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Islamic Character Formation in Contrasting Cultures: A Case Study of NU and Muhammadiyah Boarding Schools

Akbar Nur Aziz
Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta
akbar.nur.psc24@mail.umy.ac.id

Azam Syukur Rahmatullah
Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta
azam.sy@umy.ac.id

Muhammad Azhar
Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta
azhar@umy.ac.id

Sjafri Sairin
Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta
sjafrisairin@umy.ac.id

Abstract

This study aims to analyze and compare the formation of religious identity, the internalization of values, and students' spiritual attitudes in NU and Muhammadiyah boarding schools. This study uses a qualitative approach with an exploratory case study design. Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. Data were analyzed using pattern-matching strategies based on cross-cultural psychology theories (Hofstede, Berry, and Tajfel). The results showed that the NU shapes students' values and character through internalization of symbols, traditions, and spiritual relationships. In contrast, the Muhammadiyah pesantren instills values through rational, structural, and discursive approaches. The religious identity of NU students is inclusive and communal,

while Muhammadiyah students show normative and argumentative identities. These findings emphasize that the Nusantara Islam and Progressive Islam models are not only an ideological narrative, but also function as a cultural framework that shapes the psychological structure of students. This study contributes to understanding how cultural frameworks within Islamic boarding schools shape the psychological construction of religious identity, offering an integrative perspective on the relationship between educational culture and faith development. However, this research is limited to two case study sites and qualitative data; thus, further comparative studies with broader samples and quantitative or mixed-methods designs are recommended to deepen these findings.

Keywords: *Cross-Cultural Psychology, Pesantren, NU, Muhammadiyah, Religious Identity, Religious Moderation*

A. Introduction

With the current rapid flow of modernization and globalization, [1] one of the most real tensions in Islamic education in Indonesia occurs within Muslims themselves [2], especially between Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah [3]. The difference in educational culture between NU and Muhammadiyah Islamic boarding schools is not just a variation in methods[4]. Still, it

[1] Ismunandar Ismunandar, "Pengembangan Pendidikan Islam Berkemajuan Perspektif Muhammadiyah," *EDUSOSHUM: Journal of Islamic Education and Social Humanities* 1, no. 1 (2021): 55–66, https://doi.org/10.52366/edusoshum.v1i1.12.

[2] Erwin Muslimin and Uus Ruswandi, "Tantangan, Problematika Dan Peluang Pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam Di Perguruan Tinggi," *Tarbiatuna: Journal of Islamic Education Studies* 2 (2022): 57–71, https://doi.org/10.47467/tarbiatuna.v2i1.652.

[3] Nur Rifqah Nadiyah and Muh. Nur Rochim Maksum, "Dinamika Dakwah Islam Dalam Menghadapi Tantangan Di Era Digital: Perspektif Nahdlatul Ulama Dan Muhammadiyah," *At-Tawasul* 3, no. 2 (2024): 90–101, https://doi.org/10.51192/ja.v3i2.1032; Mukhlis Fahruddin, "Manajemen Pendidikan Karakter Religius : Studi Komparatif Pesantren NU , Muhammadiyah , Dan Hidayatullah," *Peradaban Journal of Interdisciplinary Educational Research* 3, no. 1 (2025): 32–45, https://doi.org/10.59001/ pjier.v3i1.299.

[4] Tasman Hamami, "Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama Education: Two Main Pillars of National Education in Indonesia," *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam* 18, no. 2 (2021): 307–30, https://doi.org/10.14421/jpai.2021.182-06.

reflects two very contrasting perspectives on religiosity, authority, and the internalization of religious values.[5] NU maintains a salaf pesantren system based on the kiai,[6] the yellow book[7], and a thick local tradition. At the same time, Muhammadiyah develops modern pesantren based on formal schools' rationality [8] and universal Islamic values[9]. These differences significantly influence the process of forming student identity, attitudes towards authority, and the meaning of religious moderation.[10] Thus, studying cross-cultural psychology is essential to understand how Islamic boarding school institutions shape religious personalities, social identities, and students' psychological well-being in different cultural frameworks.

Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah are the two largest Islamic community organizations in Indonesia and the

[5] Sumiarti Sumiarti and Intan Nur Azizah, "Representation of the Moderate Education Curriculum in Indonesia ; Integration of NU and Muhammadiyah Thought," *Attarbiyah: Journal of Islamic Culture and Education* 9, no. 2 (2024): 213–32, https://doi.org/10.18326/attarbiyah.v9i2.213-232; Nurul Fadzilah et al., "Social Religious Relations of the NU and Muhammadiyah Islamic Communities in the Multicultural Era," *Scaffolding: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam Dan Multikulturalisme* 4, no. 2 (2024): 615–24, https://doi.org/10.37680/scaffolding.v4i2.5116.

[6] Najib Mubarok, "Optimalisasi Penerapan Tradisi Pesantren Salaf Bagi Santri Kalong," *Journal of Islamic Education Studies.* 4, no. 1 (2019): 1–12, https://doi.org/10.58788/alwijdn.v4i2.355.

[7] Abdul Adib, "Metode Pembelajaran Kitab Kuning Di Pondok Pesantren," *Jurnal Mubtadiin* 7, no. 01 (2021): 232–46, http://journal.an-nur.ac.id/index.php/mubtadiin/article/view/73.

