducted in the *Tapal Kuda* region of East Java, Indonesia, an area widely known for its dense concentration of *pesantren* and *pesantren*-based Islamic higher education institutions. This region was selected because *pesantren*-based PTKIS in *Tapal Kuda* play a significant role in shaping religious discourse, educational leadership, and community engagement within a socio-religious environment strongly influenced by *pesantren* authority (Hasan, 2022; Zaman et al., 2024). The regional setting was therefore considered particularly suitable for examining the institutional structuration of religious moderation in a context where traditional Islamic authority and modern academic administration intersect intensively.

Six *pesantren*-based PTKIS were purposively selected as research sites. Purposive site selection was used because the study did not seek statistical representativeness, but rather analytical depth from institutions that were information-rich and relevant to the research problem. The selected institutions were: (1) Universitas Nurul Jadid, Probolinggo, affiliated with Pesantren Nurul Jadid; (2) Universitas Ibrahimy, Situbondo, affiliated with Pesantren Salafiyah Syafi'iyah Sukorejo; (3) Institut Agama Islam Ibrahimy, Banyuwangi, affiliated with Pesantren Bustanul Makmur; (4) Institut Agama Islam Syarifuddin, Lumajang, affiliated with Pesantren Kyai Syarifuddin; (5) Universitas Al-Qodiri, Jember, affiliated with Pesantren Al-Qodiri; and (6) Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Cendekia Insani, Situbondo, affiliated with Pesantren Nurul Huda. These institutions were selected to capture variation in institutional scale, organizational structure, governance models, and *pesantren* affiliation while retaining comparable socio-religious characteristics as *pesantren*-based Islamic higher education institutions.

The participants in this study were institutional actors who occupied strategic roles in shaping, interpreting, and reproducing religious moderation within *pesantren*-based universities. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on three criteria: first, they held leadership or decision-making positions within the institution; second, they were involved in academic governance or educational management; and third, they had direct engagement with *pesantren* educational traditions and campus religious life. These criteria were used to identify information-rich participants capable of explaining how moderation was structured at the institutional level and enacted in everyday organizational practice.

In total, the study involved 10 key informants, including university rectors, *pesantren* leaders (*kyai*), postgraduate directors, and heads of study programs. These participants were selected because of their direct involvement in institutional decision-making, leadership processes, academic management, and moderation-related initiatives within their respective institutions. The composition of participants was designed to provide access to different institutional vantage points, particularly those related to formal university governance, *pesantren* authority, and academic leadership. Although the participant group was relatively limited in number, the study prioritized depth, positional relevance, and interpretive richness over numerical breadth, in line with the logic of qualitative inquiry.

Data were collected primarily through in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted between 2021 and 2022. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they allowed the researcher to maintain thematic focus while also providing flexibility to probe participants' interpretations, experiences, and institutional narratives in greater depth. Each interview lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes and was conducted in Indonesian. The interviews explored participants' views on institutional leadership, governance arrangements, *pesantren* authority, academic culture, and the ways religious moderation was understood and practiced within the university setting.

Key informants included KH. Abdul Hamid Wahid, Rector of Universitas Nurul Jadid; KH. Kholilur Rahman, Rector of Institut Agama Islam Ibrahimy Banyuwangi and former chairman of the *Pesantren*-based PTKIS Association in *Tapal Kuda*; KH. Achmad Fadhail from Universitas Ibrahimy Situbondo; Abu Hasan Agus RM, Head of the Islamic Education Management Program at Universitas Nurul Jadid; Abdul Aziz Fanani, Director of Postgraduate Studies at IAI Ibrahimy Banyuwangi; and Halimatus Sa'diyah, Chairperson of STAI Cendekia Insani Situbondo. Several participants were interviewed more than once to deepen clarification, verify initial interpretations, and strengthen the consistency of the data across institutional contexts.

Data collection continued until thematic saturation was reached. Saturation was indicated by the recurrence of similar themes across interviews, particularly those related to leadership legitimacy, *pesantren* influence, governance arrangements, and institutional moderation practices. At that stage, additional interviews no longer generated substantially new conceptual insights, suggesting that the data were sufficient to support the analytical claims developed in this study.

In addition to interviews, non-participant observation was conducted to capture everyday institutional practices related to religious moderation. The observations covered academic activities, campus religious events, *pesantren* rituals integrated into university life, and selected formal institutional meetings. This observational strategy enabled the researcher to identify how moderation was enacted not only in formal discourse but also in routine practices, symbolic expressions, interactional norms, and institutional behavior. Observational data were recorded through detailed field notes documenting leadership dynamics, patterns of interaction, institutional rituals, and cultural expressions associated with moderation (Negou et al., 2023).

Document analysis constituted the third method of data collection. Institutional documents, including statutes, academic regulations, curricula, strategic plans, and *pesantren* guidelines, were examined to identify how moderation was formally articulated, authorized, and embedded in governance frameworks. These documents were treated not merely as supplementary material but as important structural indicators of how institutional norms, values, and priorities were codified and legitimized within organizational settings (Sumiati et al., 2024; Asnawi et al., 2020). The combination of interviews, observations, and documents allowed the study to examine moderation across discursive, practical, and regulatory dimensions.

