



Bridging the Moral Cognition-Action Gap: An Integrated Ecosystem of Religious Education and Policy in Higher Education

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Article Info

Article history:

Received 1 February 2026

Received in revised form 16

April 2026

Accepted 7 July 2026

Keywords:

Moral Education

Higher Education Policy

Attitude Formation

Behavior Formation Systematic

Narrative Synthesis

Abstract

This article examines religious education as a system of moral education and explores its conceptual relationship with higher education policy in shaping attitudes and behaviors. Drawing on a Systematic Narrative Synthesis (SNS) of multidisciplinary literature in moral education, religious studies, psychology, sociology, and higher education policy, the study addresses a persistent global problem: the gap between moral knowledge and moral behavior among university students. While religious education is widely expected to cultivate ethical character, empirical and conceptual studies repeatedly demonstrate that moral cognition does not automatically translate into consistent moral conduct. At the same time, higher education institutions increasingly rely on formal policies codes of ethics, integrity systems, and violence-prevention frameworks to regulate behavior. This study synthesizes the literature to conceptualize religious education as an internal moral formation system and policy as an external moral-regulatory mechanism. The synthesis identifies three dominant relational models between religious education and policy: complementary, overlapping, and tension based. Using Indonesia as an illustrative case, the article argues that effective moral formation in higher education requires an integrated moral-regulatory ecosystem rather than a substitution of education by policy or vice versa. The study contributes a theoretically grounded framework for understanding how attitudes and behaviors are formed and regulated in contemporary higher education.

Introduction

Higher education institutions across the globe are increasingly confronted with complex moral and ethical challenges (Prisacariu & Shah, 2016; Gupta et al., 2025). Phenomena such as academic dishonesty, sexual harassment, abuse of power, intolerance, and various forms of digital misconduct have come to be widely recognized as symptoms of a broader moral crisis within university environments (Huang et al., 2025; Blau et al., 2020; Mwila & Maganga, 2025).

These issues are not confined to cultural, national, or religious contexts; rather, they recur across diverse higher education systems, prompting renewed scholarly and policy-oriented concern regarding the role of moral education at the tertiary level (Biesta, 2015). Within this context, religious education has historically been positioned as a central instrument for moral formation.

In many national education systems across Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East religion-based courses are institutionally mandated with the expectation that they cultivate ethical awareness, self-restraint, respect for others, and socially responsible conduct among students

(Jackson, 2014). Religious education is thus often assumed to function not merely as cognitive instruction but as a formative process shaping moral character and behavior.

However, a growing body of empirical and theoretical research highlights a persistent disjunction between moral knowledge and moral action. Students may demonstrate high levels of ethical awareness, religious literacy, or moral reasoning while simultaneously engaging in behaviors that contradict the very values they profess (Komalasari & Yakubu, 2023; Ibrahim et al., 2024; Drumwright et al., 2015; Elsayed et al., 2023; Perry, 2014). This gap between moral cognition and moral behavior represents a central concern within moral psychology, educational theory, and the sociology of education.

From a behavioral perspective, the problem is not simply whether moral values are taught, but how such values are internalized, embodied, and sustained within real-life contexts shaped by peer pressure, power relations, institutional culture, and increasingly pervasive digital environments (Veissière et al., 2020; Bandura, 2014; Bharti & Singh, 2026; Joseph & Mikel, 2014). Moral failure, in this sense, cannot be adequately explained by deficits in moral knowledge alone; it reflects limitations in the affective, motivational, and structural conditions that enable moral action.

In response to recurrent moral and ethical violations, higher education institutions have increasingly relied on formal regulatory mechanisms (Hedgecoe, 2016; Panarina & Fonotova, 2021; Ntim et al., 2017; Bachmann et al., 2015). Codes of ethics, disciplinary procedures, and preventive policy frameworks have been introduced to control, deter, and correct behavior deemed harmful to individuals or institutional integrity (Meyer-Sahling et al., 2022; Hess, 2015; Webb, 2012; Kral, 2018; Perlman et al., 2023). In the Indonesian context, this trend is exemplified by the promulgation of ministerial regulations addressing violence and sexual misconduct in higher education, such as the Regulation of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology on the Prevention and Handling of Violence in Higher Education (Nengyanti et al., 2024; Imania & Dwi, 2024; Hijriani et al., 2023; Brink et al., 2021).