[8] Baidarus Baidarus et al., "Al-Islam Dan Kemuhammadiyahan Sebagai Basis Pendidikan Karakter," *AL-ASASIYYA: Journal Of Basic Education* 4, no. 1 (2020): 71, https://doi.org/10.24269/ajbe.v4i1.2101.

[9] Hadi Pajarianto and Natsir Mahmud, "Model Pendidikan Dalam Keluarga Berbasis Multireligius," *Lentera Pendidikan : Jurnal Ilmu Tarbiyah Dan Keguruan* 22, no. 2 (2019): 254, https://doi.org/10.24252/lp.2019v22n2i7.

[10] Maemonah Maemonah et al., "Contestation of Islamic Educational Institutions in Indonesia: Content Analysis on Social Media," *Cogent Education* 10, no. 1 (2023), https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2022.2164019; Muhaemin Latif and Erwin Hafid, "Multicultural Attitudes in an Islamic Boarding School of South Sulawesi–Indonesia," *Cogent Education* 8, no. 1 (2021), https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2021.1968736.

world[11]. NU's traditional base and Muhammadiyah's modernist approach have become the two dominant poles in coloring the national Islamic landscape. According to data from the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia (2023), of the total 36,600 Islamic boarding schools spread throughout Indonesia [12], more than 70% are culturally and structurally affiliated with Nahdlatul Ulama, both directly and in the values and traditions they teach. On the other hand, the Muhammadiyah-style boarding school-based education system—known as Muhammadiyah Boarding School (MBS**)** continues to grow, with more than 440 modern Islamic boarding schools [13] formally managed by the Muhammadiyah Organization in various regions. This phenomenon gives rise to two distinct cultural value systems, both of which fall under the umbrella of Indonesian Islam.

Given the number of active students exceeding 4.9 million[14], NU and Muhammadiyah pesantren not only play a role in education but also in shaping the religious psychology of the young generation of Indonesian Muslims[15]. However, to date, few studies have specifically examined the profound differences between the two from a cross-cultural psychology perspective. These studies, namely, examine how cultural values in a social

[11] Ahmad Munjin Nasih, "Lembaga Fatwa Keagamaan Di Indonesia (Telaah Atas Lembaga Majlis Tarjih Dan Lajnah Bathsul Masail)," *Journal de Jure* 5, no. 1 (2013): 67–78, https://doi.org/10.18860/j-fsh.v5i1.2997.

[12] Konita Lutfiyah et al., "Navigating the Challenges and Opportunities of IoT Adoption: A Stakeholder Perspective," *Journal of Logistics, Informatics and Service Science* 11, no. 5 (2024): 471–86, https://doi.org/10.33168/jliss.2024.0527.

[13] Aan Ardianto, "Perkembangan Jumlah PesantrenMu Supaya Diimbangi Penambahan Jumlah Santrinya," muhammadiyah.or.id, 2024, https://muhammadiyah.or.id/2024/07/perkembangan-jumlah-pesantrenmu-supaya-diimbangi-penambahan-jumlah-santrinya.

[14] Rohmatun Rohmatun and Ida Miftakhul Jannah, "Analisis Penerapan Metode Manhaji Pada Pembelajaran Nahwu Shorof Santri Putri Raudlatul Muta'allimin Babat Lamongan," *Lughotuna: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Arab* 2, no. 1 (2025): 31–46, http://ejournal.stainuktb.ac.id/index.php/ljpba.

[15] Azam Syukur Rahmatullah, "Kyai's Psychological Resilience in the Perspective of Pesantren: Lesson from Indonesia," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 10, no. 2 (2021): 235–54, https://doi.org/10.14421/jpi.2021.102.235-254.

system affect the way individuals think, feel, and behave.[16] Therefore, this research is essential to see how these two large Islamic education systems (NU and Muhammadiyah) shape students' character, identity, and religious attitudes within their respective cultural frameworks.

Previous studies have highlighted differences in the education systems and religious values between Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah Islamic boarding schools. Rohman & Herdianto [17] found that NU pesantren students are more accustomed to affective and symbolic approaches in instilling religious values, while Muhammadiyah students are more guided cognitively and rationally based on the curriculum [18] Meanwhile, Rosidi [19] shows that the hierarchical pattern of authority and leadership in NU pesantren impacts the emotional closeness of students to kiai, in contrast to the managerial pattern in Muhammadiyah pesantren, which tends to be formal and functional.

In another study, Al Rahmah & Lisnawati [20] revealed a significant difference in psychological well-being between

[16] Vivienne Badaan and Farah Choucair, "Toward Culturally Sensitive Development Paradigms: New Shifts, Limitations, and the Role of (Cross-) Cultural Psychology," *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 54, no. 2 (2023): 232–48, https://doi.org/10.1177/00220221211073671; Shinobu Kitayama and Cristina E. Salvador, "Cultural Psychology: Beyond East and West," *Annual Review of Psychology* 75 (2024): 495–526, https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-021723-063333; Shinobu Kitayama et al., "Varieties of Interdependence and the Emergence of the Modern West: Toward the Globalizing of Psychology," *American Psychologist* 77, no. 9 (2022): 991–1006, https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0001073.