Data analysis followed a thematic procedure conducted in several iterative stages. First, all interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and integrated with observation notes and documentary materials to form the primary dataset. Second, the researcher undertook an initial open coding process to identify recurring concepts, phrases, and patterns related to leadership authority, *pesantren* influence, institutional governance, and moderation practices. At this stage, coding remained close to the data in order to preserve participants' meanings and avoid premature abstraction. Third, the initial codes were compared, refined, and grouped into broader analytical categories that captured relationships among institutional structures, actor practices, and cultural routines. Fourth, these categories were interpreted through the lens of structuration theory in order to examine how moderation was produced and reproduced through the recursive interaction between structure and agency. Through this analytical process, three central mechanisms were identified as constitutive of the institutional structuration of moderation: authoritative regulation, persuasive academic engagement, and normative cultural internalization. These mechanisms were not imposed deductively at the outset; rather, they emerged through the iterative dialogue between empirical coding and theoretical interpretation.

The analysis was informed by structuration theory, which emphasizes the recursive relationship between institutional structures and human agency in the reproduction of social practices (Tetteh et al., 2021; Woon & Tee, 2025). In this study, "structure" refers to institutional rules, governance systems, leadership hierarchies, cultural norms, and *pesantren* authority embedded within universities. "agency" refers to the actions of institutional actors, such as rectors, *kyai*, lecturers, administrators, and, more broadly, academic communities, who interpret, negotiate, and enact those structures in everyday academic life. This analytical lens made it possible to examine not only how moderation was regulated by institutional arrangements, but also how it was continuously reproduced through leadership decisions, pedagogical interaction, mentoring practices, and organizational routines.

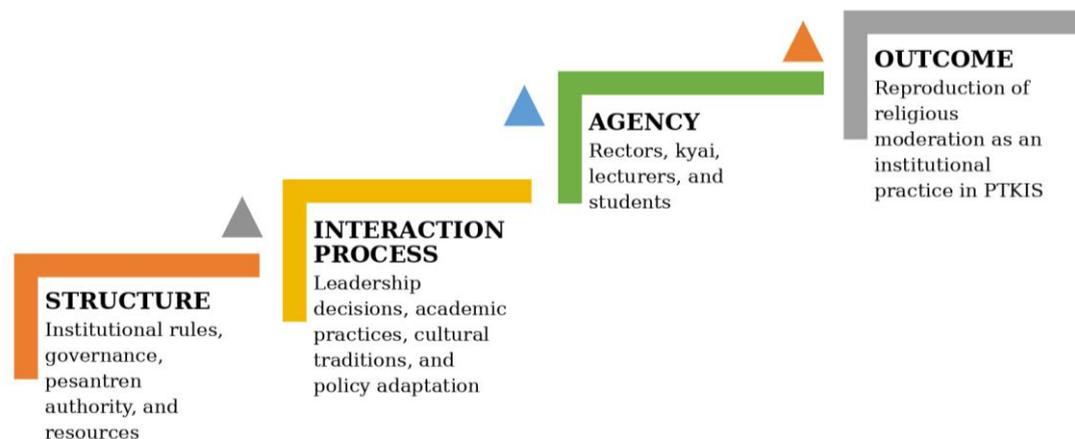


Figure 1. Structuration Framework for Analyzing Religious Moderation in PTKIS

The analytical framework used in this study is illustrated in Figure 1, which conceptualizes religious moderation as the outcome of the dynamic interaction between institutional structures and the agency of educational actors. Drawing on structuration theory, the framework assumes that institutional structures, such as governance systems, leadership authority, organizational rules, and *pesantren*

cultural traditions, provide the normative context that guides actors' practices. At the same time, these structures are continuously enacted and reproduced through the actions of key actors, including university leaders, *kyai*, lecturers, and students. Through academic policies, pedagogical practices, and everyday institutional interactions, these actors interpret and implement moderation within their institutional settings. In this recursive process, structures shape actors' behavior, while actors simultaneously sustain and reinforce those structures. Consequently, religious moderation becomes institutionalized not merely as a formal policy, but as a lived practice embedded in governance, academic engagement, and *pesantren* cultural routines.

To ensure trustworthiness, several strategies were employed. Credibility was strengthened through methodological triangulation across interviews, non-participant observation, and document analysis. Member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary interpretations with selected participants to verify whether the researcher's understanding accurately reflected their institutional experiences and perspectives. Dependability was supported by maintaining a systematic audit trail of research procedures, coding decisions, theme development, and analytical reflections. Transferability was enhanced through thick description of the research context, institutional settings, participant roles, and socio-religious characteristics of the *pesantren*-based PTKIS under study (Isik, 2025).

