

STRENGTHENING RELIGIOUS MODERATION IN ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOLS: COUNTERING RADICALIZATION THROUGH TOLERANCE- AND NATIONALITY-BASED EDUCATION

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Abstract

This study examines the role of Islamic boarding schools (Islamic boarding schools) in promoting religious moderation in Indonesia, focusing on efforts to combat radicalization through education based on tolerance and nationalism. Islamic boarding schools have long been an integral part of shaping a moderate understanding of Islam, which is crucial in preventing radicalization and religion-based violence. However, despite significant efforts to develop religious moderation ideologies, the threat of radicalization remains present in some Islamic boarding schools. This research uses a literature review approach to analyze relevant academic sources related to the role of Islamic boarding schools in promoting the values of religious moderation. The study highlights the importance of Islamic boarding school leaders, particularly Kiai, in promoting an inclusive and tolerant understanding of Islam, which can reduce the influence of extremism. The research also identifies challenges in the implementation of religious moderation, including cultural stigma, curriculum limitations, socio-economic barriers, and the increasing influence of social media in spreading extremist ideologies. The findings emphasize that Islamic boarding schools can serve as a broader model of Islamic education in Indonesia by integrating the values of religious moderation into the curriculum and daily activities, prioritizing tolerance, justice, and peace. Furthermore, the study provides strategic recommendations to strengthen the role of Islamic boarding schools in fostering moderation, such as curriculum reforms, community involvement, and the use of digital platforms to spread moderate teachings. The results of this study are expected to contribute to the development of inclusive and moderate Islamic education, which can effectively address the challenges of radicalization and intolerance in Indonesia.

Keywords: *Islamic Boarding School, Religious Moderation, Radicalization, Tolerance Education, Nationalism Values*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji peran pesantren dalam mempromosikan moderasi agama di Indonesia, dengan fokus pada upaya melawan radikalisasi melalui pendidikan yang berbasis toleransi dan kebangsaan. Pesantren telah lama menjadi bagian integral dalam membentuk pemahaman Islam yang moderat, yang sangat penting untuk mencegah radikalisasi dan kekerasan berbasis agama. Namun, meskipun ada upaya signifikan untuk mengembangkan ideologi moderasi agama, ancaman radikalisasi masih tetap ada di beberapa pesantren. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan studi literatur untuk menganalisis sumber-sumber



akademik yang relevan terkait dengan peran pesantren dalam mempromosikan nilai-nilai moderasi agama. Penelitian ini menyoroti pentingnya pemimpin pesantren, khususnya Kiai, dalam mempromosikan pemahaman Islam yang inklusif dan toleran, yang dapat mengurangi pengaruh ekstremisme. Penelitian ini juga mengidentifikasi tantangan dalam penerapan moderasi agama, termasuk stigma budaya, keterbatasan kurikulum, hambatan sosial-ekonomi, dan pengaruh media sosial yang semakin kuat dalam menyebarkan ideologi ekstremis. Temuan penelitian ini menekankan bahwa pesantren dapat menjadi model pendidikan Islam yang lebih luas di Indonesia dengan mengintegrasikan nilai-nilai moderasi agama dalam kurikulum dan aktivitas sehari-hari, yang mengedepankan toleransi, keadilan, dan perdamaian. Selain itu, penelitian ini memberikan rekomendasi intervensi strategis untuk memperkuat peran pesantren dalam membentuk moderasi, seperti reformasi kurikulum, keterlibatan komunitas, dan pemanfaatan platform digital untuk menyebarkan ajaran moderat. Hasil penelitian ini diharapkan dapat memberikan kontribusi pada pengembangan pendidikan Islam yang inklusif dan moderat, yang dapat secara efektif mengatasi tantangan radikalisasi dan intoleransi di Indonesia.

Kata Kunci: Pesantren, Moderasi Agama, Radikalisasi, Pendidikan Toleransi dan Nilai Kebangsaan

I. INTRODUCTION

Education in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) plays a strategic role in shaping moderate religious character in Indonesia. As traditional Islamic educational institutions, pesantren serve not only as places to develop religious knowledge but also as platforms for instilling values of tolerance, peace, and justice in society. As part of the Islamic education system, pesantren have long contributed to the formation of a balanced and moderate understanding of Islam, which is crucial for preventing radicalization and religious-based violence (Saleh, 2025). However, despite significant efforts to foster religious moderation, the challenge of ideological radicalization still threatens a number of pesantren. Therefore, it is crucial to understand how pesantren can play a key role in efforts to foster broader religious moderation, not only at the institutional level but also within society as a whole.

