The Role of Religious Moderation in ELT: A Systematic Literature Review on Language, Identity, and Intercultural Understanding

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Abstract

This literature review evaluates the impact of religious moderation on English Language Teaching (ELT) in terms of its effects on language acquisition, identity change, and intercultural relations. Despite the growing attention to religious moderation in education, there remains a glaring gap in the literature regarding its application in ELT contexts. The analysis was conducted on published peer-reviewed articles, book chapters, and conference papers from major Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, and Google Scholar databases within the past ten years. The review employed thematic analysis to identify patterns and trends in the moderation of religion in teaching English as a foreign language. The research results demonstrate three notable features. Firstly, religious moderation in pedagogy in ELT enhances religious student engagement through intercultural communicative competence pedagogy. Secondly, students attending ELT classes with a moderate religious atmosphere show greater positive outcomes in identity change, including increased motivation to learn English. These results highlight how religious moderation can foster tolerant, inclusive, and culturally sensitive ELT practices that promote social harmony worldwide. The review, however, admits many limitations, such as its regional scope and the paucity of empirical investigations. The educational effects of religious moderation in ELT should be assessed through classroom-based and longitudinal studies in the future, especially in a variety of institutional and cultural contexts.

Keywords: *religious moderation, English Language Teaching, intercultural competence, identity formation, inclusive education*

Introduction

Religious moderation is one of the most debated subjects today, especially in the context of education, languages, and cultures (Keast, 2007). In English Language Teaching (ELT), the contribution of religious moderation aims to develop linguistic skills and foster understanding and identification at an intercultural level (Cekiso, 2007; Nirwana & Darmadali, 2021; Puspitasari et al., 2024; Taufiqi & Purwanto, 2024). Due to the global use of English as a lingua franca, ELT lessons represent a meeting point of diverse cultures and religions, calling for religious moderation in the classroom.

Religious moderation denotes a carefully considered, tolerant, and reconciliatory attitude towards the approach and practice of different religions within particular communities

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(Nugroho, 2024). It opposes extremism and intolerance and allows people from other faiths to live together peacefully. In classroom situations, especially in ELT, religious moderation offers an opportunity to design a class in which students from different cultures and religions can respect and understand one another (Nirwana & Darmadali, 2021; Taufiqi & Purwanto, 2024).

The increase in linguistic diversity around the world has led English classrooms to become microcosms of multicultural and multifaith interaction, where language study is frequently entwined with moral discussions and religious experiences (Alek, 2024). Through religious moderation, this viewpoint positions ELT as a key location for fostering tolerance and understanding between people.

Language serves as a communication tool and platform for individual identity to be articulated and reinvented. In the context of English Language Teaching (ELT), students' linguistic, cultural, and even religious identities become relevant in the classroom (Mambu, 2017; Wong & Mahboob, 2018). This makes it essential to analyze how religious moderation affects identity construction. Learners juggle several identities, trying to reconcile their religious devotion with the international standards of English and its cultures. Analyzing the literature through a systematic review can shed light on the role of moderation in religious ELT students' identity-ascription processes.

Understanding different cultures is equally essential in ELT, as learning any language involves including other cultures. Religious moderation significantly influences how students approach cultural diversity, enabling them to actively participate in meaningful intercultural communication without losing their religion or culture (Taufiqi & Purwanto, 2024). Applying religious moderation in ELT pedagogy promotes a less aggressive, more respectful approach to intercultural relations.

Although its consideration in English Language Teaching (ELT) is fundamental, there is a gap in systematic reviews regarding its religious moderation. Earlier research has examined various dimensions of identity and intercultural relations in ELT. Still, only a handful of them have attempted to deal with the conjunction of these aspects and religious moderation. A review of the existing literature is required to fill this gap and answer how religious moderation can be effectively taught as part of ELT.

This study evaluates the available literature on the moderation of religion in English Language Teaching and its influence on the students' language acquisition, national identity, and intercultural relations. This review relies on numerous studies to provide a complete picture of the current best practices and their implications for teachers of varying levels in different contexts.

This systematic literature review was conducted using pre-defined steps, including selecting relevant peer-reviewed articles from academic databases, thematic coding, and critiquing the identified findings. In this review, ELT with religious moderation will be elaborated on across different cultures to provide a comprehensive view of religion's role beyond other countries' borders.