The coexistence of religious education and institutional policy raises a fundamental conceptual question: how do systems of moral education relate to systems of moral regulation in higher education? Specifically, are regulatory policies substitutes for moral education, corrective responses to its limitations, or complementary mechanisms operating at different levels of moral governance? This question is particularly salient in contexts where religious education is formally embedded within the curriculum, yet moral violations persist at significant levels.

This article addresses these questions through a Systematic Narrative Synthesis (SNS) existing interdisciplinary literature. Rather than evaluating religious education in terms of theological validity or doctrinal correctness, the study approaches religious education analytically as a form of moral education aimed at shaping attitudes and behaviors. Indonesia is employed as an illustrative case due to its institutionalized inclusion of religious education in higher education curricula and its recent expansion of policy frameworks designed to address moral and ethical misconduct within universities (Mukhibat et al., 2024; Suyadi et al., 2021; Wiranto et al., 2026; Sahin, 2018; Pratomo 2025; Sadat et al., 2026; Ansori, 2025).

The central objective of this study is to develop a conceptual framework that explains how moral attitudes and behaviors are formed, why gaps between moral knowledge and moral action persist, and how moral education and regulatory policy can be integrated more coherently within higher education systems. By bridging insights from moral psychology, sociology of education, and policy studies, this article seeks to contribute to ongoing debates on the role of higher education institutions in addressing contemporary moral and ethical challenges.

Methods

This study employed a **Systematic Narrative Synthesis (SNS)** to examine the relationship between religious education, moral formation, institutional policy, and sexual violence prevention in higher education. This approach was selected because the included literature consisted of heterogeneous conceptual studies, empirical research, policy analyses, and institutional documents that could not be combined statistically. The synthesis followed the narrative synthesis framework of Popay and Mallinson (2013), while the study-selection process was reported using a PRISMA-style flow.

A systematic literature search was conducted on January 23, 2026, using Scopus, Google Scholar, Crossref, SINTA, Neliti, and Indonesian institutional repositories. Publish or Perish was used to retrieve records from Scopus, Google Scholar, and Crossref. The search combined terms related to religious education, moral education, character education, attitude, behavior, moral formation, sexual violence prevention, campus policy, and higher education regulation in English and Indonesian.

Studies were included if they addressed religious or moral education, attitude or behavior formation, institutional regulation, or sexual violence prevention; were available in full text; and provided theoretical, empirical, or policy-relevant evidence. Studies conducted outside higher education were included only when they offered transferable conceptual insights. Duplicate records, abstract-only publications, inaccessible full texts, and irrelevant studies were excluded.

The search identified 1,450 records: 200 from Scopus, 200 from Google Scholar, 1,000 from Crossref, and 50 from local repositories. After title and abstract screening, 120 studies underwent full-text assessment. Of these, 75 were excluded, leaving 45 studies for qualitative synthesis. Two reviewers independently conducted the screening and resolved disagreements through discussion.

Data were extracted into a standardized matrix covering the author, year, study context, source type, research focus, theoretical framework, principal findings, mechanisms of change, relevance to sexual violence prevention, and policy implications. Table 1 presents selected representative studies, while the complete matrix should be provided as supplementary material.

The data were analyzed through open, axial, and selective coding. The findings were grouped into cognitive, affective, social, structural, and resistance-related mechanisms. These categories were then integrated into a conceptual framework explaining how religious education and institutional policy may influence attitudes and behavior. The synthesis also distinguished direct evidence on sexual violence prevention from indirect or conceptually transferable evidence.

Results and Discussion

Results Data of the Narrative Synthesis

Scopus Literature Search (Cluster A)

Scopus Literature Database on Religious, Moral, and Character Education. Based on a systematic search using Publish or Perish (version 8.6.4214.8378) with Scopus as the data source, a strong and established corpus of literature on religious education, moral education, and character education was obtained. The search was conducted without publication year restrictions, with keywords placed in both the title and keywords of the articles. The search results included 200 scientific articles published between 1978 and 2024, reflecting the

continuity and consistency of academic interest in the theme of moral and religious education for nearly five decades.

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Substantively, the narrative synthesis of this cluster shows a consistent thematic pattern: (1) religious and moral education is positioned as an instrument of attitude formation, (2) internalization of values is understood as a socio-psychological process involving cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions, and (3) character is not seen as an instant result, but rather as a product of continuous interaction between individuals, educational institutions, and social norms.

