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ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION POLICY AND RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN INDONESIA: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW AND BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS (2015–2026)

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Keywords:
Freedom of Religion; Islamic Religious Education Policy; Madrasah; Islamic Boarding School; Religious Moderation; Systematic Review; Bibliometrics

ABSTRACT

This study aims to map the literature on religious freedom in the constitution and its implications for Islamic religious education (PAI) policies in Indonesia. The design used was a systematic review based on PRISMA 2020 combined with bibliometric analysis. The search was conducted on OpenAlex as the main index, with Crossref for metadata validation and Google Scholar as a complementary source, using five search strings for the 2015–2026 publication (search deadline October 2026; 2026 is treated as an incomplete year). Of the 231,895 records identified, 200 records with the highest relevance score on each string (1,000 records total) were taken for screening; after de-duplication and feasibility assessment, 277 studies were included. The corpus shows an average publication growth of 23.1% per year in the complete period 2015–2025, the dominance of Indonesian authorship (192 articles; 69.3%), an average of 8.03 citations per article, and the proportion of open access 96.4%. After generic geographical terms were excluded from the interpretation, the dominant thematic keywords were pesantren, madrasah, Islamic education, religious freedom, and religious moderation, which formed three clusters: Islamic educational institutions, education policy, and religious freedom. These clusters became the starting point for thematic coding that produced seven crucial issues: religion-state relations in the constitution; PAI as public policy; governance of madrassas and pesantren; religious moderation as an education policy; protection of freedom of religion and minority groups; curriculum and learning practices of PAI; and regulatory and implementation gaps. This study concludes that constitutional guarantees of religious freedom have become the normative basis of PAI policies, but the literature discusses the norm level and value discourse more than evidence of implementation in educational units. The main contribution is the four-layer conceptual

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framework (constitution–policy–institutional–learning) and the research agenda for the development of moderate and inclusive PAI.

Keywords:
Religious freedom; Islamic religious education policy; madrasah; pesantren; religious moderation; systematic review; bibliometrics

ABSTRACT

This study maps the literature on constitutional religious freedom and its implications for Islamic Religious Education (IRE/PAI) policy in Indonesia. It employs a PRISMA 2020-based systematic review combined with bibliometric analysis. Searches were run in OpenAlex as the primary index, with Crossref used for metadata validation and Google Scholar as a supplementary source, using five search strings for publications from 2015 to 2026 (search cut-off: October 2026; 2026 is treated as an incomplete year). Of the 231,895 identified records, the 200 highest relevance-ranked records from each string (1,000 records in total) were retrieved for screening; after de-duplication and eligibility assessment, 277 studies were included. The corpus shows an average annual growth of 23.1% over the complete period 2015–2025, a predominance of Indonesian authorship (192 articles; 69.3%), an average of 8.03 citations per article, and an open-access share of 96.4%. After generic geographical terms were excluded from interpretation, the dominant thematic keywords were pesantren, madrasah, Islamic education, religious freedom, and religious moderation, forming three clusters: Islamic educational institutions, education policy, and religious freedom. These clusters served as the starting point for thematic coding, which yielded seven critical issues: state–religion relations in the constitution; IRE as public policy; madrasah and pesantren governance; religious moderation as education policy; protection of religious freedom and minorities; IRE curriculum and classroom practice; and the gap between regulation and implementation. The study concludes that constitutional guarantees of religious freedom have become the normative foundation of IRE policy, yet the literature addresses norms and value discourses more than evidence of implementation in schools and madrasahs. Its main contributions are a four-layer conceptual framework (constitution–policy–institution–pedagogy) and a research agenda for developing moderate and inclusive Islamic education.

A. INTRODUCTION

Freedom of religion is a human right that is explicitly guaranteed in the Indonesian constitution. Article 28E paragraph (1) of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia states that everyone is free to embrace religion and worship according to his religion, choose education and teaching, choose a job, choose citizenship, choose a place of residence, and have the right to return. Article 29 paragraph (2) emphasizes that the state guarantees the freedom of each citizen to embrace his or her own religion and to worship according to his religion and beliefs. Article 31 paragraph (3) mandates that the government seeks and implements a national education system that increases faith and piety to God Almighty as well as noble morals (Republic of Indonesia 1945).

These three articles place Indonesia in a distinctive position on the spectrum of religion-state relations. Indonesia is not a religious state that includes one official religion in its constitution, nor is it a secular state that expressly separates religion from state affairs (Mu'ti and Burhani 2019; Hefner 2021). This peculiarity raises an ongoing academic question: how has this constitutional construction translated into Islamic

religious education policy, and to what extent has the scientific literature mapped the issue?

The debate on this position does not take place in a vacuum. A comparative study of religious governance in Muslim-majority countries shows that constitutional recognition of religious freedom can coexist with religious regulation through laws and regulations, without necessarily leading to full secularism or theocracy (Bruinessen 2018; Künkler and Lerner 2016). Studies on the role of the Constitutional Court in determining the relationship between the state and religion show that the judiciary is also an arena for interpreting the relevant constitutional articles, including the recognition of believers (Safa'at 2022; Butt 2020). Thus, the issue of religious freedom is not only a normative issue, but also a question of interpretation, institutionality, and policy implementation.

At the level of education policy, the constitutional implications can be seen in the placement of religious education as the rights of students and the responsibility of the state. Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System and Government Regulation Number 55 of 2007 concerning Religious Education and Religious Education are the two main footholds that translate the mandate of the constitution into the implementation of religious education in schools, madrasas, Islamic boarding schools, and higher education (Republic of Indonesia 2003; 2007; Sobri 2019). Since then, Islamic religious education policies have developed through various curriculum reforms, strengthening madrasah governance, and mainstreaming religious moderation, which was later confirmed through Presidential Regulation Number 58 of 2023 concerning the Strengthening of Religious Moderation (Republic of Indonesia 2023; Kosim et al. 2023).

Conceptually, the relationship between religious freedom and PAI can be understood through four interrelated layers. The first layer is the constitutional layer, which is a normative guarantee of religious freedom and an educational mandate oriented towards faith and noble morals. The second layer is the policy layer, namely laws, government regulations, and ministerial regulations that regulate the right of students to obtain religious education according to their religion and taught by educators of the same religion. The third layer is the institutional layer, namely schools, madrasas, Islamic boarding schools, and Islamic religious colleges that translate policies into governance. The fourth layer is the pedagogical layer, namely the curriculum, textbooks, teacher competencies, and learning climate where students truly experience religious freedom. In this framework, religious freedom has dual implications for PAI: on the one hand guaranteeing Muslim students' right to their religious education, on the other hand demanding that PAI foster respect for the religious freedom of others (Jackson 2018; Mu'ti 2023; Utami 2022). This four-layer framework is used as an analytical lens in this study.