[17] "Habluminallah and Habluminannas : Perilaku Charity Antara Muslim Nahdlatul Ulama And Muhammadiyah," *Asyafina Journal: Jurnal Akademi Pesantren* 1, no. 1 (2022): 79–92, https://doi.org/10.2896/asyafina.v1i3.4.

[18] Abdul Munip, "Menangkal Radikalisme Di Sekolah," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* I, no. 2 (2012): 159–82, https://doi.org/10.14421/jpi.2012.12.159-181.

[19] "Muhammadiyah Dan Nahdlatul Ulama Dalam Konsep Pendidikan Di Indonesia," *JIS: Journal Islamic Studies* 1, no. 2 (2023): 169–79, http://qjurnal.my.id/index.php/jis/article/view/242.

[20] "Kesejahteraan Psikologis Ditinjau Dari Spiritualitas Siswa Di Lembaga Pendidikan Berbasis Agama Pesantren Dan Non Pesantren," *Jurnal Psikologi Integratif* 6, no. 2 (2018): 190–212, https://doi.org/10.14421/jpsi.v6i2.1499.

traditional Islamic boarding school students and modern Islamic-based school students. In addition, Priliyanti & Al-Fath (2024) noted that students' religiosity is strongly influenced by the cultural context of the organization where they study, particularly in terms of worship practices and social interactions. However, most of these studies still emphasize education or religiosity alone and have not explicitly used a cross-cultural psychology framework to examine how organizational cultural values shape students' religious behavior and self-identity. Therefore, this research is a novelty, offering a cross-cultural psychological approach to compare the dynamics of internalizing values and constructing student identities in two Islamic boarding school systems that are historically and culturally very different.

Seeing the complexity of differences in the education system and the ways of internalizing religiosity in NU and Muhammadiyah Islamic boarding schools,[21]it is essential to conduct research that can reveal more deeply how institutional culture shapes students' psychological construction in living their religious lives. It is not enough to assess only formal aspects, such as the curriculum or daily activities. Still, analyzing how collective values, power relations, authority structures, and communication styles in the pesantren environment shape self-constructiveness, social identity, and attitudes towards diversity is necessary.

Through a cross-cultural psychological approach, this study offers a new way to read the dynamics of students' lives from an internal perspective, namely their subjective experiences as individuals living in an established but ideologically different religious value system. Aspects such as *power distance* between students and kiai,[22] individualism-collectivism in social

[21] Fahruddin, "Manajemen Pendidikan Karakter Religius : Studi Komparatif Pesantren NU , Muhammadiyah , Dan Hidayatullah."

[22] A. R. Saputera and M. Tendean, "Peran Kyai Dan Santri Dalam Mengimplementasikan Nilai Pendidikan Agama Ditengah Lajunya Arus Globalisasi Dan Fenomena Akulturasi Budaya Indonesia," *Ahsana Media: Jurnal Pemikiran, Pendidikan, Dan Penelitian Ke-Islaman* 6, no. 1 (2020): 11–20, https://doi.org/10.31102/ahsana.6.1.2020.11-20.

interaction,[23] and acculturation strategies to global cultures will be the primary focuses of this study[24]. This research not only produces a comparative mapping of NU and Muhammadiyah Islamic boarding schools, but can also contribute new theoretical concepts to the discourse on moderation, religious identity, and character education grounded in local values within the framework of cross-cultural psychology.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze and compare cultural values, religious socialization strategies, and the construction of religious identity of students in Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah Islamic boarding schools from the perspective of cross-cultural psychology. This research is designed to answer the central question: How does the culture of religious education institutions shape students' understanding of religiosity, authority, and social diversity? This study explores the differences and similarities in the parenting style of the Islamic boarding school, the form of the relationship between students and teachers/kiai, and how students interpret religious values in daily life. This study fills that gap by integrating cultural psychology perspectives with Islamic educational analysis to understand how faith, culture, and education interact in forming santri identity.

The contribution of this research lies in presenting an interpretive model that connects Islam Nusantara and Islam Berkemajuan as cultural frameworks influencing religious character formation, offering new insights for developing culturally grounded and psychologically sensitive approaches to

[23] Nurul Fitriyah Awaliatul Laili, Azam Syukur Rahmatullah, and Mohd Sukki Othman, "Internalization of ' Panca Jiwa Pondok ' in Pesantren : An Ethnomethodological Study," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 12, no. 1 (2023): 57–71, https://doi.org/10.14421/jpi.2023.121.57-71.

[24] Geert Hofstede et al., "Comparing Regional Cultures within a Country: Lessons from Brazil," *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 41, no. 3 (2010): 336–52, https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022109359696; John W. Berry, "A Critique of Critical Acculturation," *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 33, no. 5 (2009): 361–71, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2009.06.003.

Islamic education in Indonesia. The results of this research can serve as a theoretical contribution to the development of locally based cross-cultural psychology studies and as a practical reference for Islamic education policymakers in developing curricula and strategies to foster moderate character in Islamic boarding schools and schools aligned with their respective cultural values.