In many studies, religious education functions not only as a means of transmitting doctrine, but also as a mechanism for shaping moral orientation that influences individuals' decisions and actions in the public sphere. Thus, based on this matrix-based SNS, it can be concluded that the Scopus literature on religious education, moral education, and character education forms a very strong theoretical foundation for researching changes in human attitudes and behavior. This cluster provides sufficient academic legitimacy to make religious education a gateway to more universal moral-ethical education, as well as relevant to policy issues, contemporary social problems, and character-building agendas at the institutional and national levels.

Google Scholar Literature Search (Cluster B)

The literature in Cluster B was collected through systematic searching using Publish or Perish version 8.6.4214.8378 with Google Scholar as the data source. The search strategy used a combination of keywords in the title and keywords, namely "religious education," "moral education," "character education," "attitude," "behavior," and "moral formation," without any restrictions on the year of publication. The search was conducted on January 23, 2026, and did not produce any data errors (search result: no error).

The literature corpus includes 200 publications published between 1978 and 2025, with citations covering a period of 48 years (1978–2026). The total number of citations reached 10,190, with an average of 212.29 citations per year and 50.95 citations per publication. The scientific impact of this cluster is reflected in an h-index of 52 and a g-index of 76, with an m-index of 1.08, indicating a consistent level of influence and growth in citations in the study of values education and attitude formation.

The citation distribution shows a concentration on core literature, with 46.2% of citations in the h-core and 57.6% in the g-core. The age-weight citation rate of 764.05 confirms that both classical and contemporary literature continue to contribute significantly to academic discourse. Substantively, Cluster B expands the scope of Cluster A by explicitly focusing on

attitude, behavior, and moral formation, thus serving as an empirical and mechanistic basis in SNS to explain the relationship between religious/moral education and changes in attitude and behavior.

Crossreff Literature Search (Cluster C)

The literature in Cluster C was obtained through systematic searching using Publish or Perish version 8.19.5300.9483 with Crossref as the data source. The search strategy combined keywords in the title ("religious education," "Islamic education," "moral education," "attitude," "behavior," "moral formation") and keywords (Religious Education, PAI, Attitude and Behavior, Moral Formation, Policy, Regulation), with publication years limited to 2010–2026. The search was conducted on January 23, 2026, and did not produce any data errors (search result: no error).

The literature corpus includes 1,000 publications in the period 2010–2026, with a citation coverage of 16 years. The total number of citations reached 3,921, with an average of 245.06 citations per year and 3.92 citations per publication. The scientific impact is demonstrated by an h-index of 30 and a g-index of 42, with an m-index of 1.88, indicating relatively rapid growth in citations in contemporary literature.

The citation distribution shows that 38.2% are in the h-core and 46.2% in the g-core, indicating the existence of core literature that focuses on issues of attitude, behavior, and moral formation in the context of religious education and policy. The age-weighted citation rate of 541.76 shows the significant contribution of recent publications, especially those linking religious education (including PAI) to regulation, institutional policy, and the prevention of moral-social problems.

Within the SNS framework, Cluster C serves as the policy basis and regulatory context, complementing Cluster A (theoretical foundation) and Cluster B (attitude-behavior mechanisms). This cluster provides relevant literature evidence for analyzing the role of the policy framework in strengthening or weakening the effectiveness of religious education in shaping attitudes and behaviors in higher education.

Literature Search Local Repositories (SINTA, etc.)

Literature in Cluster D was sourced from Indonesian local and institutional repositories, including national indexing platforms (e.g., SINTA, Neliti) and university repositories affiliated with IAIN, UIN, and other higher education institutions. These repositories primarily capture context-specific, policy-relevant, and practice-oriented studies that are often underrepresented in international commercial databases. The search focused on publications addressing religious education particularly Islamic Religious Education (PAI)—moral formation, attitude and behavior change, and sexual violence prevention within Indonesian higher education.

The inclusion of local repositories serves a strategic function within the Systematic Narrative Synthesis. While Scopus-based literature provides theoretical rigor and international benchmarking, and Google Scholar and Crossref extend conceptual and infrastructural coverage, local repositories contribute contextual depth and socio-cultural specificity. Many studies in this cluster emphasize institutional practices, curriculum implementation, lecturer roles, and regulatory responses that are closely aligned with the Indonesian higher education system. From an SNS perspective, Cluster D functions as contextual and implementation-oriented evidence, strengthening the external validity of the synthesis.