Ethical considerations were carefully observed throughout the research process. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and informed consent was obtained prior to the interviews. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained when necessary, particularly in relation to sensitive issues involving institutional policy, leadership relations, and religious governance. The study was also conducted with full respect for *pesantren* cultural norms, institutional hierarchies, and the ethical sensitivities surrounding religious authority within Islamic higher education institutions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Institutional Context of Moderation Structuration in *Pesantren*-Based PTKIS

The *pesantren*-based private Islamic higher education institutions (PTKIS) examined in this study operate within an institutional environment in which higher education governance and *pesantren* tradition are structurally intertwined. Historically, these institutions were established as extensions of *pesantren* educational missions in response to growing social demand for higher education while maintaining strong Islamic values. The findings show that this institutional hybridity constitutes the foundational context in which religious moderation is formulated, negotiated, and sustained.

The analysis further indicates that religious moderation in *pesantren*-based PTKIS is not introduced primarily as an external policy agenda. Rather, it emerges from the interaction between formal university governance and *pesantren* cultural authority. This hybrid institutional arrangement creates a structural environment in which moderation values are embedded in everyday institutional practices rather

than implemented through isolated programs or ideological campaigns. In this sense, moderation is reproduced through routine institutional life and not merely through formal declarations.

Field observations demonstrate that campuses are physically and symbolically integrated with *pesantren* complexes. Academic buildings, mosques, dormitories, and *pesantren* facilities are frequently located within the same compound. This spatial integration facilitates the incorporation of *pesantren* routines, such as communal prayers, religious study circles, and ethical supervision, into the daily rhythm of university life. As a result, students experience academic and religious socialization simultaneously, and moderation is reinforced through habitual practice rather than through formal instruction alone. In several sites, observation notes recorded that students moved directly from lecture rooms to congregational prayer spaces and then continued with *pesantren*-based study activities under the guidance of senior mentors, indicating that academic and religious life were not institutionally separated but mutually reinforcing (Obs-01; Obs-03). In one campus setting, the researcher observed that religious gatherings, informal discussions, and academic consultations took place within the same compound, reflecting how moderation was normalized through continuous interaction rather than through special programming (Obs-04).

At the organizational level, PTKIS operate under a dual governance structure. On the one hand, they follow formal higher education administrative systems required by national regulations, including rectorates, faculties, academic senates, and quality assurance units. On the other hand, *pesantren* leadership, represented by *kyai* or *pesantren* caretakers, maintains moral authority over institutional identity and religious orientation. This dual institutional arrangement can be summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Institutional Hybrid Governance in *Pesantren*-Based PTKIS

Institutional Dimension	University Structure	<i>Pesantren</i> Structure	Implication for Moderation
Governance	Rectorate, faculty administration, academic senate	Kiai leadership and <i>pesantren</i> caretakers	Shared authority in institutional decision-making
Educational Orientation	Academic curriculum and research	Religious tradition and ethical mentoring	Integration of academic knowledge and Islamic values
Student Life	Classroom learning and student organizations	Dormitory life and religious rituals	Moderation practiced through everyday routines
Institutional Identity	Modern Islamic higher education	Traditional <i>pesantren</i> values	Moderation framed as continuation of <i>pesantren</i> tradition

Table 1 shows that the institutional hybridity characterizing *pesantren*-based PTKIS is reflected in the coexistence of formal university governance and *pesantren* authority. These two structures do not operate as competing systems. Instead, they interact in ways that shape institutional policy, student life, and educational

orientation. Within this hybrid environment, religious moderation is framed not as a newly imported ideology but as a continuation of *pesantren* traditions adapted to the context of modern higher education.

Interview data strengthen this finding. University leaders consistently explained that moderation-related decisions rarely emerge from unilateral administrative authority. Rather, they are negotiated through consultation between university leadership and *pesantren* authorities. While rectors and deans manage academic affairs, *pesantren* leaders retain symbolic and moral influence over the institution's religious orientation. As one rector explained, "*Formally, the university has its own regulations. But morally, we still coordinate with the pesantren. This coordination ensures that our academic policies remain in line with pesantren values*" (INF-01). A similar point was emphasized by another institutional leader who noted, "*Administrative decisions may be taken at the university level, but for matters related to religious direction, the pesantren remains an important moral reference*" (INF-02). These statements indicate that institutional governance in *pesantren*-based PTKIS is shaped by negotiated authority rather than by rigid bureaucratic separation.

This pattern of shared leadership indicates that moderation is institutionalized through consensus rather than coercion. Institutional regulations related to student conduct, academic ethics, and religious activities consistently emphasize harmony, mutual respect, and social responsibility. In this respect, authority functions as a coordinating mechanism that aligns academic governance with *pesantren* values. Observation data support this pattern. During a coordination meeting attended by academic administrators and *pesantren* representatives, moderation-related concerns were discussed in the language of guidance, balance, and institutional harmony rather than prohibition and punishment, suggesting that authority was exercised through deliberative coordination (Obs-05).