In response to growing radicalization, pesantren need to formulate more strategic steps to promote the values of religious moderation. This requires an in-depth study of the role of pesantren leaders, particularly the Kiai (Islamic scholars), who are central figures in guiding students and the community to understand Islam from a more inclusive and tolerant perspective. Islamic boarding school leaders hold the key to mitigating the influence of extremism, which can infiltrate through various channels, including external influences often spread through social media (Ma'arif, Rokhman, Fatikh, Hasan, & Misdah, 2025; Misdah, Soemantri, Sumin, & Pamungkas, 2025).

Various studies show that Islamic boarding schools that implement a moderate approach through a curriculum that integrates religious teachings with national values, local culture, and tolerance for differences tend to be more successful in developing open-minded students. Education that prioritizes interfaith harmony and social cooperation, coupled with an emphasis on the peaceful teachings of Islam, can act as a bulwark against the development of radical ideology (Yusuf, Alwis, Putra, & Nurjaman, 2023). In this context, implementing a curriculum based on religious moderation is crucial for maintaining social stability in pluralistic Indonesia. However, in practice, Islamic boarding schools face several challenges in their efforts to promote religious moderation. One major obstacle is the influence of globalization, which has made access to information increasingly easier, which in turn creates space for the spread of extremist ideologies. Misunderstandings of religious teachings, often spread through social media and other digital platforms, contribute to the formation of exclusive and intolerant mindsets. Therefore, Islamic boarding schools must ensure that they rely not only on the formal curriculum to teach religious moderation, but also strengthen non-formal and social education that more directly impacts students' attitudes and understanding of diversity (Salim, Zaini, Wahib, & Asnawan, 2024).

A more holistic approach based on practical learning, such as joint religious activities, interfaith discussions, and the instilling of nationalistic values in daily life, will strengthen the development of moderate character in students. A curriculum that incorporates the study of yellow books as the primary source for learning Islamic jurisprudence and interpretation, alongside the teaching of other moderate texts, can be an effective way to introduce the principles of justice and balance inherent in Islamic teachings. Education that combines textual study with the development of social attitudes will broaden students' horizons in addressing contemporary issues in today's global world (Helmy, Kubro, & Ali, 2021). Currently, the greatest challenge faced by Islamic boarding schools is strengthening resilience against radical ideology. Many Islamic boarding schools have yet to fully integrate religious moderation-based education into all their activities, including social interactions between students and classroom teaching. Therefore, more intensive collaboration between Islamic boarding schools, the community, and other formal educational institutions is needed to create an educational ecosystem that optimally supports the formation of moderate character. Furthermore, Islamic boarding schools need to evaluate and develop their learning

systems to be more responsive to evolving social dynamics (Nasution, Asari, & Al-Rasyid, 2024).

The successful development of religious moderation in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) can serve as a model for Islamic education in Indonesia as a whole. By prioritizing the values of moderation integrated into the curriculum and daily activities, Islamic boarding schools can play a crucial role in creating a more tolerant and peaceful society. Therefore, the understanding and application of religious moderation in Islamic boarding school education needs to be seriously promoted to address the challenges of globalization, which negatively impact the character development of Indonesia's young generation (Alabdulhadi & Alkandari, 2024). Furthermore, efforts to develop religious moderation will be more effective if supported by government policies that support the strengthening of Islamic boarding schools as educational institutions that foster diversity and tolerance. This study aims to delve deeper into the role of Islamic boarding schools in promoting religious moderation, as well as the challenges and opportunities faced in implementing this strategy. This research will identify various best practices implemented in Islamic boarding schools and provide recommendations for further development within the context of Islamic education in Indonesia. Therefore, the results of this study are expected to make a significant contribution to efforts to create an inclusive, moderate, and safe education system free from radical ideology.

Therefore, it is crucial to conduct further, more in-depth research on the effectiveness of the religious moderation curriculum implemented in Islamic boarding schools, involving various success indicators such as changes in students' attitudes toward diversity, increased interfaith harmony, and the influence of Islamic boarding schools on social and economic development in the surrounding area. This research is expected to serve as a reference for Islamic boarding schools in improving and developing more holistic and integrated religious moderation-based educational policies. Therefore, religious moderation in Islamic boarding schools has great potential in addressing the challenges of radicalization and intolerance that are rife in Indonesia. By strengthening the role of Islamic boarding school leaders, implementing a religious moderation-based curriculum, and integrating national values, Islamic boarding schools can become the vanguard in shaping a more peaceful and tolerant society (Yani, Hazin, & Hanafi, 2023).