These studies illuminate how religious and moral education frameworks operate within real institutional settings, interact with national regulations, and respond to local cultural dynamics. Although citation intensity may be lower compared to international databases, the substantive

contribution of local repository literature lies in its empirical proximity to policy execution and educational practice, thereby complementing the theoretical and mechanistic insights derived from other clusters. Overall, the integration of local repository literature enhances the robustness of the synthesis by anchoring abstract mechanisms cognitive, affective, social, and structural within the lived realities of Indonesian higher education institutions.

Data Extraction – Focus on Meaning

Table 1. Systematic Narrative Synthesis (SNS) Data Matrix: Moral and Religious Education in Sexual Violence Prevention.

Study/Source	Study Type and Context	Main Focus	Key Findings or Arguments	Mechanisms Identified in the Synthesis	Relevance to Sexual Violence Prevention	Implications for Higher Education
Lamb (2013), Just the Facts? The Separation of Sex Education from Moral Education	Conceptual study on sexuality and moral education	The relationship between factual sex education and moral education	Sexuality education should not be limited to biological and factual knowledge but should also incorporate moral reasoning, interpersonal responsibility, respect, and ethical reflection.	Cognitive: moral reasoning and understanding of ethical boundaries; Affective: empathy and concern for others.	Indirect conceptual relevance. The study does not specifically examine campus sexual violence but provides an ethical foundation for sexuality and consent education.	Higher education institutions may integrate factual knowledge about sexuality with discussions of consent, human dignity, responsibility, and ethical decision-making in violence-prevention education.
Arifin (2016), Islamic Religious Education and Radicalism in Indonesia: Strategy of De-radicalization through Strengthening the Living Values Education	Conceptual and educational analysis in the Indonesian context	Internalization of Islamic and living values to promote moderate and nonviolent behavior	Religious education can contribute to behavioral moderation when values are internalized through appropriate pedagogy, role modelling, and supportive educational environments.	Affective: internalization of moral values; Social: role modelling and reinforcement through the educational environment.	Indirect conceptual relevance. The study addresses deradicalization rather than sexual violence, but its value-internalization approach may inform nonviolent and respectful behavior.	Islamic Religious Education curricula may strengthen respect, responsibility, nonviolence, and recognition of human dignity as foundations for preventing harmful behavior on campus.
Author(s) to be confirmed (2021), article on sex education in Islamic religious learning	Study in a secondary-school context; complete bibliographic information must be verified	Integration of sexuality education into Islamic religious learning	Religious education may provide a moral and normative framework for discussing sexuality, personal boundaries, responsible relationships, and the prevention of harmful sexual behavior.	Cognitive: knowledge of sexuality and personal boundaries; Affective: moral restraint and responsibility; Structural: integration of sexuality education into learning modules.	Potentially relevant, but the original source, authorship, title, and publication details must be verified. Its transferability from secondary education to higher education also	The findings may inform the development of religious education modules addressing consent, healthy relationships, bodily integrity, and responsible conduct, but

					requires justification.	higher-education-specific evidence is still needed.
Parker (2014), Religious Education for Peaceful Coexistence in Indonesia?	Educational analysis in a multicultural Indonesian context	Religious education, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence	Inclusive religious education may support dialogue, mutual recognition, tolerance, and peaceful interaction among individuals from different religious and cultural backgrounds.	Social: interreligious dialogue and inclusive interaction; Affective: tolerance, respect, and reduction of prejudice.	Indirect conceptual relevance. The study does not specifically address sexual violence but contributes to understanding how inclusive education may strengthen respectful campus relationships.	Higher education policies should promote inclusive and dialogical religious education that supports mutual respect, equality, and a campus culture that rejects discrimination and violence.
Suherman, Aryani, and Yulyana (2021), analysis of Ministerial Regulation No. 30 of 2021	Policy analysis in Indonesian higher education	The regulatory function of Ministerial Regulation No. 30 of 2021 in preventing sexual violence on campus	Formal regulation establishes institutional responsibilities, preventive measures, reporting procedures, complaint-handling mechanisms, and sanctions related to sexual violence in higher education.	Structural: formal rules, reporting mechanisms, institutional responsibility, enforcement, and accountability.	Direct policy relevance because the study specifically examines the prevention of sexual violence in Indonesian higher education.	Religious and moral education should complement formal regulations through policy socialization, survivor-centred reporting procedures, institutional accountability, and consistent enforcement.