At the conceptual level, religious moderation is perceived by institutional actors as an intrinsic element of *pesantren* tradition. Interview data repeatedly show that moderation is understood not as a recently introduced governmental agenda, but as a long-standing orientation embedded in *pesantren* education. A *pesantren* leader stated, "*Pesantren education has always taught balance and respect. The university only continues this tradition in a more structured academic form*" (INF-03). Another informant similarly remarked, "*For us, moderation is not a new label. It is already part of the pesantren way of teaching religion with wisdom, adab, and social sensitivity*" (INF-04). These accounts suggest that moderation is locally understood as a continuity of inherited educational values rather than as an externally imposed discourse.

This perception influences the way moderation is articulated in institutional documents such as vision statements, academic guidelines, and student codes of conduct. Although the phrase "religious moderation" does not always appear explicitly in these documents, its substance is reflected in values such as tolerance, ethical responsibility, and openness to diversity. The absence of explicit terminology does not indicate the absence of moderation; rather, it suggests that moderation has been absorbed into the normative vocabulary of the institution. This documentary pattern was also reinforced by observations of campus communication boards, student handbooks, and informal guidance sessions, where

moral terms such as balance, responsibility, courtesy, and harmony appeared more frequently than formal ideological terminology (Obs-02; Obs-06).

Observations of classroom practices further support this interpretation. Lecturers rarely present moderation as a formal subject or ideological slogan. Instead, moderation is conveyed implicitly through dialogical teaching approaches that encourage students to engage with multiple scholarly perspectives and to interpret religious texts in relation to social realities. In one observed classroom session, the lecturer invited students to compare differing juristic opinions before relating them to contemporary social life, and students responded in a discussion-oriented rather than confrontational manner (Obs-07). This finding suggests that moderation is reproduced not only through institutional discourse but also through pedagogical style and academic interaction.

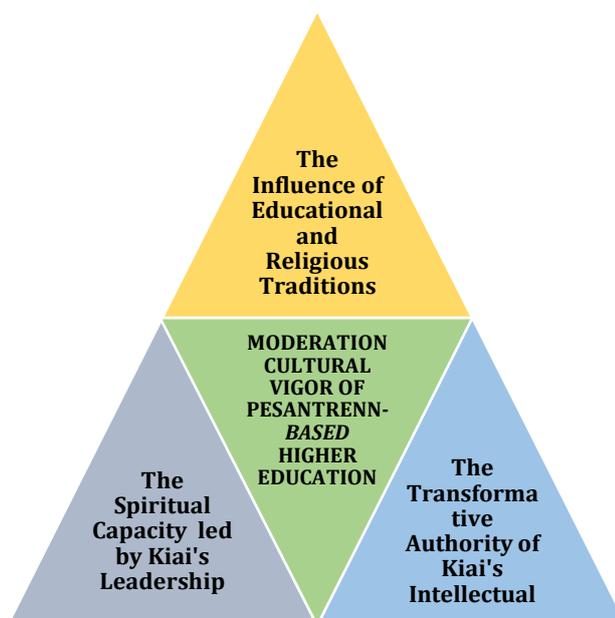


Figure 2. Cultural Structuration of Moderation in *Pesantren*-Based PTKIS

Figure 2 illustrates how moderation emerges from the interaction among institutional governance, *pesantren* cultural authority, and everyday academic practices. The findings in this section show that the formulation of religious moderation in *pesantren*-based PTKIS is grounded in institutional hybridity, shared authority, and cultural continuity. Moderation is not articulated primarily as a formal ideology or temporary program. Rather, it emerges as an institutional orientation shaped by leadership consensus, academic practices, and *pesantren* culture.

Structuration Mechanisms of Religious Moderation

Unlike conventional policy implementation models, moderation in *pesantren*-based PTKIS emerges through continuous interaction among institutional authority, academic engagement, and *pesantren* cultural norms. The analysis identifies three interconnected mechanisms that structure moderation practices: authoritative regulation, persuasive academic engagement, and normative cultural internalization. These mechanisms are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Structuration Mechanisms of Religious Moderation in *Pesantren*-Based PTKIS

Structuration Mechanism	Institutional Actors	Institutional Practices	Moderation Outcome
Authoritative Regulation	Rectors and <i>pesantren</i> leaders	Institutional policies and supervision	Establishes boundaries of acceptable religious discourse
Persuasive Academic Engagement	Lecturers and academic leaders	Dialogical pedagogy and academic forums	Encourages contextual interpretation of religious knowledge
Normative Cultural Internalization	Students and mentors	<i>Pesantren</i> routines and mentoring systems	Moderation becomes internalized behavioral norms

Table 2 shows that the structuration of moderation operates through multiple institutional layers involving leadership authority, academic practice, and cultural socialization. These mechanisms do not function independently; rather, they reinforce one another. Authoritative regulation provides institutional boundaries, persuasive academic engagement shapes intellectual orientation, and normative cultural internalization cultivates everyday behavioral norms. Together, these mechanisms transform moderation from a policy concept into a lived institutional practice.

Authoritative Regulation

At the structural level, moderation is reinforced through leadership authority. University leaders, in coordination with *pesantren* authorities, establish institutional positions regarding acceptable religious discourse and student activities. These positions are expressed through rectoral decrees, student conduct guidelines, and informal directives. The findings indicate that leadership authority functions as an important regulatory resource in defining the limits of legitimate expression within the campus environment.