B. Method

This study used a qualitative, exploratory case study design. This approach was chosen to explore in depth the cultural dynamics, religiosity, and identity construction of students in two ideologically and structurally distinct pesantren models: the traditional Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) pesantren and the modern Muhammadiyah pesantren. The exploratory case study design refers to the concept developed by Yin[25], which emphasizes the importance of context in explaining complex social and cultural phenomena. This research was conducted in two Islamic boarding schools that were purposively selected based on the criteria of religious-cultural representation of NU and Muhammadiyah, an active learning system, and easy access for observation and interviews, namely NU Islamic Boarding School Yogyakarta and Muhammadiyah Boarding School (MBS) Yogyakarta.

The informants in this study were selected through purposive sampling, using the following criteria: final-level active students, ustaz/kiai/pesantren caregivers, and alums for experience triangulation. The 10 informants (5 from each pesantren) are described in Table 1. Data collection techniques include in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. Interviews are used to explore students' subjective experiences in understanding religious values, authority, and social life in the pesantren. Observations were

[25] *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish* (New York, 2016).

made of the dynamics of social relations, interaction patterns, and the expression of cultural values in daily activities. Meanwhile, documentation is carried out on the Islamic boarding school's teaching materials, organizational structure, and official documents.

Table 1. Research Informant Code

Informant Code	*Pesantren*	Role	Information
NU-S1	NU	Students	Final year, active in maulid (Islamic recitation) and tahlil (Islamic recitation) activities
NU-S2	NU	Students	Focuses on studying the yellow books and the etiquette of the kiai (Islamic scholars)
NU-G1	NU	Ustaz	Fiqh teacher and dormitory supervisor
NU-G2	NU	Kiai	Central figure in the authority structure
NU-A1	NU	Alumni	Graduated 5 years ago, active in the local NU organization
MBS-S1	MBS	Students	Final year, active in the IPM forum
MBS-S2	MBS	Students	Focuses on studying Islamic interpretation and logic
MBS-G1	MBS	Ustaz	Teaching Al Islam Kemuhammadiyahan (AIK)
MBS-G2	MBS	Dormitory Supervisor	Responsible for the boarding system
MBS-A1	MBS	Alumni	Graduated 3 years ago, active student and campus activist

Data analysis was carried out using pattern matching[26], which involves matching empirical findings to theoretical patterns from cross-cultural psychology, such as Hofstede's cultural dimensions[27], Berry's (2009)[28], and Tajfel's [29]social identity. This

[26] Yin.

[27] "Comparing Regional Cultures within a Country: Lessons from Brazil."

[28] "A Critique of Critical Acculturation."

analysis includes data reduction, data presentation, pattern matching, and concluding, as formulated by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña.[30] To maintain the validity of the data, this study applied the validity strategy from Lincoln and Guba [31] through four approaches: *credibility* (triangulation and member checking), *transferability* (in-depth contextual description), *dependability* (audit trail), and *confirmability* (researcher reflection to avoid bias).

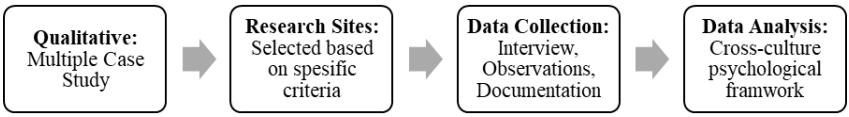


Figure 1. Research Flow

C. Result

1. General Description of Research Locations

This research was conducted in two Islamic boarding schools that represent two different Islamic education cultures in Indonesia, namely NU Islamic Boarding School, Yogyakarta (a representation of the Nahdlatul Ulama/NU Islamic boarding school) and the Muhammadiyah *Boarding School* (MBS) at Bantul, Yogyakarta (a representation of the Muhammadiyah Islamic boarding school). These two locations were chosen *purposively* because they retain distinctive, authentic Islamic educational traditions and reflect ideologically and structurally different approaches to religious cultures.

The NU Islamic Boarding School was founded in 1911 by KH. Munawwir is a highly respected scholar within

[29] "Social Identity and Intergroup Behaviour," *Social Science Information* 13, no. 2 (1974): 65–93, https://doi.org/10.1177/053901847401300204.

[30] *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook.*, 3rd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2014).

[31] *Naturalistic Inquiry* (Beverly Hills, Calif. : Sage Publications, 1985).

Nahdlatul Ulama[32] . This pesantren is one of the centers for the study of classical Islamic sciences and has consistently maintained the salafiyah tradition to this day. Thousands of students from various regions study at the NU Islamic Boarding School, using the sorogan and bandongan recitation system, study the turats (yellow book) books, and delve into nahwu, fiqh, tafsir, and Sufism.[33] The social life of students is colored by the values of khidmah (devotion), good manners towards the kiai, and habituation of religious traditions such as tahlilan, barzanji, maulid, and istighotsah.[34] Kiai occupies a central position, not only as a teacher but also as a respected spiritual figure.

Meanwhile, Muhammadiyah Boarding School (MBS) Yogyakarta represents a modern Islamic education model based on the reformist movement [35] Professionally managed by the Muhammadiyah Organization, MBS combines the national and Islamic curriculum in the boarding school system [36] The educational approach in MBS is based on rationality, critical thinking, and forming a cadre

[32] Neni Rosita, "Pengembangan Program Takhasus Al-Quran Di Pondok Pesantren Krapyak Yogyakarta," *Komunitas* 12, no. 1 (2021): 11–28, https://doi.org/10.20414/komunitas.v12i1.3512.