The qualitative synthesis followed a systematic coding and theme grouping procedure to identify patterns across the selected studies. The analysis began with open coding, in which key concepts and meaningful findings were extracted from each article. These initial codes were then organized through axial coding by grouping them into broader analytical categories that represented the underlying mechanisms of influence. Five principal categories were established, namely cognitive (KOG), which encompasses knowledge acquisition and moral reasoning, affective (AF), which includes empathy, shame, and personal responsibility, social and normative (SOS), which captures the influence of role models, social environments, and peer groups, structural and policy (STR), which reflects institutional regulations, curriculum design, and legal frameworks, and resistance or contradiction (RES), which represents tensions between religious values and campus culture. In addition, policy implications (IMPL) were coded to identify recommendations for higher education institutions. The final stage involved selective coding, in which these categories were integrated into a coherent narrative explaining the mechanisms through which Islamic Religious Education (PAI) shapes students' attitudes and behaviors across different educational contexts.

Building Patterns and Mechanisms

The synthesis of the reviewed literature indicates a consistent mechanism-based pattern through which Religious Education particularly Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in higher

education contributes to the formation of students' attitudes and behaviors related to the prevention of sexual violence. This pattern can be analytically structured as a sequential process linking educational inputs, internal mechanisms, and behavioral outcomes within a moderated institutional context. The conceptual framework of this study positions Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in higher education as the primary input that contributes to the development of students' attitudes and behaviors toward the prevention of sexual violence. The influence of PAI operates through four interconnected mechanisms. First, the cognitive mechanism enhances students' understanding of moral and religious values, particularly those related to human dignity, personal integrity, and bodily rights.

Second, the affective mechanism fosters empathy, moral restraint (*hayā'*), and a sense of moral responsibility, encouraging students to internalize ethical principles in their daily interactions. Third, the social mechanism emphasizes the importance of lecturers as moral role models, the influence of peer norms, and the creation of a religiously supportive campus environment that reinforces positive behavior. Fourth, the structural mechanism reflects the role of institutional policies, including the Ministry of Education Regulation No. 30 of 2021, which is strengthened through the integration of religious values into university governance and educational practices. Collectively, these mechanisms are expected to produce positive student outcomes, including the rejection of sexual violence, the willingness and capacity to report or intervene when incidents occur, and respect for personal and bodily boundaries. However, the effectiveness of these processes is moderated by the broader institutional context, particularly campus culture, leadership commitment, and the availability of organizational support, all of which influence the extent to which the values promoted through PAI are translated into students' attitudes and behaviors.

Narrative Synthesis

This narrative synthesis systematically integrates theoretical perspectives, empirical evidence, and policy implications to examine the role of religious and moral education in preventing campus sexual violence. Rather than presenting isolated findings, the analysis focuses on the mechanisms of change and the points of convergence or tension within institutional contexts. The discussion is structured into five interconnected components: (1) Introduction & Theoretical Mapping, Establishes the urgency of religious approaches and explores how dominant theories such as Virtue Ethics, Social Learning Theory, and Moral Reasoning provide a foundation for prevention; (2) Empirical Evidence Synthesizes cross-database studies to identify proven mechanisms that effectively drive changes in student attitudes and behaviors; (3) Critical Analysis of Tensions, Examines the practical contradictions that may arise, such as the friction between rigid religious norms and the principles of academic freedom; (4) Policy Integration, Proposes concrete institutional responses, including the synchronization of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) modules with anti-sexual violence curricula; (5) Strategic Collaboration, Focuses on capacity-building for lecturers as moral mentors and the formal partnership between religious units and university Sexual Violence Prevention Task Forces

Assessing Robustness

The robustness of the findings in this narrative synthesis was assessed through a systematic evaluation of the breadth, consistency, and coherence of the included evidence. Rather than relying on statistical aggregation, robustness was established by examining the convergence of theoretical claims, empirical patterns, and policy-relevant insights across multiple data sources and disciplinary perspectives.