Previous studies on this topic have generally been narrative-descriptive and based on content analysis of laws and regulations documents (Sobri 2019; Tamami 2019). In recent years, systematic and bibliometric reviews have begun to be applied to the field of Islamic education. Table 1 compares a number of these studies to show the position of this research.

Table 1. Comparison of previous systematic and bibliometric review studies

Study	Focus	Method	Limitations relative to this study
Ulya and Amrullah (2026)	PAI policy in public elementary schools	Systematic review	Limited to one level; no bibliometric mapping
Muzayana (2024)	Certificate policy is a boarding school	Systematic review	Limited to one policy instrument
Afwadzi and Miski (2021)	Religious moderation in college	Literature review	Limited to higher education; without PRISMA protocol
Prasetyo, Fauziah, and Syafii (2025)	Religious moderation as a counter-radicalization strategy	Systematic review	Focuses on pedagogy; does not link with constitutional guarantees
Hasan and Juhannis (2024)	Religious education and moderation	Bibliometrics	Global coverage; without a policy and constitutional lens
Zamroni, Handayani, and Lestari (2025)	Religious moderation and Islamic education in Indonesia	Bibliometrics	Not discussing religious freedom and institutional governance
Salman and Arvita (2024)	PAI curriculum model	Bibliometrics and literature review	Limited to curriculum
Efendi, Susanto, and Basri (2025)	Integration of PAI with Sustainable Development Goals	Systematic and bibliometric review	Focusing on the SDGs agenda
Asari, Ritonga, and Nursalimah (2024)	Modernization of Islamic education 1965–2022	Bibliometrics	Broad coverage; does not focus on policy and religious freedom

Source: Compiled by the authors from the referenced studies.

The comparison shows three limitations. First, previous studies generally photographed only one segment, either one level, one policy instrument, or one theme such as religious moderation. Second, there has been no study that links the constitutional layer with the policy, institutional, and pedagogical layers of PAI as a single field of study. Third, most bibliometric studies have not reported the number of recordings at each stage of selection, keyword normalization procedures, and network parameters, making them difficult to replicate. A separate bibliometric investigation of the relationship between religious freedom and PAI policy is important because the literature in this field is scattered in legal journals, religious studies, and education; only systematic mapping can show whether these discourses meet or develop separately.

This research fills the gap by asking five study questions: RQ1, how does literature construct the relationship between religion and the state in the constitution and its implications for the legal position of Islamic religious education? RQ2, how is Islamic religious education policy formulated and institutionalized as a public policy? RQ3, how is the policy translated into curriculum and learning practices? RQ4, how is the policy implemented at the madrasah levels, schools, Islamic boarding schools, and higher education? RQ5, what are the crucial issues that arise related to religious moderation, tolerance, radicalism, and the protection of minority groups?

The novelty of this research lies in three things. First, the complete implementation of the PRISMA 2020 protocol with flowcharts, inclusion-exclusion criteria, and reporting of the number of records at each stage. Second, the integration of bibliometric analysis with explicitly reported calculation and normalization procedures so that the mapping of trends, sources, countries, and keywords can be verified. Third, thematic synthesis directed at crucial issues and linked with a four-layer framework. Theoretically, this study contributes a map of the intellectual structure of the field of study and a conceptual framework that links religious freedom with the development of PAI. Practically, this research offers implications for policymakers,

managers of madrasas and Islamic boarding schools, and PAI teachers, along with a more targeted research agenda.

B. METHODS

Design and protocol

This study uses a *systematic review* design combined with descriptive bibliometric analysis. The systematic review was carried out following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines which include identification, screening, feasibility assessment, and study inclusion (Page et al. 2021). Bibliometric analysis was used to map annual scientific production, most productive sources, geographical distribution of authorship, citation, keyword frequency, and keyword co-ocurence network. Thus, this study is qualitative-systematic at the content synthesis level and quantitative-descriptive at the literature mapping level. The overall research flow is presented in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Research flow

The review protocol was prepared before the search was conducted and included objectives, five study questions (RQ1–RQ5), database, search strings, time ranges, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and data extraction procedures. The publication range was set 2015–2026 to capture the dynamics of post-reform and post-current Islamic religious education policies. The last search was conducted in October 2026, so 2026 is an incomplete publication year. Therefore, the annual trend analysis is based on the complete period 2015–2025, while the 2026 data are reported separately.

Data sources and search strategies

The three data sources have different functions. OpenAlex is used as the primary index for the identification and retrieval of records due to its open and broad scope, including Indonesian national journals that are underrepresented in commercial databases (Priem, Piwowar, and Orr 2022). Crossref is used to validate the metadata of

each retrieved record, i.e. DOI, year of publication, journal name, and author name, through DOI matching; Crossref is not treated as an additional record source so it does not add to the number of records. Google Scholar is used manually to search for 23 comparative studies, namely systematic reviews, bibliometric studies, and previous legal studies, some of which do not have DOIs. These comparative studies are used in introductions and discussions, but are not included in the bibliometric corpus so that all indicators are calculated from one consistent metadata source.

Five search strings are applied to the OpenAlex search feature with filters of document type, article, and year of publication 2015–2026. Table 2 summarizes the search strings along with the number of records identified and retrieved on each string.

Table 2. Search protocol and results per search string (OpenAlex)

Code	Search string	Total records identified	Recorded
S1	religious freedom AND constitution AND (Islamic OR religious) education AND Indonesia	12.482	200
S2	("Islamic religious education" OR "Islamic religious education") AND (policy OR policy)	81.038	200
S3	(madrasah OR pesantren OR "religious school") AND (policy OR curriculum) AND Indonesia	97.319	200
S4	("religious education" OR "religious instruction") AND (secularism OR "state neutrality" OR constitution)	14.133	200
S5	("religious moderation" OR "religious moderation") AND (education OR curriculum OR school)	26.923	200
Total		231.895	1.000

Source: Author's analysis of OpenAlex metadata validated with Crossref (2026).

Study selection

In aggregate, the five search strings resulted in 231,895 records. This number is too large to filter manually and is largely irrelevant because common terms such as *policy*, *curriculum*, or *education* also appear in other fields. Therefore, from each string, 200 records with the highest relevance scores are drawn according to the OpenAlex search engine, which ranks documents based on the match of search terms in their titles, abstracts, and indexed text. An equal quota for each string is chosen so that all five thematic viewpoints are represented in a balanced manner and so that any screening decisions can be audited. This procedure has the potential to lead to selection bias because relevance rankings tend to favor English-language documents, documents with complete metadata, and documents that contain a lot of search terms. The high proportion of off-topic recordings, even in the top-rated recordings (644 out of 987 or 65.2%), indicates that relevance is rapidly declining so that off-quota recordings are more likely to be dominated by irrelevant documents. However, this limitation is discussed again in the discussion section.