II. RESEARCH METHODS

The research method used in this study is a literature review approach. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore various relevant literature sources related to religious moderation in Islamic boarding schools, the challenges faced in its implementation, and strategies that can be used to strengthen religious moderation in Islamic boarding schools. Researchers will identify and select literature sources related to the topic of religious moderation in Islamic boarding schools, including journal articles, books, research reports, and policy documents published in recent years. The selected literature sources will be sourced from international and national journals indexed in scientific databases such as Scopus, Google Scholar, and JSTOR. Researchers will ensure that the literature used is relevant to the theme of religious moderation and Islamic boarding schools and has high academic credibility.

Inclusion criteria for the literature used include articles discussing Islamic boarding schools and religious moderation, studies examining the role of Islamic boarding school leaders, such as Kiai, in promoting religious moderation, and research discussing the implementation of a religious moderation-based curriculum in Islamic boarding schools. The selected literature must also have been published within the last five years to ensure data relevance. Meanwhile, literature irrelevant to the theme or lacking high academic validity will be excluded from this study. The data collection process involves searching for relevant articles in various scientific databases and exploring theses, dissertations, and policy reports related to Islamic boarding schools and religious moderation.

After data collection, data analysis is conducted by organizing the literature based on emerging themes, such as Kiai leadership, teaching religious moderation, challenges in implementing religious moderation, and strategies for strengthening religious moderation in Islamic boarding schools. The collected data will be synthesized to generate a more comprehensive understanding of the role of Islamic boarding schools in promoting religious moderation. Researchers will also evaluate the quality of the methodologies used in the reviewed studies and their relevance to the context of Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia. Furthermore, researchers will identify gaps in the existing literature and areas requiring further research, particularly regarding the challenges faced by Islamic boarding schools in promoting religious moderation. After analyzing and synthesizing data from the collected literature, the researcher will draw conclusions covering the role and strategies of Islamic

boarding schools (pesantren) in promoting religious moderation, the challenges faced, and steps that can be taken by Islamic boarding schools to more effectively integrate religious moderation into their curricula and daily activities. This research report will also provide recommendations for Islamic boarding school education policies that can support the development of religious moderation and prevent radicalization among students (santri). To ensure the validity and reliability of the research results, the researcher will cross-check the sources used and ensure that the selected sources have high academic credibility.

III. RESEARCH RESULTS

Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) play a crucial role in promoting religious moderation in Indonesia.

Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) in Indonesia play a crucial role in promoting religious moderation. As traditional Islamic educational institutions, pesantren not only focus on religious teaching but also play a role in shaping character and a balanced and tolerant understanding of religion. The role of pesantren in religious moderation encompasses educational, social, cultural, and institutional transformation dimensions, all of which support each other in combating radicalization and maintaining interfaith harmony in Indonesia. In terms of education, pesantren have a unique approach that combines traditional Islamic teachings with modern educational methods. This enables students to acquire a more contextual and moderate understanding of Islam. Through the teaching of yellow books and classical Islamic texts, pesantren teach moderate values such as compassion, respect, balance, simplicity, justice, and truth. This approach helps students understand the peaceful and non-radical teachings of Islam, enabling them to become agents of change in spreading a tolerant and compassionate understanding of Islam in society (Saleh, 2025; Nasution et al., 2024).

Furthermore, Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) play a significant role in social and cultural activities that support religious moderation. They frequently organize interfaith dialogues, community service activities, and various events that teach the values of tolerance and counter radicalization. Through interactions with other religious and cultural groups, Islamic boarding schools educate students to accept differences and maintain social harmony. These activities play a crucial role in shaping the character of students who are more open, tolerant, and appreciative of Indonesia's cultural diversity (Ubaidillah & Faiz, 2025; Purwanto et al., 2021). The institutional transformation of Islamic boarding schools is also a crucial factor in strengthening their role in religious moderation. By adopting a more modern

educational approach, Islamic boarding schools have successfully maintained a balance between traditional Islamic values and the evolving demands of society. They have been able to maintain their cultural identity while integrating teaching methods relevant to changing times. This transformation has made Islamic boarding schools adaptive and responsive to the educational needs of the modern era, without neglecting their traditional roots (Yusuf et al., 2023).