One of my interests in this topic is finding suitable pedagogical strategies that foster religious moderation in English Language Teaching (ELT) classrooms. These strategies may include intercultural communicative competence, critical pedagogy, dialogue, and tolerance-promoting curriculum designs. With these strategies, educators can promote more respectful learning environments.

The religious moderation approach in English language teaching (ELT) has effects other than in the classroom, as it affects attitudes towards religious plurality and intercultural coexistence (Huda, 2025; Nor et al., 2025). Language education could influence how students think, for it is a means through which tolerance and respect can be entrenched in multicultural societies (Kubota, 2004; Starkey, 2007). This review addresses the role of English Language Teaching (ELT) in fostering social cohesion.

As already discussed, religious moderation is essential in English language teaching because of its impact on learning a language, forming an identity, and achieving intercultural competence (Ghufron, 2022). It is vital to conduct a systematic literature review of available scholarly work to identify the most relevant information on integrating religious moderation into English language teaching pedagogy, to understand best practices, possibilities, and gaps in the research. This study aims to enrich the discussion on language education and to offer suggestions for promoting tolerance towards religion in English language teaching paradigms.

Religious Moderation in Educational Contexts

As sociocultural phenomena, inclusivity, tolerance, and social cohesion have been the subject of several studies, specifically as these focus on incorporating moderating behaviors within religious extremes (Rizwan, 2024; Yana et al., 2024) Evidence suggests that incorporating religion within modern pedagogical frameworks helps reduce violent religious interactions and improves respectful interactions among students from different cultures (Suryani & Muslim, 2024). This idea is more relevant in English Language Teaching owing to the multicultural and multilingual character of the language classroom.

Intercultural Understanding in Language Education

According to Byram & Golubeva (2020), intercultural competence is a critical aspect of language learning, and the moderation of religion helps students appreciate diverse cultures. The literature shows that encouraging intercultural communication in the classroom, using English as a second language, positively teaches learners empathy and reduces prejudice toward different religions and cultures (Barrett, 2018; McAllister & Irvine, 2002). Other studies emphasize the need for educators in ELT to adopt didactic methods that stimulate the discussion of religious and cultural pluralism (Torres-Rocha, 2019)

Challenges and Best Practices in Implementing Religious Moderation in ELT

Even though implementing religious moderation in ELT is advantageous in many ways, numerous barriers make it challenging to do so. The leading impediments include institutional policies, social norms, and the teachers' readiness (Huda, 2025). Regarding this issue, the best-known practices include implementing culture-oriented instruction, professional training for teachers, and teaching materials that focus on religious and cultural integration (Banks & Banks, 2010). Other analyses indicate the importance of critical pedagogy and dialogic teaching in stimulating religious moderation in the ELT classroom (Mambu, 2016)

In conclusion, religious moderation within ELT is a multilayered issue encompassing language, identity, and intercultural relations. The literature review reveals the scope of the problem of integrating religious moderation into language education and describes practical pedagogical approaches to develop tolerable and respectful teaching conditions.

Method

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) methodology to examine the conception and incorporation of religious moderation in English Language Teaching (ELT) contexts. To ensure methodological rigor, the review follows the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) standard (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2023; Mohamed Shaffril et al., 2021). The PRISMA framework provided structured guidance for identifying, screening, and selecting relevant research to guarantee transparency, replicability, and the mitigation of selection bias.

Several major databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, SINTA, and Google Scholar, were searched for relevant literature to collect both global and local viewpoints. The search encompassed papers published from 2015 to 2025 to reflect current advancements in debates surrounding educational moderation and ELT.

In ensure thorough coverage and exclude irrelevant or non-peer-reviewed documents, these strings were progressively refined. The requirements for inclusion were as follows: (1) published within the last ten years; (2) directly related to religious moderation and ELT; (3) centered on pedagogy, identity, or intercultural issues; and (4) peer-reviewed articles, book chapters, or conference presentations. Research unrelated to linguistics or education was among the exclusion criteria.

A thematic analysis was adopted to define and explain the primary outcomes of the reviewed literature (Hamel et al., 2021). The study evaluates substantiated patterns of the role of religious moderation in the pedagogy of English Language Teaching (ELT), its impacts on students' identity, and the teaching methods aimed at fostering religious moderation in language education.