[33] Muhammad Yeni Rahman Wahid, "Kontribusi KH . Zainal Abidin Munawwir Di Pondok Al-Munawwir Krapyak Yogyakarta, 1989-2014," *JUSPI: Jurnal Sejarah Peradaban Islam* 2, no. 2 (2018): 58–73, https://doi.org/10.30829/j.v2i2.1735.

[34] Muhamad Ali Abdul Basit and Rahma Putri Kholifatul Ummah, "Aplikasi Toeri Generatif-Transformasi Dalam Pembelajaran Bahasa Arab Di Pondok Pesantren Nurussaalam Krapyak Yogyakarta," *Lisanan Arabiya* 2, no. 2 (2018): 155–71, https://doi.org/10.32699/liar.v2i02.648.

[35] Ilham Putri Handayani and Muh. Wasith Achadi, "Integrasi Kurikulum Muhammadiyah Boarding School Dan Implikasinya Pada Pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam Di SMA Muhammadiyah," *Jurnal Intelektual: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Studi Keislaman* 12, no. 3 (2023): 277–91, https://doi.org/10.33367/ji.v12i3.3093.

[36] Samsu Riski, "Perkembangan Kurikulum Muhammadiyah Bording School Dalam Penguatan Amal Usaha Muhammadiyah," *Jurnal Studi Islam Dan Kemuhammadiyahan (JASIKA)* 2, no. 2 (2022): 104–14, https://doi.org/10.18196/jasika.v2i2.29.

of intellectual scholars [37] The relationship between students and ustaz is dialogical, the institutional structure is open and modern [38]and religious activities are more based on the study of evidence, scientific discussions, and the purification of spiritual practices [39] Students are accustomed to thinking independently, organizing activities, and conveying ideas scientifically in various forums [40] Through these two models of pesantren with different value systems, authority structures, and expressions of religiosity, the research is directed to examine how institutional culture affects student identity formation, the internalization of religious values, and attitudes towards diversity, from the perspective of cross-cultural psychology.

2. Thematic Findings Based on Interview Analysis

Table 2. The Beginning of Thematic Coding – Interview Results

Informant Code	Theme Theory	Category Sub-Theme	Interview Quotes (Narrative/Core)	Initial Interpretation
NU-S1	Power Distance (Hofstede)	The relationship between santri and kiai	*"A kiai is like a father. If he commands us, we follow him and*	Authority relations are very high, demonstratin

[37] Andri Septilinda Susiyani, "Manajemen Boarding School Dan Relevansinya Dengan Tujuan Pendidikan Islam Di Muhammadiyah Boarding School (MBS) Yogyakarta," *Jurnal Pendidikan Madrasah* 2, no. 2 (2017): 327–46, https://doi.org/10.14421/jpm.2017.22-08.

[38] Rahmah Hidayati et al., "Character Education and the Rise of Mental Health in Muhammadiyah Boarding School," *International Journal of Public Health Science* 11, no. 1 (2022): 170–78, https://doi.org/10.11591/ijphs.v11i1.20889.

[39] Miftahul Jannah, M. Sabirin, and Hernadi Hernadi, "Analisis Perkembangan Kurikulum Di Pesantren MBS Nurul Amin Alabio," *Madrasah : Jurnal Pendidikan Madrasah* 1, no. 1 (2024): 39–46, https://globalpustakailmiah.com/index.php/madrasah.

[40] Mariama, Muhammad Muzaki, and Zulkifli, "Analisis Motivasi Orang Tua Memilih Muhammadiyah Boarding School (MBS) Di MTs Muhammadiyah 2 Aimas Mariama," *Jurnal Paida Universitas Pendidikan Muhammadiyah (UNIMUDA) Sorong* 3, no. 1 (2024): 324–34, https://doi.org/10.36232/jurnalpaida.v3i1.1448.

Informant Code	Theme Theory	Category Sub-Theme	Interview Quotes (Narrative/Core)	Initial Interpretation
			don't dare argue."	g a strong hierarchy.
MBS-S2	Power Distance (Hofstede)	The relationship between santri and ustaz	*"Here, we can have discussions with the ustaz. As long as we're polite, having differing opinions is okay."*	Relations are more egalitarian, with authority based on function rather than charisma.
NU-G1	Acculturation (Berry)	Integration of local culture in da'wah	*"The tradition of celebrating the mawlid (the birth of the Prophet) has been around for a long time. It's our way of conveying Islam gently."*	Cultural integration strategies with Islamic values.
MBS-G1	Acculturation (Berry)	Cultural reform, scripturalism	*"We don't teach additional rituals that aren't based on evidence. We focus on the substance."*	Cultural assimilation and rationalization strategies.
NU-S2	Social Identity (Tajfel)	Group identity, attitudes toward others	*"I'm proud to be a NU student. But we're also taught to respect differences."*	Inclusive identity with intergroup tolerance.
MBS-A1	Social Identity (Tajfel)	Muhammadiyah cadre identity	*"We, Muhammadiyah cadres, must be scientific. We can't just follow the crowd; everything must be based on evidence."*	Exclusive identity based on normative understanding.