De-duplication was carried out in two steps, namely DOI matching and normalized title matching along with the year of issue, so that 13 duplicates were removed and 987 unique records remained. Further screening was carried out in three stages: (1) screening of titles and abstracts of the study topic; (2) assessment of the completeness of metadata, i.e. the availability of indexed abstracts, languages, and venues; and (3) feasibility assessment based on relevance to at least two of the five study questions. Each stage was conducted independently by two authors using the same

screening sheet; disagreements were resolved through discussion with the third author, and the fourth author verified the decision on a random sample of recordings. The inclusion and exclusion criteria are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Journal articles that discuss Islamic religious education, education policy, or religious-state relations	Non-article documents (editorials, notes, conference summaries)
Focus on Indonesia, Southeast Asia, or relevant cross-country comparisons	It does not have an abstract so it cannot be assessed for feasibility
English, Indonesian, or Malay	Languages other than English, Indonesian, and Malay
Published in the range 2015–2026	Doesn't have a venue or indexed source
Relevant to at least two of the five study questions (RQ1–RQ5)	Relevant to less than two study questions

Source: Research protocol (2026).

Data extraction and bibliometric analysis

The extracted data includes title, year, source, author, country affiliation, author keywords, indexed concepts, open access status, and number of citations. Extraction is done programmatically from OpenAlex metadata that has been validated with Crossref so that each number can be traced back to its original record. The counting rules are set as follows. The year of publication follows the year of publication in the OpenAlex metadata, including online *first*. The number of citations is the number of citations recorded in OpenAlex on the search deadline date. Countries are calculated using *the full counting method* at the article level: each article is counted once for each country that appears on the affiliation of one of its authors, so that international collaboration articles are counted in more than one country and the percentage is calculated against 277 studies. Source names are normalized so that variations in the writing of the same journal name are not calculated separately.

The author's keywords are normalized through the uniformity of lowercase letters, the removal of spaces and punctuation, the incorporation of singular-plural forms and spelling variations, and the mapping of Indonesian equivalents to English terms, e.g. "religious moderation" to *religious moderation* and "Islamic education" to *Islamic education*. Generic terms, i.e. country names that are part of the search strategy ("Indonesia") and the concept labels of auto-indexing results that have no thematic meaning ("course program"), are still reported in the frequency table for the sake of transparency, but are not interpreted as intellectual themes. The co-ocurence network is constructed from pairs of keywords that appear together on the same article with a minimum co-ocurence threshold of three; the node size indicates the frequency of the keyword and the line thickness indicates the co-ocurence weight. Data processing, indicator counting, modularity-based cluster detection, and visualization were performed using Python 3 with pandas, NetworkX, and Matplotlib libraries.

Thematic synthesis

Thematic synthesis is carried out by adapting thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006) in four steps. First, deductive coding of the titles, abstracts, keywords, and indexed concepts of each study based on RQ1–RQ5. Second, inductive coding to generate open code within each RQ, for example "dualism of authority", "symbolic

formalization", or "believers". Third, group the code into theme candidates and cross-check with the keyword cluster from the bibliometric analysis. Fourth, the review and definition of the final theme, so that seven themes are obtained, each of which is supported by a representative study. Since the units of analysis are titles, abstracts, and keywords, the synthesis findings are read as a map of the substance of the literature, not as a measure of policy effectiveness.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

1. Study selection and flow diagram PRISMA

Figure 2 presents the study selection flow according to PRISMA 2020. Of the 231,895 records identified on OpenAlex, 1,000 records (200 per string) were taken for screening and 13 records were removed due to duplication leaving 987 unique records. At the title and abstract screening stages, 644 records were excluded for being off-topic so that 343 recordings passed. Furthermore, 0 recordings were excluded for not having abstracts, 3 recordings for language reasons, and 2 recordings for not having indexed venues, so that 338 recordings were assessed for feasibility. After 61 recordings were excluded because they were only relevant to less than two study questions, a total of 277 studies were included in bibliometric mapping and thematic synthesis. In addition, 23 comparative studies from Crossref and Google Scholar were recorded separately and were not included in the corpus. A summary of each stage is presented in Table 4.

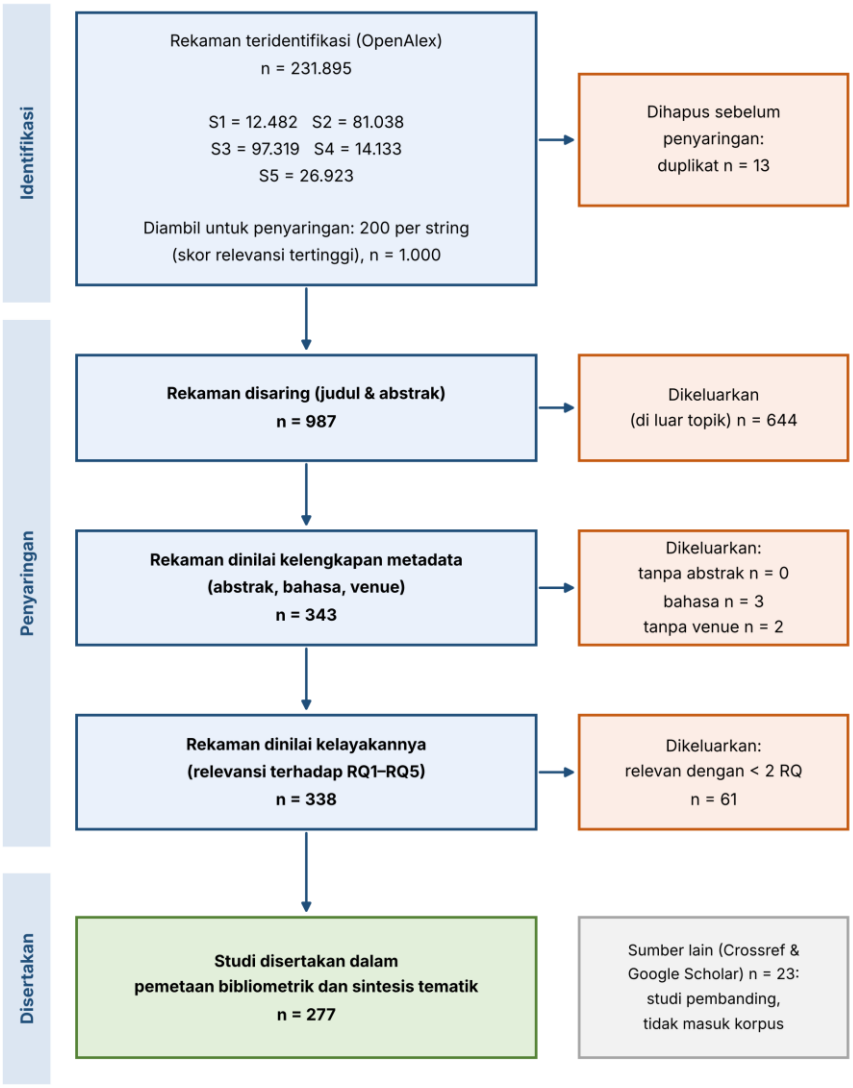


Figure 2. PRISMA 2020 flowchart for study selection

Table 4. Summary of the PRISMA selection stages

Stages	Remarks	Quantity
Identification	Total records identified on OpenAlex (S1–S5)	231.895
Identification	Recordings taken for screening (200 per string)	1.000
Identification	Deleted duplicates	13
Identification	Unique records after de-duplication	987
Screening	Excluded for off-topic	644
Screening	Pass title and abstract screening	343
Screening	Excluded because there is no abstract / language / no venue indexed	0 / 3 / 2
Eligibility	Assessed eligibility	338
Eligibility	Excluded because it is relevant to less than two RQs	61
Included	Studies included in the final synthesis	277
Other sources	Comparative studies from Crossref and Google Scholar (outside the corpus)	23