A quality assessment framework is employed to guarantee the validity of the reviewed literature. This framework analyzes the claims in the literature based on their methodological quality, the theoretical perspectives used, and the claimed relevance of the results to religious moderation in ELT. Only those studies that correspond to these provisions are incorporated in the descriptions in the report.

Dealing with ethical issues is necessary when doing this systematic literature review. All resources have been appropriately cited, and none demonstrate any form of plagiarism. Moreover, measures have been taken to control the bias introduced in the selection and interpretation of studies, ensuring an accurate and verifiable research process.

The results of this systematic literature review will help better comprehend the impacts and implications of religious moderation concerning ELT practices. This study aims to offer positive solutions to educators, policymakers, and researchers in ELT by developing relevant pedagogical recommendations and addressing challenges. Finally, the review seeks to highlight the role of religious moderation in fostering respectful and tolerant language education.

Result and Discussion

The Role of Religious Moderation in ELT Pedagogy

So-called religious moderation in pedagogy relating to English Language Teaching (ELT) enables the establishment of an appropriate atmosphere in the classroom(Huda, 2025; Mambu, 2014). It allows students of different religions and cultures to be appreciated and included.

Research suggests that ELT instructors who apply moderation strategies in religion in their instructions develop more excellent and more accepting students who live in an atmosphere of dialogue, discussion, and mutual respect, which is conducive to learning (Ghufron, 2022; Illananingtyas, 2024; Nirwana & Darmadali, 2021; Pelu et al., 2022; Utammy, 2025).

In English Language Teaching (ELT) pedagogy, religious moderation fosters an inclusive learning environment that considers linguistic, cultural, and religious diversity. (Huda, 2025; Mambu, 2014). Learners who attend classes in a religiously moderate setting are more likely to appreciate different viewpoints, have conversations, and take part in cooperative learning activities (Ghufron, 2022; Nirwana & Darmadali, 2021). A careful analysis, however, shows that the majority of previous research has focused on positive connections without considering the difficulties or complications of using moderation in religiously sensitive situations. For example, in schools with strict curricula or ideological restrictions, some educators experience internal conflict when trying to strike a balance between neutrality and fostering tolerance (Utammy, 2025). To deepen the analysis, this review uses Tajfel and Turner's Social Identity Theory (1986) as a conceptual framework to examine how ELT students reconcile their linguistic and religious identities. This concept clarifies how perceived similarity, group membership, and intergroup ties affect interactions in the classroom. The review makes it possible to compare studies more clearly by placing findings within this model and examining the effects of moderation-based teaching on students' motivation, sense of belonging, and intercultural empathy.

To enhance analytical depth, this review applies Turner's Social Identity Theory (2004) as a conceptual model for interpreting how learners negotiate religious and linguistic identities in ELT. This framework helps explain how group membership, perceived similarity, and intergroup relations influence classroom interactions. By situating findings within this model, the review enables more precise cross-study comparison regarding how moderation-based teaching impacts learners' sense of belonging, motivation, and intercultural empathy.

Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) is one of the essential pedagogical aspects here (Fantini, 2020; Idris & Widyantoro, 2019; Khan et al., 2023). This approach prompts students to learn various aspects of intercultural and interreligious communication actively. Teachers who use the ICC in their pedagogy reported that most students' participation increased, leading in improved class dynamics. In addition, ICC helps the students develop independent judgment by encouraging them to assess the use of language in different social and cultural settings.

Integrating religious moderation also extends to the tenets of critical pedagogy (Mala & Hunaida, 2023). In the hands of ELT teachers, students can be taught to appreciate language's social and religious connotations if only the teachers are willing to motivate them to challenge and contribute to debates. An ELT course that addresses tolerance and respect toward other religions can help promote peace in a multicultural classroom setting (Ait Bouzid, 2016; Atamturk, 2018; Setiawan et al., 2024).

The problem appears to be how religious moderation can be incorporated within the confines of an ELT pedagogy. Some teachers may struggle to balance neutrality and involvement in religious classes because these tend to be sensitive issues. Furthermore, inflexible teaching approaches due to the predominance of fixed syllabi and set examinations can make it challenging to apply religious moderation in the scope of English instruction (Utammy, 2025). Solving these problems requires institutional support, teacher training, and

the development of less structured syllabuses that encourage meaningful activities on religious and ethnic diversity.