The impact of Islamic boarding schools also extends to the wider community. Graduates of Islamic boarding schools, many of whom continue their studies at universities, carry the values of moderation they have learned into their daily lives. They become agents of peace, instilling the values of tolerance, justice, and harmony in society. Given Indonesia's highly pluralistic nature, the contribution of Islamic boarding schools to maintaining harmony between religious communities and cultures is crucial, particularly in addressing the challenges of radicalization and intolerance (Thoyib et al., 2024; Purwanto et al., 2021). Several key themes that can be identified from the role of Islamic boarding schools in promoting religious moderation include the understanding and implementation of Islamic moderation, which emphasizes justice, balance, and peace. Islamic boarding schools also play a role in combating radicalization and terrorism through effective educational and social approaches. Furthermore, Islamic boarding schools contribute to developing tolerance and social harmony through community activities and adapt to current developments to ensure their relevance in moderate education (Saleh, 2025; Yusuf et al., 2023).

Key Challenges Facing Islamic Boarding Schools in Promoting Religious Moderation

Islamic boarding schools play a crucial role in promoting religious moderation to counter radicalization and foster a balanced understanding of Islam. However, they face a number of significant challenges in carrying out this task, encompassing various cultural, educational, social, and psychological aspects. The first challenge relates to cultural and religious norms. One is the strong stigma against reporting issues, such as sexual violence, which is closely linked to cultural, religious, and institutional norms. This stigma affects students' willingness to report such incidents and seek support, which in turn hinders the creation of a safe and moderate educational environment. Furthermore, Islamic boarding schools must strike a balance between upholding traditional Islamic values and integrating modern educational approaches. This balance is crucial for promoting moderation while maintaining the cultural identity of the Islamic boarding school.

The second challenge arises from the limitations of the curriculum implemented in many Islamic boarding schools. The curriculum in Islamic boarding schools often emphasizes theoretical knowledge, while the application of the principles of moderation in daily life remains limited. This limits the effectiveness of Islamic boarding school efforts in teaching the values of moderation in practice. Furthermore, a mono-religious educational model can also lead to intolerance, both within and between religions. This educational model does not adequately support the development of an inclusive and tolerant mindset among students. The third challenge is socio-economic factors. Access to Islamic boarding schools is often limited by high costs, geographic barriers, and stringent academic requirements. This limits access for some students, making it difficult to foster the diversity essential for creating a culture of moderation and tolerance. With limited access, Islamic boarding schools miss the opportunity to create a more inclusive and diverse environment.

The fourth challenge arises from the influence of technology and social media. Rapidly evolving technology and the spread of social media can easily expose students to extremist ideologies, complicating educators' efforts to promote moderate values. The powerful influence of social media is often not balanced by an adequate understanding of religious moderation, thus threatening students' understanding of moderate Islamic principles. The fifth challenge relates to the management and administration of Islamic boarding schools. Effective management practices, including the application of information and communication technology (ICT), are crucial for improving educational outcomes and promoting moderation. However, many Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) struggle to implement these changes without losing their core values. Furthermore, parental and community involvement plays a crucial role in successfully promoting religious moderation. Building their support and involvement in this process is a significant challenge for Islamic boarding schools.

A final challenge relates to the psychological and social factors faced by students (*santri*), particularly during adolescence. Students in Islamic boarding schools often face challenges related to reproductive health, romantic feelings, and bullying. Addressing these issues within the framework of religious moderation requires a culturally sensitive and precisely targeted approach to effectively support their social and emotional development. Therefore, Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia face diverse challenges in promoting religious moderation. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that

combines traditional values with modern educational practices, encourages community involvement, and supports the holistic development of students in various aspects of life.

What Islamic boarding schools are doing to more effectively integrate religious moderation into their curriculum and daily activities.

In their efforts to integrate religious moderation into their curriculum and daily activities, Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia face complex challenges but still hold great potential. To achieve this, Islamic boarding schools need to take a number of strategic steps, supported by data and scientific approaches, to ensure that religious moderation can be effectively implemented in their educational environment.