Source: Author's analysis of OpenAlex metadata validated with Crossref (2026).

2. Annual scientific production

Figure 3 and Table 5 present the number of studies in the corpus per year. This figure shows the composition of the corpus as a result of search and selection procedures, rather than the total scientific production of the field as a whole. In the full period 2015–2025, the corpus contained 222 studies, with an increase from 5 articles in 2015 to 40 articles in 2025, or an average growth of 23.1% per year. The acceleration is evident after 2020, with a peak of 45 articles in 2024. This pattern is in line with the strengthening of the agenda of religious moderation and madrasah governance reform in Islamic education policy.

The year 2026 contains 55 records up to the search limit, more than 2025. This figure is not interpreted as a trend for three reasons. First, 2026 is not complete. Second, OpenAlex metadata can record articles that are published online earlier for the 2026 volume issue. Third, the relevance ranking and S5 string tend to elevate the most recent published religious moderation literature. The low citations in 2025 (35) and 2026 (4) also reflect a short citation window, not a low quality of publication.

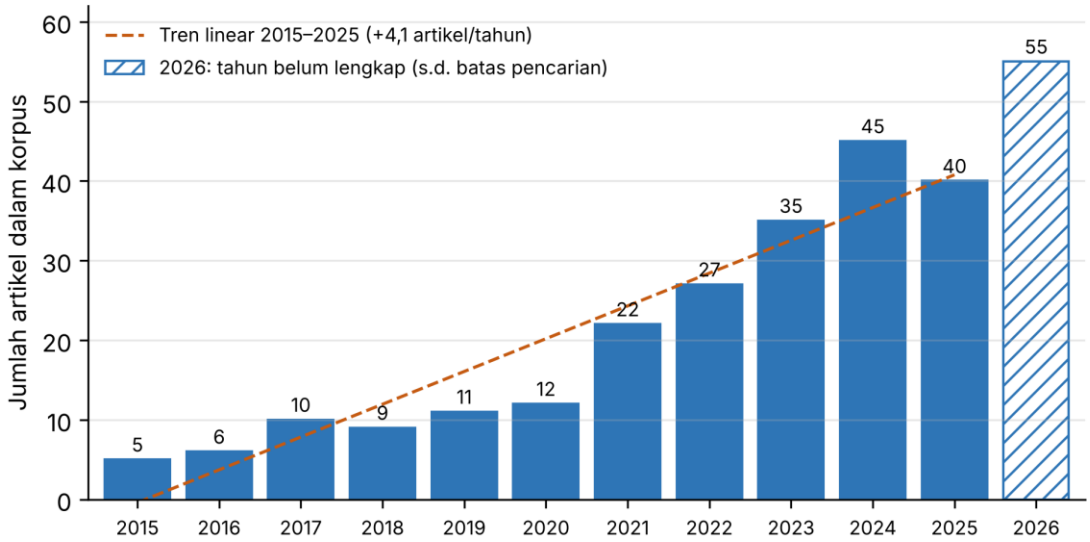


Figure 3. Number of studies in the corpus per year (2015–2026)

Table 5. Number of studies and citations per year in the corpus

Year	Number of articles	Total citations	Average citations per article
2015	5	176	35,2
2016	6	130	21,7
2017	10	70	7,0
2018	9	299	33,2
2019	11	362	32,9
2020	12	105	8,8
2021	22	308	14,0
2022	27	184	6,8
2023	35	386	11,0
2024	45	165	3,7
2025	40	35	0,9
2026*	55	4	0,1
Total 2015–2025	222	2.220	10,0
Total 2015–2026	277	2.224	8,0

*Source: Author's analysis of OpenAlex metadata validated with Crossref (2026). *Year incomplete (as of search limit).*

3. The most productive source

The included corpus is spread across 235 different sources. The ten most prolific sources publish only 31 articles or 11.2% of the corpus, indicating that this field of study is highly dispersed and does not have a core journal. Figure 4 and Table 6 show that *the Religions* and *the Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies each* published four articles, followed by seven journals with three articles. The composition of these sources includes journals of religious, theological studies, human rights, and education, which affirms the interdisciplinary nature of these fields while explaining why legal discourse and educational discourse tend to develop on different publication channels.

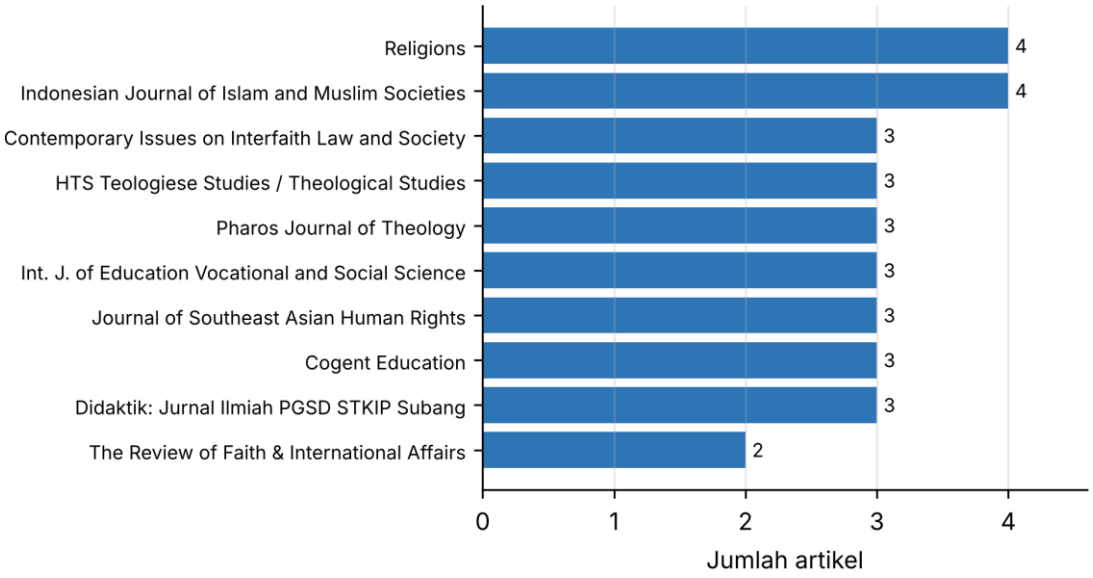


Figure 4. Ten most productive journals/sources

Table 6. The ten most productive sources/journals

Ratings	Source	Number of articles
1	Religions	4
2	Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies	4
3	Contemporary Issues on Interfaith Law and Society	3
4	HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies	3
5	Pharos Journal of Theology	3
6	International Journal of Education, Vocational and Social Science	3
7	Journal of Southeast Asian Human Rights	3
8	Cogent Education	3
9	Didactic: PGSD Scientific Journal STKIP Subang	3
10	The Review of Faith & International Affairs	2