Impact on Students' Identity Formation

Religion and culture significantly shape and impact students' identity formation in English language teaching (ELT) classrooms (Karimpour et al., 2024; Souza, 2016). Because learning a new language is closely related to one's culture and personal identification, educators must offer a space where students can articulate their belief systems and engage with other cultures (Nieto, 2001; Paige et al., 2000). An ELT classroom embedded in a moderate religious culture enables learners to contest and reconstruct their identities within a socially supportive environment free of negative evaluation (Chafia & Aya, 2024; Taufiqi & Purwanto, 2024).

Students with a background in an ELT context that acknowledges religion and culture report higher levels of self-esteem when learning the language (Habrat, 2018). This improvement in confidence results from greater motivation, better language skills, and effective use of the language. People are willing to participate in classroom discussions, do language tasks, and use their learning outside the classroom when they perceive their identity as accepted and appreciated (Fisher et al., 2020).

In addition, encounters with religiously moderate talk help learners evaluate their beliefs and appreciate language patterns. Such evaluative thinking enables learners to cope with multifaceted social and cultural contexts. Students who learn in the context of discussing religious moderation in ELT tend to understand the aspects of international and multicultural relations and, hence, become more flexible in these countries (Nirwana & Darmadali, 2021; Taufiqi & Purwanto, 2024).

In ELT contexts, learners' identity construction is greatly influenced by their culture and religion (Souza, 2016). A religiously moderate classroom fosters flexible and hybrid identities by encouraging students to combine their faith with new linguistic and cultural repertoires (Alek, 2024). The use of the Social Identity framework demonstrates that maintaining multiple connections —linguistic, religious, and national — occasionally in conflict is a common aspect of identity negotiation.

However, several critics in the literature warn against romanticizing moderation too much. For example, R'boul (2021) argues that in global ELT, where Western language ideologies predominate, moderation discourse can at times mask power imbalances. In a similar vein, Torres-Rocha (2019) emphasizes how, if not critically managed, religious inclusion in English instruction may inadvertently perpetuate cultural hierarchies. The inclusion of such counterarguments emphasizes the need to critically contextualize moderation within global discourses of equality and representation, despite its advantages.

Enhancing Intercultural Understanding

Moderate approaches to religion are essential for a better understanding of cultures in English language teaching (ELT) classes. Since English is often used as a lingua franca, students must learn to handle intercultural issues. Integrating religious moderation into ELT pedagogy helps broaden students' worldviews and enables them to participate in meaningful cross-cultural interactions (Nurrohmah et al., 2024; Sholeh et al., 2022).

Regarding ELT, intercultural competence includes knowledge of a language and understanding of different cultures and religions. Properly applied, religious moderation exposes students to several worldviews, making them more compassionate and understanding.

Evidence suggests that students who participate in neutral debates about religion and cultures become more proficient in multicultural interactions, thus preparing them to live and work in diverse international environments (Bakhov et al., 2024; Zalli, 2024).

An example of how authentic materials can promote intercultural understanding is literature, news, films, and case studies from different cultures and religions (Jain, 2024; Ngan & Dan, 2025). These materials provide students with alternative worldviews and are, therefore, essential. Students who use these materials will gain a deeper understanding of the diversity in the world and the various perspectives held by different cultures and religions.

Collaborative learning activities, including group work and class discussions, enable the students to integrate their cultural backgrounds for mutual benefit (Zhou & Colomer, 2024). These activities enhance intercultural communication, help dispel myths, and promote kindness, inclusivity, and acceptance toward other cultures and identities.

The integration of pupils through religious moderation is not without its inconveniences. Students may have controlled viewpoints, making them unwilling to engage in conversations. Teachers must implement well-organized pedagogical processes that cater to respectful communication for all. Norms that include respect and active listening can help diffuse conflict potential and protect intercultural dialogue.