Table 2. Robustness Assessment of the Systematic Narrative Synthesis

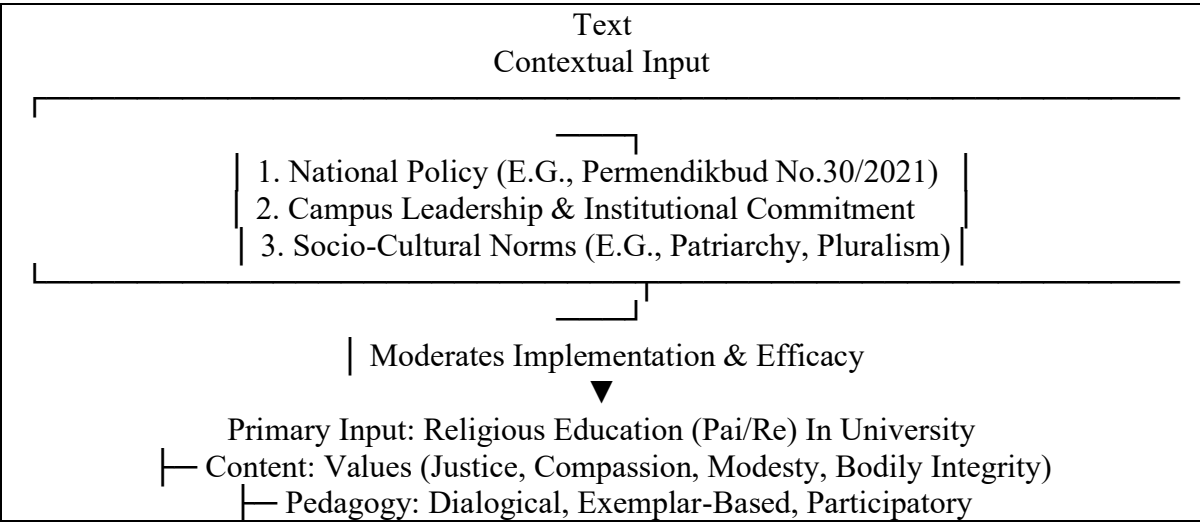
Aspect	Assessment
Diversity of Sources	Scopus (global), GS (broad), Crossref (policy), local (Indonesia)
Consistence of Arguments	Consistent: religious values strengthen internal morality and structural compliance
Contextual Openness	The Indonesian context is very strong, so caution is needed when generalizing.
Perspective Bias	Dominance of the Islamic perspective; additional perspectives from other religions are needed for comparison

Study Selection Flow Diagram (PRISMA-Style)

The study selection process was conducted in a transparent and systematic manner following a PRISMA-style flow approach to ensure methodological rigor and replicability. Records were initially identified through comprehensive searches across multiple databases, including Scopus, Google Scholar, Crossref, and relevant institutional repositories. All retrieved records were compiled and screened to remove duplicates and clearly irrelevant entries. The literature selection process followed a systematic screening procedure to ensure the inclusion of relevant and high quality studies. An initial search identified a total of 1,450 records from multiple databases, consisting of 200 articles from Scopus, 200 from Google Scholar, 1,000 from Crossref, and 50 from local institutional repositories. The identified records were subsequently screened based on their titles and abstracts to assess their relevance to the research topic. During this stage, 1,330 records were excluded because they were duplicates, unavailable in full text, or not relevant to the study objectives, leaving 120 articles for further evaluation. These remaining articles then underwent a full text assessment based on the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Following this review, 75 studies were excluded because they did not specifically examine higher education settings or issues related to sexual violence. Ultimately, 45 studies met all eligibility criteria and were included in the qualitative synthesis to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of Islamic Religious Education in preventing sexual violence within higher education institutions.

Visual Mechanism Map (Descriptive Textual Representation)

The following map synthesizes the extracted data into a coherent causal pathway, illustrating how Religious Education (RE) inputs lead to behavioral outcomes via mediating mechanisms, moderated by contextual policy and cultural factors.