Source: Author's analysis of OpenAlex metadata validated with Crossref (2026).

4. Geographic distribution of authorship

With *the full counting* method at the article level, Figure 5 and Table 7 show the dominance of Indonesian authorship. Of the 277 included studies, 192 articles or 69.3% involved at least one Indonesian-affiliated author. Malaysia occupies the second position with 11 articles (4.0%), followed by the United States and Turkey with 5 articles

each (1.8%). This distribution shows that the study of Islamic religious education policy in Indonesia is still dominated by the domestic academic community and opens up space for international collaboration and broader comparative studies.

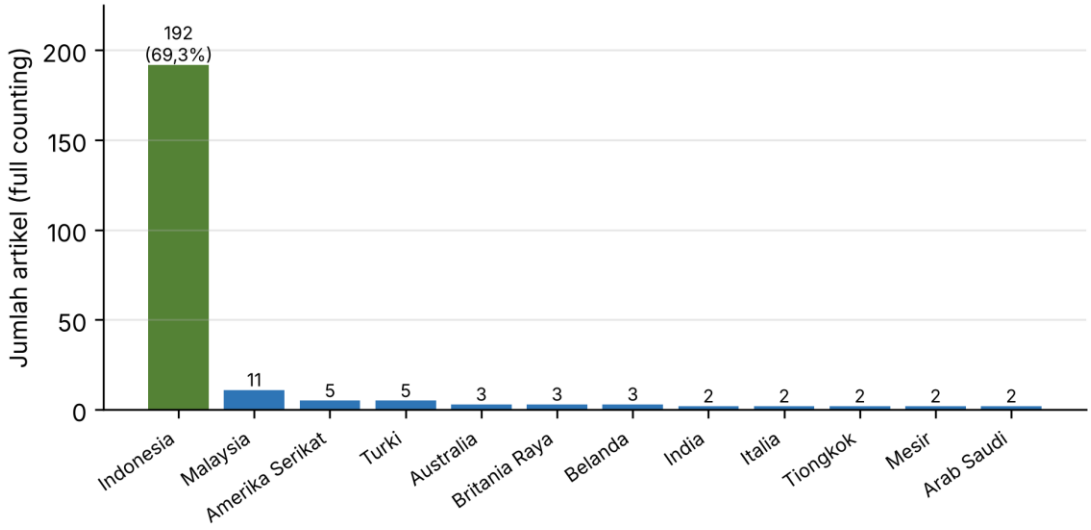


Figure 5. Geographic distribution of authorship (top 12 countries, full count)

Table 7. Distribution of authorship countries

Ratings	Country	Number of articles	Percentage of 277 studies
1	Indonesia	192	69,3%
2	Malaysia	11	4,0%
3	United States	5	1,8%
4	Turkey	5	1,8%
5	Australia	3	1,1%
6	United Kingdom	3	1,1%
7	The Netherlands	3	1,1%
8	India	2	0,7%
9	Italy	2	0,7%
10	China	2	0,7%
11	Egypt	2	0,7%
12	Saudi Arabia	2	0,7%

Source: Author's analysis of OpenAlex metadata validated with Crossref (2026). A single article can be counted in more than one country.

5. Keywords and intellectual structure

Figure 6 and Table 8 present the fifteen authors' keywords that appear most frequently after normalization. The keyword "Indonesia" occupies the highest frequency (224), but its appearance mainly reflects a search strategy that contains the name of the country so that it is not interpreted as a theme. The same is true for "course program" which is an automatic indexing label. Outside of these two terms, the dominant thematic keywords are pesantren (110), madrasah (104), *Islamic education* (92), and *religious freedom* (71). The emergence of *religious moderation*, *religious tolerance*, *religious pluralism*, and *religious diversity* shows that the issue of religious freedom is not discussed in isolation, but is intertwined with the discourse of moderation and pluralism. The keywords *secularism* and Pancasila indicate that the debate on the

philosophical basis of religious-state relations remains part of the academic conversation.

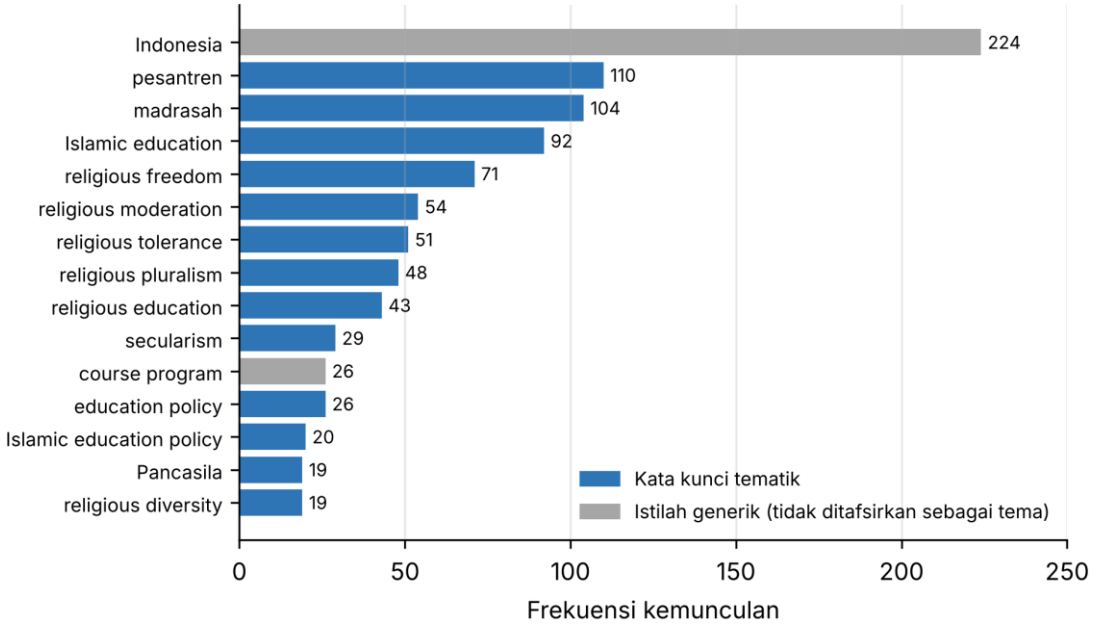


Figure 6. Most frequent author keywords (top 15)