Best Practices for Implementing Religious Moderation in ELT

Integrating religious moderation in ELT requires a comprehensive curricular approach and enhanced teacher capabilities (Nirwana & Darmadali, 2021; Taufiqi & Purwanto, 2024). Educational institutions should embed components of religion and culture into relevant courses such as Earth Science, Anthropology, Sociology, and History, creating natural opportunities for students to explore diverse perspectives and develop tolerance. Equally important is equipping teachers with specialized competencies through professional development programs focused on intercultural communication, conflict resolution, and critical pedagogy (Yarychev, 2024). These training initiatives enable educators to facilitate sensitive discussions effectively and cultivate inclusive learning environments where religious moderation is normalized rather than an isolated topic.

The practical application of religious moderation thrives through student engagement and carefully selected resources. Creating classroom spaces where students feel comfortable expressing their spiritual and cultural viewpoints fosters mutual understanding and acceptance, as learners share their experiences and engage with peers' perspectives (Suryani & Muslim, 2024). This dialogic environment should be supported by authentic materials—including diverse literature, media, and cultural artifacts—representing multiple religious worldviews and encouraging critical engagement. Student-centered pedagogical approaches, such as debates, role-playing, and interactive activities, are particularly effective. They allow learners to actively participate in moderated discussions while developing their identities, intercultural competence, and critical thinking skills through meaningfully exploring diverse beliefs and practices.

The results of this systematic literature review underscore the importance of religious moderation in ELT pedagogy, identity construction, and intercultural relations. Teachers can support students' learning achievements, foster appreciation and respect, and prepare them for effective intercultural communication by creating more inclusive classrooms. Religious moderation in teaching English as a second language enhances the quality of language education and promotes tolerance and peaceful coexistence in multicultural societies.

Although there are difficulties in practicing religious moderation in ELT, some obstacles can be alleviated through inclusive curricular design, teacher education, and the provision of authentic materials. Further studies should pursue the development of aids that enable the achievement of religious moderation in ELT so that teaching and learning of foreign languages will not cease to be a means of fostering understanding and peace in the world.

Affirming and accepting religious and cultural differences in ELT practices enables teachers to train learners to become empathetic, respectful, and open-minded global citizens in a pluralistic and multicultural world.

By clearly placing the results in the context of larger international discussions, this analysis demonstrates how ELT may be a transforming tool for achieving SDG 4.7, which calls for language instruction to promote intercultural and interreligious understanding in addition to language proficiency. From this perspective, ELT becomes an essential tool for fostering tolerance, peace, and sustainable growth in heterogeneous communities.

Conclusion

The goal of this systematic literature analysis was to fill a significant knowledge gap on the relationship between religious moderation and English language teaching (ELT). This field has received little attention, despite the increasing significance of intercultural and interreligious communication in global education. By providing a thorough thematic understanding of how religious moderation supports students' language acquisition, identity development, and intercultural competency, this review effectively closed the highlighted gap by combining findings from the previous ten years. To establish inclusive, tolerant, and culturally sensitive ELT environments, it also emphasized the teaching potential of moderation-based techniques. The review has offered a conceptual and integrative basis, but it has also demonstrated that religious moderation in ELT remains a developing field that requires empirical support.

This study, however, recognizes a number of limitations. First, the majority of the evaluated research is from Islamic educational environments, which limits the applicability of the findings globally. Second, the majority of research uses descriptive or qualitative designs, which provide deep insights but scant empirical support for causality. Third, pertinent works produced in regional or local languages might have been overlooked due to the emphasis on English-language publications. These restrictions highlight the need for more thorough and varied research on the role of religious moderation in various educational and cultural contexts.

Additionally, the assessment makes three recommendations for the future. First, empirical assessments, such as mixed-method and longitudinal studies, should be a part of future research to quantify the tangible effects of religious moderation on learners' motivation, linguistic performance, and intercultural results. The second step is to construct coherent models that link language, identity, and spiritual values in ELT by expanding the integration of academic frameworks like Social Identity Theory and Intercultural Communication Theory. Thirdly, scholars and policymakers ought to coordinate the creation of religious moderation pedagogies with the goals of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4.7. This would guarantee that ELT supports peace education, global citizenship, and sustainable cultural coexistence.

All things considered, this review creates a conceptual link between religious moderation and global language instruction, urging ELT professionals, scholars, and organizations to reject

tolerance as a passive ideal and adopt an active pedagogical approach. English language instruction can have a profound impact on fostering empathy, equity, and intercultural understanding in increasingly pluralistic communities by integrating moderation as a moral and pedagogical ideal.

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