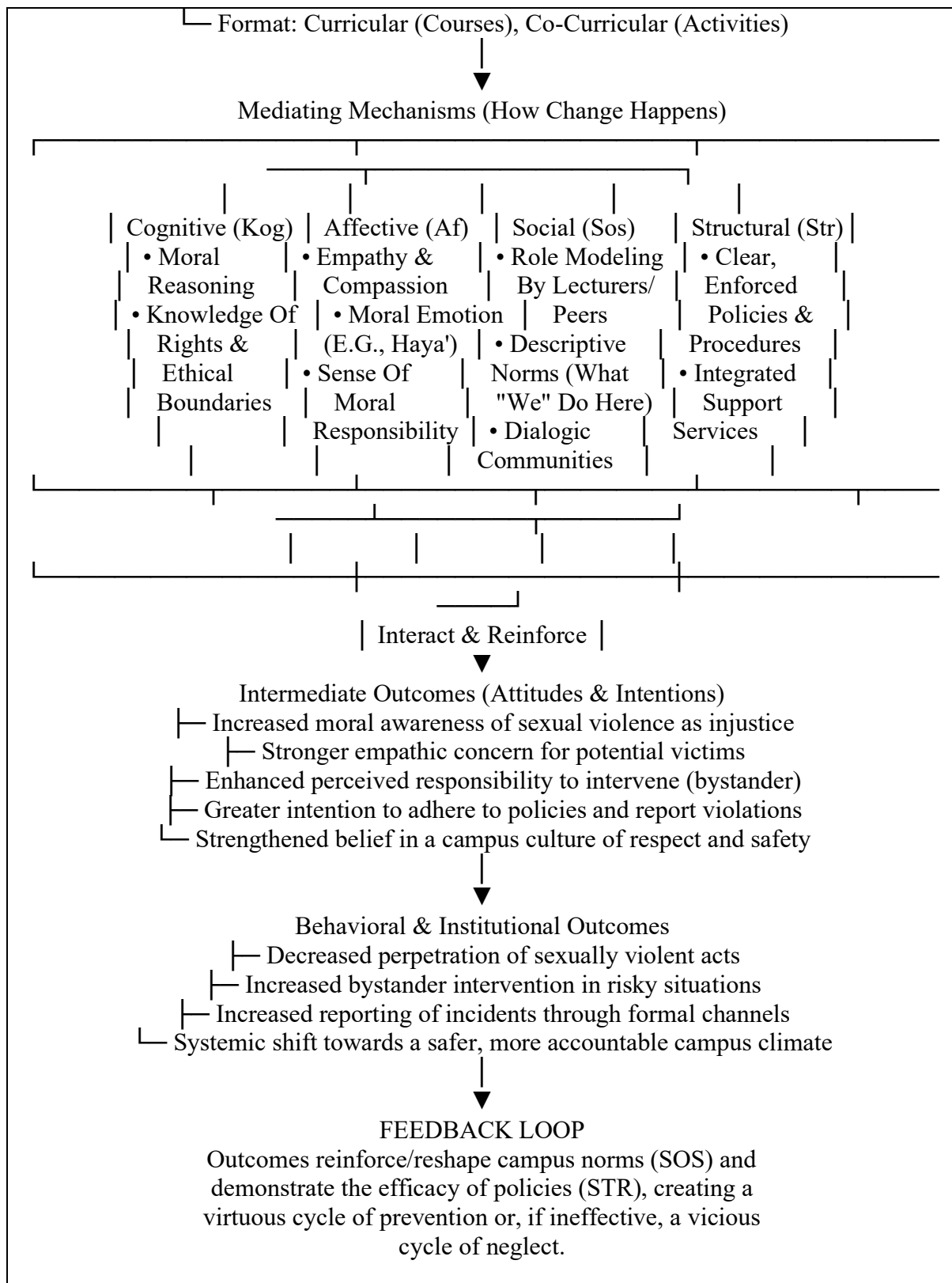
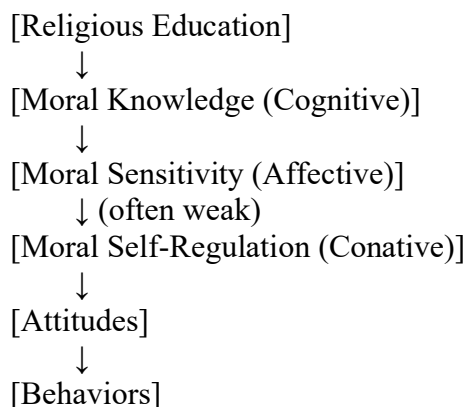


Figure 1. Conceptual Mechanism Linking Religious Education, Institutional Context, and Sexual Violence Prevention Outcomes

Religious Education as Moral Formation System

Across literature, religious education is consistently framed as a system of moral formation aimed at shaping ethical awareness, values, and character. Its primary strength lies in articulating moral norms and providing ethical narratives that ground concepts such as dignity, responsibility, and self-restraint. However, the synthesis reveals that religious education frequently emphasizes moral cognition while underdeveloping mechanisms for sustained behavioral regulation.