Table 8. Fifteen most frequent author keywords

Ratings	Keywords	Frequency	Interpretation status
1	Indonesia	224	Generic
2	Islamic boarding school	110	Thematic
3	Madrasah	104	Thematic
4	Islamic education	92	Thematic
5	Religious Freedom	71	Thematic
6	Religious Moderation	54	Thematic
7	Religious Tolerance	51	Thematic
8	Religious pluralism	48	Thematic
9	religious education	43	Thematic
10	secularism	29	Thematic
11	Course Program	26	Generic
12	Education Policy	26	Thematic
13	Islamic education policy	20	Thematic
14	São Paulo	19	Thematic
15	Religious Diversity	19	Thematic

Source: Author's analysis of OpenAlex metadata validated with Crossref (2026). Generic terms are reported but not interpreted as themes.

6. Keyword co-curation network

Figure 7 shows the author's keyword co-co-curation network with a minimum co-co-occupancy threshold of three. The "Indonesia" node is at the center of the network because it is connected to almost all other nodes; this position is a consequence of the search strategy so that the cluster reading is focused on the relationships between thematic nodes. The network structure shows three main clusters. The institutional cluster is centered on madrassas and Islamic boarding schools that are closely

connected to *Islamic education*, *Islamic higher education*, and *Islamic educational institutions*. The policy cluster is centered on *education policy*, *Islamic education policy*, and *curriculum integration*. The religious freedom cluster is centered on *religious freedom* which is connected to *religious tolerance*, *religious pluralism*, *religious minorities*, *human rights*, Pancasila, and *secularism*. *Religious moderation* is between the institutional cluster and the religious freedom cluster, which indicates its role as a bridge of discourse. The direct link between the policy cluster and the religious freedom cluster is relatively thin, so that the policy study of PAI and the study of religious freedom seem to be developing relatively separately.

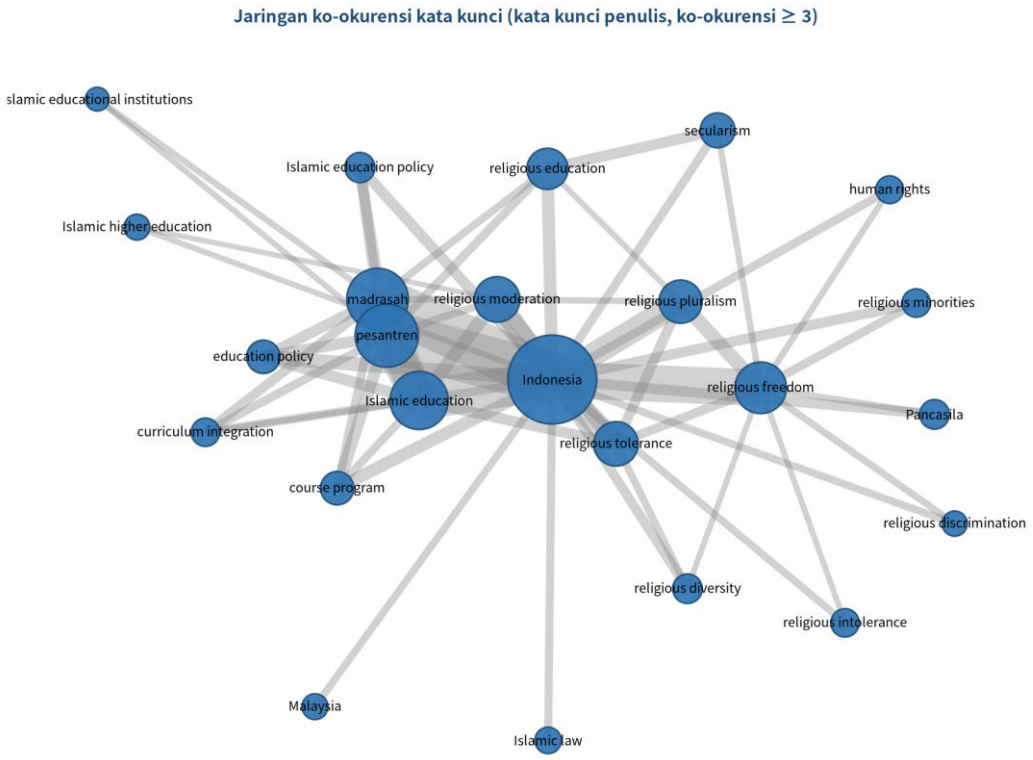


Figure 7. Author's keyword co-ocurence network (co-ocurence ≥ 3)

7. The most influential studies

Table 9 contains fifteen studies with the highest citations in the corpus. The total number of corpus citations reached 2,224 with an average of 8.03 citations per article. The most influential studies discussed post-reform ideological contestation, Islamic education and deradicalization, the mainstreaming of religious moderation in Islamic higher education, the ambiguity and limits of religious freedom, and the dynamics of Islamic education policy. This composition shows that the most referenced studies are precisely at the intersection between the discourse of religious freedom and the institutional discourse of Islamic education.

Table 9. The fifteen most influential studies in the corpus

No.	Author (year)	Title	Citation	Source
1	Bourchier (2019)	Two Decades of Ideological Contestation in Indonesia: From Democratic Cosmopolitanism to Religious Nationalism	161	Journal of Contemporary Asia

No.	Author (year)	Title	Citation	Source
2	Wahid (2015)	Nurturing Salafi Manhaj: A Study of Salafi Islamic Boarding Schools in Contemporary Indonesia	111	Discourse
3	Nasir and Rijal (2021)	Keeping the Middle Path: Mainstreaming Religious Moderation through Islamic Higher Education Institutions in Indonesia	107	Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies
4	Marshall (2018)	The Ambiguities of Religious Freedom in Indonesia	102	The Review of Faith & International Affairs
5	Zuhdi (2018)	Challenging Moderate Muslims: Indonesia's Muslim Schools in the Midst of Religious Conservatism	89	Religions
6	Kosim et al. (2023)	The Dynamics of Islamic Education Policies in Indonesia	89	Cogent Education
7	Arifin (2016)	Islamic Religious Education and Radicalism in Indonesia: Strategy of De-radicalization through Strengthening the Living Values Education	85	Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies
8	Mukhibat et al. (2024)	Development and Evaluation of Religious Moderation Education Curriculum at Higher Education in Indonesia	68	Cogent Education
9	Mas'ud, Fuad, and Zaini (2019)	Evolution and Orientation of Islamic Education in Indonesia and Malaysia	59	Journal of Indonesian Islam
10	Sari et al. (2023)	Religious Moderation in Islamic Education in Indonesia	58	Journal on Education
11	Mulyana (2023)	Religious Moderation in Islamic Religious Education Textbook and Implementation in Indonesia	56	HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies
12	Mu'ti and Burhani (2019)	The Limits of Religious Freedom in Indonesia: With Reference to the First Pillar of Godliness Yang Maha Esa of Pancasila	46	Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies
13	Hefner (2021)	Islam and Institutional Religious Freedom in Indonesia	43	Religions
14	Ardi et al. (2021)	Religious Schema and Tolerance towards Alienated Groups in Indonesia	40	Hell
15	Ahmad (2015)	Educational Practice: Lessons to Be Learned from Madrasah and Religious Schools in Contemporary Southeast Asia	36	Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies

Source: Author's analysis of OpenAlex metadata validated with Crossref (2026).