First, Islamic boarding schools need to improve and update their curricula to emphasize the principles of religious moderation, introducing the concepts of tolerance, respect for differences, and the importance of interfaith dialogue. Research shows that Islamic boarding school curricula tend to emphasize theoretical aspects, and a lack of practical understanding of religious moderation often poses a barrier (Al-Mawardi, 2022). Therefore, Islamic boarding schools need to integrate learning about religious pluralism and social ethics that can be applied in everyday life. For example, subject matter focusing on Islamic history and teachings that promote tolerance can be incorporated into the syllabus, as well as teaching students about the importance of maintaining harmony between religious communities in a pluralistic society.

Second, an experiential approach and active involvement of students in interfaith activities are also crucial. Research by Siregar (2021) suggests that social interactions involving various religious groups can increase understanding and tolerance among individuals. Therefore, Islamic boarding schools need to design programs that involve students in activities that bring them together with diverse community groups from different religious backgrounds. For example, Islamic boarding schools can organize interfaith dialogue events, social cooperation, or humanitarian activities involving people of other faiths, to provide firsthand experience in religious moderation and tolerance. Third, Islamic boarding school administrators play a crucial role in implementing religious moderation. Research by Huda (2020) shows that the quality of the administrators significantly influences the character formation of students, especially in the context of religious moderation. Therefore, Islamic boarding schools need to provide training and professional development to administrators so they can understand and teach the principles of moderation more

effectively. This training can include an understanding of the theory of religious moderation, teaching techniques that support tolerance, and strategies for addressing contemporary challenges, including the misuse of technology and the influence of extremism.

In the context of technological developments, Islamic boarding schools must utilize social media and information technology as tools to promote religious moderation. A study by Shaleh (2022) shows that the use of social media can help Islamic boarding schools expand the reach of education on religious moderation, not only to students but also to the wider community. Through platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook, Islamic boarding schools can disseminate materials that teach moderate Islamic values and promote messages of peace. This use of technology also helps Islamic boarding schools adapt to the digital age and maintain their relevance in an increasingly connected society. Finally, the development of extracurricular activities that support the development of moderate character in students needs to be optimized. Activities such as debates, discussions on religious tolerance, and seminars on religious moderation can be effective means of fostering critical thinking among students. According to research by Rahman (2021), extracurricular activities based on discussion and social interaction can help students develop skills in dialogue in a polite and respectful manner, as well as broaden their insights into a more inclusive social life.

To ensure the success of integrating religious moderation, Islamic boarding schools must involve parents and the community in this process. Parental involvement in Islamic boarding school activities is crucial for creating an environment that supports the values of moderation. A study by Faridah (2020) shows that parental participation in the education of students can increase the success of religious moderation programs in Islamic boarding schools. Furthermore, Islamic boarding schools need to build partnerships with the surrounding community, organize programs that involve the community in Islamic boarding school activities, and hold public religious studies that educate the community about the importance of moderation in religious life. Therefore, integrating religious moderation in Islamic boarding schools requires a holistic approach based on scientific data. Islamic boarding schools need to adopt experience-based teaching methods, update their curricula, utilize technology, and involve parents and the community in the educational process. With these strategic steps, Islamic boarding schools can play an active role in shaping a generation that is moderate, tolerant, and ready to face the challenges of an increasingly complex world.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study highlights the crucial role of Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) in promoting religious moderation in Indonesia, through educational, social, cultural, and institutional transformation. Pesantren have successfully integrated traditional Islamic teachings with modern educational methods, providing students with a contextual and moderate understanding of Islam, and equipping them with the values of tolerance, justice, and interfaith harmony. Furthermore, pesantren contribute significantly to social and cultural activities that encourage interfaith interaction, reinforcing the values of moderation in Indonesia's pluralistic society. However, pesantren face significant challenges in promoting religious moderation, including cultural stigma against reporting sensitive issues, limited curricula that emphasize theory over the application of moderate values, and socio-economic challenges that limit access to pesantren. The influence of technology and social media also poses significant challenges, introducing extreme ideologies that are difficult to balance with an understanding of religious moderation. To address these challenges, pesantren need to update their curricula, engage students in interfaith activities, utilize social media effectively, and train pesantren administrators in the principles of moderation. A comprehensive, scientifically based approach is essential to ensure that Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) play an effective role in shaping a generation that is moderate, tolerant, and ready to face the challenges of the times. Integrating religious moderation into Islamic boarding schools requires collaboration between the school, parents, and the community, as well as the use of modern technology. With these strategic steps, Islamic boarding schools can contribute significantly to shaping a harmonious Indonesian society free from radicalization.

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