Informant Code	Theme Theory	Category Sub-Theme	Interview Quotes (Narrative/Core)	Initial Interpretation
NU-A1	Religious Moderation	Tolerance and adaptation	*"When I was in college, I shared a boarding house with a Persian friend, and we could still study the Quran together."*	Open and moderate attitudes resulting from the cultural education process in Islamic boarding schools.
MBS-G2	Value Socialization Strategy	Methods of instilling values	*"We instill values through character development, not just memorization or tradition."*	Values education based on reasoning and the cultivation of discipline.

a. Theme 1: Authority Structure and Social Relations

One of the most striking dimensions that differentiates the lives of students at the NU Islamic Boarding School and *Muhammadiyah Boarding School* (MBS) Yogyakarta is in terms of the structure of authority and the pattern of social relations between students and teachers. Based on interview and observation results, the students at NU Islamic Boarding School showed a very high level of ta'dzim (respect) towards the kiai. The Kiai figure is not only seen as a teacher of religious knowledge, but also as a spiritual figure, guardian, and source of moral truth that cannot be denied. A NU student revealed:

> *"Kiai is like a father or a professor whose knowledge we cannot measure. If he has dawuh, yes, we will go*

> *along. No one dared to object."*
> (NU-S1, Interview, May 12, 2025)

This attitude reflects a high power distance, with a hierarchical, one-way relationship between students and the kiai. The students' obedience stems from the kiai's example and personal charisma, which bestow blessings. Even in daily interactions, students listen more than express their opinions openly.

On the other hand, students at MBS Yogyakarta describe the relationship with the ustaz as more equal. The ustaz are seen as respected intellectual mentors, but can still be discussed openly. One of the MBS students stated:

> *"Here we can discuss with ustaz. If we don't understand or disagree, as long as we are polite, we can ask questions and express opinions."*
> (MBS-S2, Interview, May 13, 2025)

This relational model reflects low power distance, where authority structures are functional and communicative. Students are formed to be critical, active, and independent thinkers, as well as to uphold the values of the rational and open organizational culture of Muhammadiyah.

From the perspective of Geert Hofstede [41], the power distance dimension describes the extent to which individuals accept that power and authority are unequally distributed within an institution. These findings suggest that the NU Islamic Boarding School reflects *a high power distance* culture emphasizing respect for traditional authority. In contrast, MBS reflects

[41] "Comparing Regional Cultures within a Country: Lessons from Brazil."

a low-power-distance culture that emphasizes dialogue and rationality. This difference shows how the cultural values of educational institutions can shape how individuals think, interact, and form psychological relationships.

These findings also align with field observations, which show that the one-way sorogan and bandongan methods dominate recitation activities at the NU Islamic Boarding School. At the same time, a dialogical class system in MBS is applied with a forum for deliberation and scientific halaqah. Thus, the authority structures in the two Islamic boarding schools are not only formally different but also affect how students build their self-identity and attitudes towards authority.

b. Theme 2: Socialization Strategy of Religious Values

The strategy of instilling religious values is one of the main distinguishing points in the education system at the NU Islamic Boarding School and Muhammadiyah Boarding School (MBS) Yogyakarta. Field findings indicate that each institution has a distinctive socialization approach, aligned with its religious and cultural orientation. At NU Islamic Boarding School, spiritual values are instilled through an internalization process grounded in rites, habituation, and direct Kiai examples. Students not only learn from the yellow books but also from daily ritual practices full of symbolic meaning. One student explained:

> *"We have tahlilan activities every night, then there is maulid, barzanji on certain days. There we were taught that Islam is beautiful and full of blessings."* (NU-S2, Interview, May 12, 2025)

This process shows that Islamic values are conveyed in a highly contextual form, integrated with the

local culture, and affective. The example of the kiai in responding to differences, offering subtle advice, and living simply serves as the primary learning medium for students. Students do not just receive religious information; they also experience appreciating values emotionally and symbolically.

On the other hand, in MBS Yogyakarta, Islamic values are more instilled through cognitive and rational approaches. Religious learning is carried out classically with an emphasis on studying Islamic postulates, interpretations, and logic, and students are encouraged to understand religious texts textually and systematically. One of the students said:

> *"We learn Islam through the study of tafsir and fiqh. Ustaz always invites thought. Every opinion must have a basis in the Qur'an and hadith."* (MBS-S1, Interview, May 13, 2025)

This approach forms a process of socializing values based on rationality and scientific discourse. Students are accustomed to conveying ideas in forums such as halaqah or deliberation and are guided to be critical of all information received. Religious values are built from logical understanding, not mere habituation or symbolism.

If analyzed through the theory of cultural acculturation, from Berry[42] NU Islamic Boarding School shows a pattern of integration strategies, in which Islamic values are harmonized with local culture and community traditions. It results in a form of religiosity that is soft, adaptive, and full of symbolic meaning. In contrast, MBS Yogyakarta follows a pattern of

[42] "A Critique of Critical Acculturation."

assimilation and value selection, filtering local culture and preserving only those aligned with the central teachings. This situation creates a systematic, scriptural, and teaching-oriented religiosity.