8. Thematic synthesis of crucial issues

Deductive coding based on RQ1–RQ5 and cross-checked inductive coding with three keyword clusters resulted in seven crucial themes. Table 10 shows the relationship of each theme to the study question, bibliometric cluster, core findings, and representative study. A description of each theme is presented after the table.

Table 10. Thematic synthesis of crucial issues

Theme	RQ	Cluster	The essence of the synthesis findings	Representative studies
T1. Constitution and religious-state relations	RQ1	Freedom of religion	Indonesia recognizes and protects religion through laws and regulations without establishing the state religion; this construction rejects full secularism as well as theocracy.	Mu'ti and Burhani (2019); Hefner (2021); Butt (2020); Bruinessen (2018)
T2. Religious education as public policy	RQ2	Policy	The National Education System Law and Government Regulation 55/2007 place religious education as the right of students and the responsibility of the state; the policy direction shifts from domestication to accommodation.	Kosim et al. (2023); Sobri (2019); Künkler and Lerner (2016)

Theme	RQ	Cluster	The essence of the synthesis findings	Representative studies
T3. Governance of madrasas and Islamic boarding schools	RQ2, RQ4	Institutional	Madrasas and Islamic boarding schools are positioned as a subsystem of national education; the crucial issues are the dualism of authority, recognition of qualifications, and curriculum contestation.	Ihsan et al. (2024); Hanif et al. (2024); Muzayana (2024); Hamami (2021)
T4. Religious moderation as a policy	RQ3, RQ5	Institutional bridge–freedom	Religious moderation is the mainstream of Islamic education policy, but it risks becoming a symbolic formalization if it is not translated into a learning experience.	Nasir and Rijal (2021); Mukhibat et al. (2024); Khasanah, Hamzani, and Aravik (2023)
T5. Freedom of religion and minority groups	RQ1, RQ5	Freedom of religion	There is a tension between constitutional guarantees and social practices; affirmative protection and legal certainty are needed for minorities and believers.	Marshall (2018); Ardi et al. (2021); Isaac and Manitra (2022); Fenton (2016)
T6. Curriculum and learning practices	RQ3	Policy	The PAI curriculum is constantly updated, but its effectiveness depends on the competence of teachers, textbooks, and a multicultural learning climate.	Mulyana (2023); Abidin and Murtadlo (2020); Utami (2022); Ulya and Amrullah (2026)
T7. Regulatory and implementation gaps	RQ4	Cross-cluster	The quality of regulation has not been matched by the capacity of implementation in schools and madrasas; empirical evidence on the impact of policies is still limited.	Kosim et al. (2023); Tamami (2019); Maskur (2017); Zuhdi (2018)

Source: Author's synthesis of 277 studies in the corpus.

T1. Constitution and religious-state relations. The literature agrees that Indonesia occupies a position between a religious state and a secular state. The precepts of the One God are the basis for state recognition of religion as well as the source of the limits of religious freedom (Mu'ti and Burhani 2019). Hefner (2021) refers to this model as institutional religious freedom, which is freedom guaranteed through state recognition of religious institutions. Comparative studies show that a similar model is also found in religious governance in Turkey (Bruinessen 2018), while European studies show that secular approaches are not completely neutral to religious education (Alberts 2019; Vaquero 2017; Thomas 2015). For PAI, this construction is the basis for the legitimacy of religious education in the national education system.

T2. Religious education as public policy. PAI's policy is built on a multi-layered legal basis, ranging from the constitution, laws, government regulations, to ministerial regulations (Sobri 2019). Kosim et al. (2023) show a shift in Islamic education policy from a domestication approach to accommodation, while Künkler and Lerner (2016) show that the placement of religious education in public spaces is a political choice that distinguishes Indonesia from the religious privatization model. This finding answers RQ2 that PAI was institutionalized as a student's right guaranteed by the state, not just a private affair of religious communities.

T3. Governance of madrassas and pesantren. Institutional clusters are the largest clusters in the keyword network. The literature highlights the contestation between the national curriculum and the religious curriculum in madrassas (Ihsan et al. 2024), the resistance of pesantren to the standardization of the national curriculum (Hanif et al. 2024), and the issue of recognizing the qualifications of pesantren graduates through muadalah policies (Muzayana 2024). The role of community organizations such as Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama as education providers also shows that Islamic education governance relies on state-community partnerships (Hamami 2021; Susanto

2015). For Islamic educational institutions, this issue emphasizes the importance of curricular autonomy that remains in line with national standards.

T4. Religious moderation as an education policy. Religious moderation is the fastest growing theme. The literature shows the role of Islamic religious universities in mainstreaming moderation (Nasir and Rijal 2021; Ardiansyah and Erihadiana 2022), the development and evaluation of the religious moderation education curriculum (Mukhibat et al. 2024), and its integration into the Islamic education system (Khasanah, Hamzani, and Aravik 2023; Rahmadi and Hamdan 2023; Sari et al. 2023). A number of studies have linked moderation to the prevention of radicalism through the education of Sufism values and traditions (Arifin 2016; Kirana 2018; Ahmad et al. 2021). However, the literature also warns of the risk of symbolic formalization if moderation is only an administrative indicator (Mukhibat, Istiqomah, and Hidayah 2023). The position *of religious moderation* as a bridge between the institutional cluster and the religious freedom cluster confirms that Islamic educational institutions are the main arena where the value of tolerance is translated into practice.

T5. Freedom of religion and minority groups. A textually strong guarantee of religious freedom does not automatically erase social tensions. Marshall (2018) and Fenton (2016) show the ambiguity of laws and practices of intolerance, Butt (2020) examines constitutional recognition of believers, while Ardi et al. (2021) found that students from homogeneous educational environments tend to be less tolerant of marginalized groups. This last finding is relevant for PAI because it shows that the educational environment also shapes attitudes towards the religious freedom of others (Ishak and Manitra 2022; Intan and Bangun 2022; Hutabarat 2023).