The dominant pattern identified through the SNS can be represented as the following analytical formation:



This pattern demonstrates that while cognitive and affective domains are relatively well addressed, the conative domain remains the most fragile link in moral formation.

Persistent Attitude–Behavior Gap

A recurring theme across studies is the persistence of gaps between moral attitudes and actual behavior. Students frequently articulate ethical disapproval of misconduct while simultaneously engaging in such behaviors when confronted with situational pressures, peer normalization, or institutional ambiguity.

This gap can be analytically summarized as:

Moral Awareness $\neq$ Moral Consistency

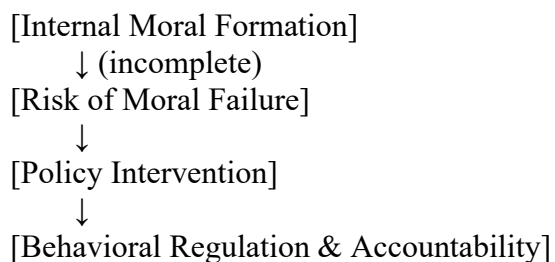
Ethical Attitude $\neq$ Ethical Practice

The SNS indicates that attitude formation represents a necessary but insufficient condition for behavior change unless reinforced by social modeling and institutional structures.

Policy as Compensatory Moral Regulation

Institutional policies emerge as compensatory responses to the limitations of internal moral formation. Policies provide formalized rules, reporting mechanisms, and sanctions that stabilize behavioral expectations.

The functional relationship between education and policy can be mapped as:



Indonesia as Illustrative Case

Indonesia illustrates the coexistence of mandatory religious education and expanding moral-regulatory policies in higher education. While religious education provides ethical grounding, recent policy developments reflect institutional recognition that moral instruction alone does not prevent misconduct. The case demonstrates how policy is mobilized not to replace moral education but to reinforce behavioral standards. Indonesia illustrates the coexistence of mandatory religious education and expanding moral-regulatory policies in higher education. While religious education provides ethical grounding, recent policy developments reflect institutional recognition that moral instruction alone does not prevent misconduct. The case demonstrates how policy is mobilized not to replace moral education but to reinforce behavioral standards. The synthesis reveals three dominant relational models between religious education and higher education policy, each reflecting a distinct moral-governance logic.

Model 1: Complementary Relationship

Religious Education → Internal Moral Formation
Policy Framework → External Behavioral Regulation

In this model, religious education cultivates moral consciousness and ethical orientation, while policy provides structural reinforcement through rules and accountability mechanisms.

Model 2: Overlapping Relationship

Religious Education $\cap$ Policy

↓
Shared Ethical Concerns
(Human dignity, consent, integrity)

Both systems address similar moral objectives but employ different languages—ethical–normative versus legal–procedural.

Model 3: Tension-Based Relationship

Normative Moral Discourse $\neq$ Procedural Legal Logic

↓
Moral–Regulatory Gap

Tension arises when religious education and policy operate without conceptual integration, resulting in confusion, resistance, or ineffective enforcement.

These models suggest that moral education and policy should not be viewed as competing systems but as interdependent components of a broader moral–regulatory ecosystem.

Conclusion

This study conceptualizes religious education as a moral education system whose effectiveness depends on its capacity to translate ethical knowledge into embodied attitudes and sustained behaviors. Drawing on a Systematic Narrative Synthesis, the analysis demonstrates that persistent gaps between moral cognition and moral conduct are not anomalies but structural challenges within higher education environments. The integration of basic theories of attitude and behavior change (Ajzen, 1991; Bandura, 1977), alongside empirical insights from Indonesian higher education (Adilan & Mu'min, 2023; Adilan & Mu'min, 2024), reinforces the conclusion that moral education alone cannot guarantee behavioral outcomes. Instead, moral attitudes require continuous reinforcement through social modeling, institutional culture, and regulatory clarity. Higher education policies function as moral-regulatory mechanisms that compensate for the limitations of internal moral formation. Rather than replacing religious or

moral education, policy frameworks provide external structures of accountability that stabilize ethical expectations and constrain harmful behavior. Accordingly, this study argues for the development of an integrated moral–regulatory ecosystem in higher education, where religious education supports internal moral formation and policy ensures external behavioral governance. Such integration offers a more realistic and effective response to contemporary ethical challenges in higher education.

Suggestion

Future research should empirically examine how pedagogical innovation, institutional culture, and policy design interact to strengthen the conative dimension of moral education across diverse cultural contexts.

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