Both approaches are effective in shaping students' character. At NU Islamic Boarding School, values are instilled through emotionally intense, affective, and symbolic processes. In MBS, values are reinforced through rational understanding and analysis of the text. These differences reflect not only the educational style but also fundamental differences in how students think about culture and in the structure of their religious cognition.

c. Theme 3: Religious and Social Identity

Social and religious identity is essential in forming students' religious attitudes and orientations, especially in the context of the internal diversity of Indonesian Muslims. This study found that NU Islamic Boarding School students and MBS Yogyakarta formed their religious identity through very different cultural paths and experiences.

Students in NU Islamic Boarding School build their religious identity through a strong sense of attachment to the pesantren environment, spiritual traditions, and affiliation with Nahdlatul Ulama. They show pride in their identity as NU students and associate it with values such as tolerance, love of tradition, and respect for scholars. A student stated:

> *"For me, being a NU student is special. We were taught to love tradition and not easily blame others. Islam is rahmatan lil 'alamin, not angry about different prayer readings."* (NU-S1, Interview, May 13, 2025)

The statement reflects that religious identity in NU Islamic Boarding School is formed within a communal and inclusive framework, where cultural symbols, spiritual values, and social relations [43]become an integral part of the meaning of being a Muslim. The students feel that they are part of a large group (ingroup) that is tasked with spreading Islam with a polite approach and local culture.

Meanwhile, in MBS Yogyakarta, religious identity is more formed through a rational approach, ideological strengthening, and the search for meaning that comes from understanding the evidence. Muhammadiyah students tend to identify themselves explicitly as cadres of the modern da'wah movement who are responsible for spreading pure and scientific Islam. A student said:

> *"In Muhammadiyah, we are accustomed to thinking logically and scientifically. I am proud because our teachings are based on the Qur'an and hadith. If it is different, we will discuss it with arguments."* (MBS-S2, Interview, May 13, 2025)

This identity emphasizes clarity of roles and boundaries and has a normatively exclusive tendency, not in the sense of rejecting other groups, but in clinging to doctrinal purification. According to the text, students form an "ingroup" based on the correct understanding and perceive the "outgroup" as a group that requires clarification or awareness of da'wah.

[43] Melissa Zajdel and Vicki S. Helgeson, "A Communal Coping Intervention for Couples Managing Chronic Illness: Proof of Concept Study," *Couple and Family Psychology: Research and Practice* 13, no. 3 (2024): 188–201, https://doi.org/10.1037/cfp0000234; Brahm Norwich, "Research about Inclusive Education: Are the Scope, Reach and Limits Empirical and Methodological and/or Conceptual and Evaluative?," *Frontiers in Education* 7, no. July (2022): 1–9, https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2022.937929.

From the perspective of Social Identity Theory [44], the formation of group identity (ingroup) serves to provide self-esteem, social direction, and justification for attitudes towards other groups (outgroup). At NU Islamic Boarding School, ingroup identity is shaped by local values, loyalty to the Islamic boarding school, and cultural symbols. Attitudes towards other groups tend to be neutral or tolerant, as acceptance is grounded in the experience of tradition and diversity. In MBS, ingroup identity is built through normative argumentation and religious rationality; the relationship with the outgroup is carried out in a da'wah manner, but it remains selective and evidence-based.

These findings suggest that institutional culture plays a significant role in shaping how students perceive themselves within the broader Muslim community. These differences in identity formation can affect how students behave towards the plurality of religious practices, both in the internal scope of Islam and in social life.

d. Theme 4: Moderation and Attitudes to Diversity

Attitudes towards religious diversity and views on moderation are essential dimensions that reflect the success of religious education in shaping students who are open, tolerant, and contextual. This study found that the NU Islamic Boarding School and the Muhammadiyah Boarding School (MBS) Yogyakarta demonstrated religious moderation, but with substantially different approaches.

[44] "Social Comparison and Group Interest in Ingroup Favouritism," *European Journal of Social Psychology* 9, no. 2 (1979): 187–204, https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2420090207.

Students at NU Islamic Boarding School tend to accept and appreciate differences in religious practices, both within the pesantren's internal environment and in its social life, as reflected in the narrative of a student:

> *"We often recite together with friends from outside NU. Even though the way of reading prayers is different,* we *never have a problem. The important thing is to respect each other."* (NU-S2, Interview, May 14, 2025)

This acceptance was born of experience-based education on the diversity of rituals, such as tahlilan, qunut, manaqiban, and maulid, which have historically been debated within Islamic organizations in Indonesia. At NU Islamic Boarding School, differences are seen as part of the richness of Islamic traditions, not as threats to the integrity of the teachings. This approach creates an inclusive inner space that blends with local culture, fostering emotional and social moderation in everyday life.

In contrast, at MBS Yogyakarta, religious moderation is expressed through a more normative, rational approach that emphasizes the need to explain differences scientifically. A student said:

> *"If there are differences of opinion or worship practice, we will study it first. If it turns out that there is indeed a difference in evidence, we respect it. But we still believe that what we hold is the most correct."* (MBS-S1, Interview, May 14, 2025)

Moderation in the context of SBM is more intentional, educational, and evidence-based. They are not easily blamed but are still critical of practices not

based on Nash. This attitude makes students tolerant in discourse, but selective in practice. Differences are presented as a da'wah discourse, not merely as a reality to be passively accepted.