However, leadership intervention generally takes a preventive and persuasive form rather than a coercive one. A vice rector explained, “*We do not wait until conflict happens. If there are activities that tend to provoke tension, we talk to the organizers and redirect them*” (INF-05). This statement shows that authority is primarily exercised as a guiding mechanism for maintaining institutional harmony rather than as a tool of ideological enforcement. In several cases, the moral legitimacy of *pesantren* leaders strengthened compliance with institutional decisions even when those decisions were not fully formalized in written regulations. One academic manager stated, “*Students usually comply not only because of campus rules, but because they feel that the pesantren’s moral guidance is also present behind those rules*” (INF-06).

The findings also suggest that this form of regulation is effective because it is perceived as legitimate by institutional members. Rather than relying solely on bureaucratic control, regulation operates through the convergence of formal authority and moral recognition. As a result, moderation is maintained through institutional guidance that is both administratively supported and culturally respected. This was visible in observation data showing that when issues with

potentially polarizing content emerged, institutional responses were framed as counseling, clarification, and alignment with *pesantren* values rather than disciplinary confrontation (Obs-08).

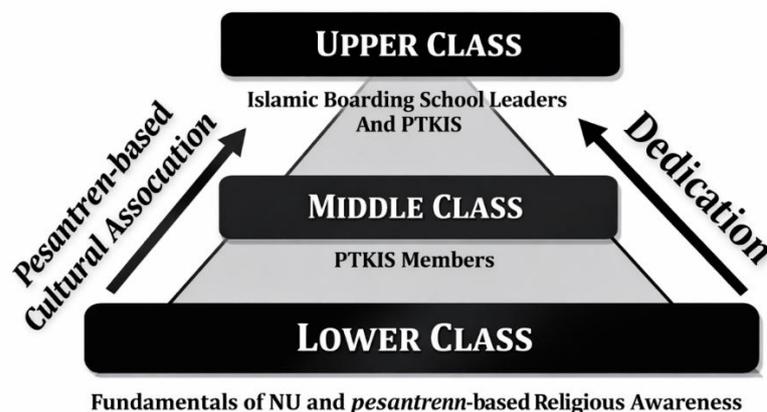


Figure 3. Governance Structure of Moderation in *Pesantren*-Based PTKIS

Figure 3 illustrates the hierarchical flow of authority and decision-making in shaping religious moderation within *pesantren*-based PTKIS. The structure consists of three interconnected levels: lower class, middle class, and upper class. The lower level represents the foundational values of religious awareness derived from *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU) traditions and *pesantren* culture, which provide the normative basis for moderation. The middle level consists of PTKIS members, including lecturers and academic administrators, who translate these values into educational practices and institutional activities. At the upper level, *pesantren* leaders and PTKIS leadership guide institutional direction and ensure alignment with *pesantren* traditions. The triangular model shows that cultural values flow upward through institutional association, while guidance and dedication flow downward from leadership, creating a reciprocal process that sustains moderation as an institutional practice.

Persuasive Academic Engagement and Normative Cultural Internalization

Moderation is also structured through academic persuasion. Lecturers play an important role in shaping students' intellectual perspectives on religious diversity. Classroom discussions frequently emphasize contextual interpretation of religious texts, comparative perspectives within Islamic jurisprudence, and the social implications of religious understanding. One lecturer explained, "*If students only memorize religious texts, they may become rigid. We invite them to discuss different opinions and relate them to social realities*" (INF-07). Another lecturer added, "*We encourage students to understand that difference in fiqh does not automatically mean conflict. It can become a space for intellectual maturity*" (INF-08). These findings indicate that moderation is reproduced through pedagogical interaction, especially where lecturers encourage interpretive openness without abandoning religious commitment.

Academic seminars and public lectures further strengthen this persuasive dimension. Institutions frequently invite speakers known for inclusive and balanced religious perspectives, thereby shaping the campus discourse environment while maintaining academic openness. In one observed seminar, the speaker explicitly

linked Islamic scholarship with social coexistence, while students engaged through reflective questions rather than adversarial responses, suggesting that academic forums functioned as spaces for moderated intellectual exchange (Obs-09). In this context, persuasion does not function as a formal doctrinal imposition but as an intellectual process through which students are exposed to diverse yet legitimate perspectives within Islamic thought.

The next mechanism involves the internalization of moderation values through *pesantren* cultural practices. Daily rituals, communal living arrangements, and mentorship relationships cultivate behavioral norms aligned with moderation principles. These cultural practices are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. *Pesantren* Cultural Practices Supporting Moderation

Cultural Practice	Institutional Context	Moderation Value Developed
Collective prayer and religious study circles	Daily <i>pesantren</i> routines	Spiritual discipline and humility
Dormitory communal living	Student residential life	Social harmony and tolerance
Ethical supervision by kiai and mentors	Informal institutional guidance	Respect for authority and responsible expression

Table 3 demonstrates that *pesantren* cultural practices function as informal institutional structures that reinforce moderation values. Through daily rituals, communal living, and mentoring systems, students internalize norms of humility, respect, and responsible expression. These cultural practices regulate behavior not through formal sanctions but through social expectations embedded in *pesantren* tradition. As a result, moderation becomes an implicit norm that guides everyday interaction within the institution.