T6. PAI curriculum and learning practices. At the pedagogical level, the literature examines the content of moderation in PAI textbooks (Mulyana 2023), the development of multicultural-based PAI curricula (Abidin and Murtadlo 2020; Islamy 2022), interreligious competence of teachers in multireligious public schools (Utami 2022), and the evolution of PAI policies in public elementary schools (Ulya and Amrullah 2026). International studies confirm that religious education that is in line with human rights requires dialogical pedagogy (Jackson 2018; Genç 2018). The constitution influences the PAI curriculum through two paths: the mandate to increase faith and noble morals determines the goals of the curriculum, while the guarantee of religious freedom requires a curriculum that fosters respect for differences.

T7. Regulatory and implementation gaps. This theme emerges across clusters. A variety of legal products are available, but their effectiveness is determined by institutional capacity, teacher competence, and resource availability (Kosim et al. 2023; Maskur 2017). The dichotomy between religious education and general education also still influences the way policies are implemented in the field (Tamami 2019), while Zuhdi (2018) shows that Muslim schools must navigate the pressures of religious conservatism. It should be noted that most of the studies in the corpus are conceptual or case studies, so systematic evidence on policy impact is limited.

Analysis and Discussion

It is necessary to distinguish between the two types of findings in this study. The bibliometric findings, namely trends, sources, countries, citations, and keyword clusters, describe the structure and dynamics of the literature. The thematic findings describe the substance discussed in the literature at the abstract level. Neither can be

used to conclude the effectiveness of policies in the field. With these limitations, the findings of this review show that constitutionally guaranteed religious freedom has become the normative foundation for the PAI policy architecture, while also revealing the three ongoing tensions in the literature.

First, the tension between constitutional recognition and social practice. The literature on minority groups and believers suggests that normative recognition still needs to be complemented by affirmative protection and legal certainty (Marshall 2018; Butt 2020). For Islamic educational institutions, this tension means that PAI is not enough to guarantee the rights of Muslim students, but also needs to equip students with the ability to respect the religious freedom of others.

Second, the tension between the quality of regulation and the capacity for implementation. This theme most often appears implicitly in the corpus, especially in studies of madrasah governance, curriculum contestation, and the recognition of pesantren qualifications (Ihsan et al. 2024; Hanif et al. 2024; Muzayana 2024). The literature describes these gaps more than measures them.

Third, the tension between moderation as policy and moderation as pedagogical practice. Religious moderation has become mainstream of policy, but the thin link between the policy cluster and the religious freedom cluster in Figure 7 indicates that moderation, tolerance, and pluralism are discussed more as value discourses than as a question of measurable policy implementation. An important exception is studies that develop and evaluate moderation curricula empirically (Mukhibat et al. 2024; Mulyana 2023).

Compared to previous studies, these findings are consistent with bibliometric studies that recorded the rapid growth of religious moderation literature and the dominance of Indonesian writers (Zamroni, Handayani, and Lestari 2025; Hasan and Juhannis 2024). The difference is that this study shows that when the lenses of religious freedom and the constitution are included, the literature is divided into three clusters that are not yet fully integrated. The findings on PAI policies in elementary schools (Ulya and Amrullah 2026) and muadalah policies (Muzayana 2024) are also expanded by this study by showing that implementation issues are cross-level and cross-institutional.

Theoretically, these findings confirm the need for an analytical framework that does not impose a dichotomy of the religious state versus the secular state in the case of Indonesia. The four-layer framework used in this study offers a way to read how constitutional guarantees (first layer) are relegated to policy (second layer), translated by institutions (third layer), and experienced in learning (fourth layer). Seven themes can be mapped in this framework: T1 at the constitutional level; T2 at the policy level; T3 and T7 at the institutional level; T4, T5, and T6 at the pedagogical level. The mapping shows that the institutional and pedagogical layers are the weakest points in the literature, whereas it is there that the contribution of Islamic education to religious freedom is most decisive.

Practically, there are three implications. For policymakers, religious moderation should be operationalized as a measurable learning indicator accompanied by periodic evaluation, not just an administrative indicator. For managers of Islamic religious madrasas, pesantren, and religious colleges, strengthening implementation capacity needs to be prioritized through teacher training, provision of teaching materials, and curriculum integration that maintains the uniqueness of the institution. For PAI

teachers, dialogical and multicultural learning practices can be a vehicle to instill respect for religious freedom without reducing the strengthening of students' Islamic identity.

Based on the gaps identified, the future research agenda includes four things: (1) empirical and evaluative studies that measure the impact of PAI policies and religious moderation on students' attitudes and behaviors; (2) cross-border comparative studies, especially in Southeast Asia, to expand international networks; (3) studies that integrate constitutional law perspectives with the development of PAI curriculum and pedagogy; and (4) studies on religious education services for minority groups and believers in educational units.

This study has a number of limitations. First, only the top 1,000 records based on relevance scores were filtered out of 231,895 records, so there is a possibility of relevant studies that are not netted and relevance ranking bias. Second, bibliometric indicators rely on OpenAlex metadata which tends to be more complete for English-language publications and open access, so it can cause language bias and access bias. Third, the 2026 data is incomplete so it is not used to infer trends. Fourth, thematic synthesis is carried out at the level of indexed titles, abstracts, keywords, and concepts, rather than through reading the full text of the entire corpus, so the depth of analysis at the level of arguments of each study is limited. Therefore, the findings of this study should be read as a map of scientific structures and trends, not as a measurement of policy impact. Follow-up research is recommended combining a full-text-based systematic review with empirical field studies.

CONCLUSION

A systematic review and bibliometric analysis of 277 studies concluded that literature constructs Indonesia as a country that recognizes and protects religion through laws and regulations without becoming a religious or secular state, so that PAI obtains a strong legal position in the national education system (RQ1). The PAI policy is institutionalized as a public policy through a layered legal basis that places religious education as the rights of students and the responsibility of the state (RQ2), then translated into curricula and textbooks that increasingly contain the values of moderation and multiculturalism, although its effectiveness depends on the competence of teachers (RQ3). Implementation in madrasas, pesantren, schools, and higher education still faces dualism of authority, curriculum contestation, and limited institutional capacity (RQ4), while the most prominent crucial issues are the mainstreaming of religious moderation, the prevention of radicalism, and the protection of minority groups (RQ5). Bibliometrically, this field grew by an average of 23.1% per year in 2015–2025, dominated by Indonesian authors, spread across many journals, and divided into three clusters that have not yet been fully integrated. The theoretical contribution of this research is a four-layer framework that links religious freedom with the development of PAI, while the practical contribution is a policy and research agenda that focuses on the institutional and pedagogical layers. Because it is based on metadata and abstracts, this conclusion describes the structure of knowledge, not the effectiveness of policies in the field.

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