Observational findings support this interpretation. Students rarely express extreme religious views publicly, not because of fear of sanctions, but because such behavior is perceived as socially inappropriate within the institutional culture. During dormitory-based observation, students were seen correcting one another's tone and wording in informal discussions, especially when conversations touched on sensitive religious differences, indicating that moderation had become part of peer-regulated conduct (Obs-10). A student leader reflected, "*Here, if someone speaks too harshly or insults others, it feels embarrassing. We are taught to guard our words*" (INF-09). Mentoring systems further strengthen this internalization. Senior students, lecturers, and *pesantren* mentors provide ongoing guidance that reinforces moderation values through example, habituation, and informal correction. As one student mentor explained, "*Usually we do not directly blame students. We accompany them, remind them, and show them how to speak and behave properly in the pesantren-university environment*" (INF-10).

Overall, the findings demonstrate that religious moderation in *pesantren*-based PTKIS is structured through a dynamic interplay of authority, persuasion, and normative internalization. These mechanisms do not operate in isolation; instead, they reinforce one another in ways that produce a stable yet adaptable institutional culture. Moderation therefore emerges as a practical orientation embedded in

leadership decisions, pedagogical practices, and everyday interactions rather than as a formalized doctrine or temporary program.

Discussion

This study shows that religious moderation in *pesantren*-based private Islamic higher education institutions (PTKIS) is best understood as an institutional process rather than merely as the outcome of formal policy implementation. Previous scholarship has often framed moderation as a normative agenda advanced through curriculum, discourse, or state-supported programs. The present findings suggest that such explanations remain incomplete unless they also address the institutional arrangements through which moderation is stabilized in everyday academic life (Nasir & Rijal, 2021; Burhanuddin & Ilmi, 2022; Qorib & Umiarso, 2025). In *pesantren*-based PTKIS, moderation is sustained through governance, leadership legitimacy, academic interaction, and cultural routine. This shifts the analytical focus from moderation as an educational message to moderation as an institutional accomplishment.

This argument extends earlier studies on curricular integration, pedagogical reform, and anti-radicalism discourse in Islamic education (Nasir & Rijal, 2021; Burhanuddin & Ilmi, 2022; Wildan & Muttaqin, 2022). Those studies have shown that Islamic educational institutions can cultivate tolerant and inclusive religious attitudes. However, they largely emphasize what institutions teach or officially promote. By contrast, this study shows that the durability of moderation depends on how it is embedded in the organizational ecology of the institution. In this respect, moderation in *pesantren*-based PTKIS is sustained not only by formal discourse but by the alignment of institutional rules, leadership authority, and social practice.

A major finding of this study concerns the hybrid institutional character of *pesantren*-based PTKIS. Existing scholarship has emphasized the importance of *pesantren* traditions and *kyai* leadership in shaping moderate Islamic orientations (Humaidi et al., 2024; Ma'arif et al., 2025; Misdah et al., 2025). Studies on Indonesian Islamic education have likewise highlighted the historical role of religious institutions in mediating Islam, education, and national identity (Hamami, 2021). The present study confirms these insights but adds that moderation is not produced by *pesantren* charisma alone or by university bureaucracy alone. Rather, it emerges from the negotiated interaction between formal higher education governance and *pesantren* moral authority. This finding is important because it moves beyond a simple opposition between traditional authority and modern administration. In these institutions, the two operate as mutually reinforcing structures that support moderation through both normative guidance and administrative coordination.

This pattern also refines existing interpretations of leadership in Islamic higher education. Earlier studies have portrayed *kyai* authority as central because *kyai* serve as moral exemplars, interpreters of religion, and guardians of institutional values (Humaidi et al., 2024; Ma'arif et al., 2025; Misdah et al., 2025). The present findings support that view, but they further show that leadership becomes institutionally effective when moral authority is translated into rectoral decisions, academic norms, student supervision, and campus governance. Thus,

moderation is sustained not only by symbolic religious influence but also by the capacity of institutions to convert moral legitimacy into administrative practice. Compared with studies that focus mainly on charisma, this study suggests that negotiated legitimacy is more analytically useful for explaining how moderation is institutionalized in hybrid educational settings.

From the perspective of structuration theory, the findings demonstrate that moderation is reproduced through the recursive relationship between structure and agency (Tetteh et.al, 2021; Woon & Tee, 2025). *Pesantren* traditions, governance rules, leadership hierarchies, and communal norms function as structural conditions that shape institutional behavior. At the same time, these structures are reproduced through the actions of rectors, *kyai*, lecturers, mentors, and students who interpret and enact them in daily practice. This means that moderation is neither a static institutional attribute nor a purely ideological principle. It is a relational outcome of repeated social practice. This interpretation is particularly relevant for Islamic higher education because it explains how religious values become durable through recurring academic and social interaction rather than through doctrine alone.

More specifically, this study identifies three interconnected mechanisms through which moderation is reproduced: authoritative regulation, persuasive academic engagement, and normative cultural internalization. This model offers a more differentiated explanation than approaches that isolate moderation within one institutional sphere, such as curriculum, leadership, or student activity (Nasir & Rijal, 2021; Burhanuddin & Ilmi, 2022; Wildan & Muttaqin, 2022). Authoritative regulation sets the boundaries of acceptable discourse through formal decisions and morally recognized leadership. Persuasive academic engagement promotes interpretive openness through dialogical pedagogy, seminars, and scholarly exchange. Normative cultural internalization embeds moderation in everyday conduct through *pesantren* routines, mentoring, and communal discipline. Together, these mechanisms show that moderation is sustained through the convergence of regulatory, pedagogical, and cultural processes rather than through a single intervention.

This framework also clarifies the relationship between *pesantren* culture and university life. Previous studies have shown that local wisdom, *kitab kuning* traditions, *Aswaja* values, and contextual religious interpretation contribute to the development of moderate Islamic discourse in Indonesia (Abdullah, 2022; Burga & Damopolii, 2022; Latif et al., 2023; Nasution et al., 2024; Zaman et al., 2024). The present study is consistent with that scholarship, but it extends the argument by showing that these traditions matter not only because of their doctrinal content. Their institutional significance lies in the fact that they are embedded in routines, authority relations, and pedagogical styles. In other words, local Islamic traditions support moderation not only as ideas to be transmitted but also as institutional forms that pattern social behavior. This helps explain why culturally grounded moderation may be more durable than moderation framed only as formal policy discourse.

In this respect, the findings resonate with broader discussions of *Islam Nusantara* and contextualized Islamic thought in Indonesia (Abdullah, 2022; Zaman et al., 2024). However, this study adds an organizational dimension to that

discussion. Contextual moderation is sustained not only because actors hold inclusive interpretations, but also because institutions provide structures that make such interpretations legitimate and repeatable. This helps explain why moderation in *pesantren*-based PTKIS often appears less as an ideological campaign than as a normalized institutional condition.

Another implication concerns language and labeling. Existing scholarship often assumes that moderation must be explicitly articulated as a formal agenda to shape educational practice (Nasir & Rijal, 2021; Burhanuddin & Ilmi, 2022; Wildan & Muttaqin, 2022). By contrast, this study suggests that explicit terminology is not always the main mechanism of institutionalization. In many *pesantren*-based PTKIS, the term “religious moderation” is not consistently foregrounded, yet its substantive values are embedded in codes of conduct, teaching practices, leadership styles, and mentoring systems. This finding adds nuance to the literature by showing that moderation may become more durable when it is absorbed into institutional norms rather than promoted only as a formal slogan.

The findings also contribute to broader debates on the role of Islamic higher education in plural societies. Previous studies have argued that higher education institutions can counter exclusivism and strengthen democratic citizenship through academic discourse, student engagement, and inclusive educational design (Nasir & Rijal, 2021; Wildan & Muttaqin, 2022; Gholami, 2021; Owusu-Kwarteng, 2021). The present study supports this view but shows that, in *pesantren*-based PTKIS, moderation is shaped as much by institutional culture as by formal academic programming. Accordingly, the moderating role of universities cannot be assessed only through curriculum or policy statements; it must also be examined through authority structures, student socialization, and the connection between academic life and moral community.

These findings also inform discussions of institutional change in Indonesian Islamic higher education. Studies on transformation and internationalization have shown that Islamic higher education institutions face growing pressure to adopt modern governance standards, quality assurance systems, and global academic expectations (Sriharini & Izudin, 2022; Sumiati et al., 2024; Asnawi et al., 2020). These developments are often described as tensions between tradition and modernization. The present study suggests a more complex relationship. In *pesantren*-based PTKIS, modernization does not necessarily displace traditional authority; instead, it can provide organizational channels through which *pesantren* values are formalized and extended. Moderation is one outcome of this institutional translation, showing that religious authenticity and institutional adaptability need not be mutually exclusive.

The study also refines pedagogical discussions in Islamic education. Existing research has shown that dialogical learning, comparative reasoning, and engagement with classical Islamic scholarship can cultivate balanced religious understanding (Helmy et al., 2021; Azizah et al., 2023; Nasution et al., 2024). The present findings confirm the importance of these pedagogical elements, but they also show that pedagogical openness becomes more effective when supported by institutional legitimacy and cultural reinforcement. In *pesantren*-based PTKIS, dialogical teaching is strengthened because it operates within a setting already shaped by *pesantren* values, communal supervision, and shared moral expectations.

As a result, moderation appears not only as intellectual openness but also as disciplined social conduct.

Theoretically, this study contributes by positioning religious moderation as a product of institutional structuration rather than merely as a doctrinal or policy-driven concept. Much of the existing literature treats moderation either as a normative ideal or as a programmatic intervention (Nasir & Rijal, 2021; Burhanuddin & Ilmi, 2022; Wildan & Muttaqin, 2022). By contrast, this study shows that moderation is more adequately understood as a socially reproduced institutional practice shaped by governance arrangements, leadership legitimacy, pedagogical processes, and cultural routines. The proposed three-mechanism model strengthens this contribution by specifying how moderation is reproduced across different organizational levels.

Practically, the findings suggest that policies aimed at strengthening religious moderation in Islamic higher education should move beyond curriculum-centered and slogan-based approaches. Policy efforts are unlikely to be fully effective unless they address the institutional conditions through which moderation is reproduced. Leadership development, coordination between formal and moral authority, mentoring systems, and culturally resonant academic practices are therefore central rather than peripheral to the sustainability of moderation (Nasir & Rijal, 2021; Burhanuddin & Ilmi, 2022). This is especially important in contexts where institutional legitimacy depends not only on administrative systems but also on religious trust and communal recognition.

Finally, the study highlights the strategic role of *pesantren*-based universities as mediating institutions between traditional Islamic scholarship and modern higher education. As Indonesian Islamic higher education continues to expand amid digital transformation, policy reform, and global academic competition, institutions must balance religious identity with intellectual openness, technological change, and organizational professionalism (Sackstein et al., 2023; Subair et al., 2024; Sriharini & Izudin, 2022; Sumiati et al., 2024). The findings suggest that *pesantren*-based PTKIS offer an important model for sustaining religious moderation through the institutional integration of authority, pedagogy, and culture rather than through policy commitment alone.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how religious moderation is structured and sustained within *pesantren*-based private Islamic higher education institutions (PTKIS) in the *Tapal Kuda* region of East Java. The findings show that religious moderation in these institutions is not sustained primarily through formal policy instruments alone. Rather, it is institutionally reproduced through the interaction of hybrid governance, leadership legitimacy, dialogical academic engagement, and the cultural routines of *pesantren* life. Moderation, therefore, operates less as a stand-alone policy agenda and more as a lived institutional orientation embedded in patterns of authority, pedagogy, and everyday social practice. This confirms that the durability of moderation in Islamic higher education depends not only on formal regulations or curricular design, but also on how institutional values are normalized through culturally legitimate structures and repeated academic interaction.

The study further demonstrates that moderation in *pesantren*-based PTKIS is reproduced through three interconnected mechanisms: authoritative regulation, persuasive academic engagement, and normative cultural internalization. Authoritative regulation defines the boundaries of acceptable religious expression through the alignment of formal university administration and *pesantren* moral authority. Persuasive academic engagement fosters interpretive openness through dialogical teaching, comparative discussion, and academic forums. Normative cultural internalization embeds moderation in students' everyday behavior through mentoring, communal living, and religious routines. Taken together, these mechanisms show that moderation is sustained not by one institutional instrument alone, but by the convergence of governance, pedagogy, and culture within a hybrid educational environment.

From a scholarly perspective, this study contributes to the literature in three important ways. First, it strengthens earlier arguments that *pesantren* traditions, *kyai* leadership, and local Islamic intellectual practices play a major role in shaping moderate religious orientations within educational institutions. Second, it extends previous studies that explain moderation mainly through ideological discourse, curricular reform, or policy intervention by showing that such perspectives remain incomplete without attention to the institutional processes through which moderation is reproduced in daily academic life. Third, this study offers a structuration-based interpretation that explains moderation as a dynamic institutional outcome emerging from the recursive relationship between structure and agency. Through this perspective, moderation is understood not only as a normative value, but also as a socially reproduced practice embedded in governance arrangements, leadership patterns, academic engagement, and *pesantren* cultural routines.

Despite these contributions, this study has several limitations. The research was conducted in a limited number of *pesantren*-based PTKIS within a specific regional context, so the findings cannot be generalized automatically to all Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia. The qualitative design offers deep contextual understanding, but it does not provide broad representativeness across institutional types. In addition, the characteristics of PTKIS in *Tapal Kuda* may differ significantly from those of state Islamic universities or *pesantren*-affiliated institutions in other socio-cultural settings. These limitations indicate that the findings should be interpreted as contextually grounded rather than universally representative.

Future research should therefore expand the comparative scope of inquiry by examining different types of Islamic higher education institutions across wider regional and socio-cultural contexts. Comparative and mixed-method designs would be especially useful for assessing the broader applicability of the three-mechanism model identified in this study. Further studies should also investigate how digital religious discourse, shifting student religiosity, and contemporary socio-political change influence the institutionalization of moderation in Islamic higher education. Practically, the findings suggest that policymakers and institutional leaders should move beyond policy-centered approaches and pay greater attention to culturally grounded governance, dialogical academic practice, mentoring systems, and leadership development rooted in locally legitimate traditions. Such strategies are

likely to be more effective because they align institutional initiatives with the lived cultural realities through which moderation is actually sustained in Islamic higher education.

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