These two approaches represent two different moderation models. NU Islamic Boarding School demonstrates moderation grounded in culture and social experience (cultural moderation)[45]. Meanwhile, MBS shows moderation as defined by rationality and the purification of teachings (conceptual moderation) [46]. Both reflect *wasathiyah* within each organizational culture, in line with religious moderation as defined by the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia [47], which includes a commitment to nationality, tolerance, non-violence, and the accommodation of local culture. Although the expression patterns differ, the two pesantren have formed a model of moderation that aligns with values in cross-cultural psychology, namely openness to differences, self-control over extreme reactions, and the ability to coexist with diverse Islamic practices.

[45] Moh. Ashif Fuadi et al., "Religious Moderation in the Context of Integration Between Religion and Local Culture in Indonesia," *Journal of Al-Tamaddun* 19, no. 1 (2024): 47–59, https://doi.org/10.22452/JAT.vol19no1.4; Iskandar Zulkarnaen et al., "Dayah Ulama's Interpretation of Religious Moderation Narratives: Negotiable," *Society* 11, no. 2 (2023): 474–89, https://doi.org/10.33019/society.v11i2.452.

[46] Andy Hadiyanto, Kinkin Yuliaty Subarsa Putri, and Luthfi Fazli, "Religious Moderation in Instagram: An Islamic Interpretation Perspective," *Heliyon* 11, no. 4 (2025): e42816, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2025.e42816; Muhammad Nasir and Muhammad Khairul Rijal, "Keeping the Middle Path: Mainstreaming Religious Moderation through Islamic Higher Education Institutions in Indonesia," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 11, no. 2 (2021): 213–41, https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v11i2.213-241; Mukhammad Zamzami et al., "Mainstreaming Religious Moderation in the Digital Space: An Examination of Islami.Co Web Portal in the Perspective of Jürgen Habermas' Communicative Rationality," *Jurnal Komunikasi: Malaysian Journal of Communication* 39, no. 1 (2023): 73–91, https://doi.org/10.17576/JKMJC-2023-3901-05.

[47] Muhammad Irfan Helmy, Achmad Darojat Jumadil Kubro, and Muhamad Ali, "The Understanding of Islamic Moderation (Wasaṭiyyah Al-Islam) and the Hadiths on Inter-Religious Relations in the Javanese Pesantrens," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 11, no. 2 (2021): 377–401, https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v11i2.377-401.

3. Analysis of Patterns of Findings and Comparisons Between Islamic Boarding Schools

After conducting a thematic exploration of the four main dimensions in pesantren life—namely the structure of authority, the socialization strategy of religious values, socio-religious identity, and attitudes towards diversity—several patterns of differences and similarities can be drawn between the NU Islamic Boarding School and the Muhammadiyah Boarding School (MBS) Yogyakarta. These differences are not only institutional but also reflect the deep cultural character that shapes the education system and students' psychology. To make it easier to understand the pattern, the following is a summary in the form of a comparison table:

Table 3. Comparison of Cross-Islamic Boarding Schools: NU Islamic Boarding School and MBS (Muhammadiyah)

Psychological Aspects of Culture	NU Islamic Boarding School	MBS Yogyakarta (Muhammadiyah)	Related Theories
Authority Structure	Hierarchical, based on the charisma of the kiai, high reverence	Functional, open to discussion, rational relationships	Hofstede – Power Distance
Value Socialization	Symbolic, through rituals, exemplary behavior, and local traditions	Rational, curriculum- and text-based	Berry – Acculturation
Religious Identity	Inclusive, loyal to NU and local culture	Normative, scientific, loyal to understanding the principles	Tajfel – Social Identity Theory
Attitudes Toward Diversity	Tolerant of different practices, cultural moderation	Moderate with normative selectivity, based on principles	Religious Moderation – Ministry of Religious Affairs

After pattern-matching using a cross-cultural psychological approach, most findings align with the theoretical mapping designed. The hierarchical authority structure of NU Islamic Boarding School students reflects a high power distance index as interpreted by Hofstede, [48] while in MBS, authority is low and functional. The value socialization strategy at NU Islamic Boarding School is integrative and affective, as Berry (2009) explained in the acculturation model, whereas in MBS, the approach is more selective and cognitive.

In terms of identity, Tajfel and Turner [49] explained that individuals form social identities based on group membership (ingroup) and differentiation from other groups (outgroup). NU students show an *ingroup pattern* based on cultural values and traditions, while Muhammadiyah students build their identity from ideological positions and religious rationality. In terms of moderation, both showed alignment with the value of tolerance, but with different approaches: NU through cultural experience, Muhammadiyah through logic and educational approaches.

However, there are also local findings that are not fully explained by the global theory. For example, in NU Islamic Boarding School, it was found that shared social experiences in collective religious activities shape the practice of moderation and respect for differences. This aspect is not explicitly described in Berry's or Hofstede's frameworks, which tend to be more macro- and structural-level. On the other hand, MBS students, accustomed to critical thinking, also show strong collectivist values in organizational settings and deliberative decision-making.

[48] "Comparing Regional Cultures within a Country: Lessons from Brazil."

[49] "Social Comparison and Group Interest in Ingroup Favouritism."

This combination is uncommon in Hofstede's theory of individualism-collectivism, which typically views critical thinking as a product of individualism.

Therefore, the patterns of results from this study not only strengthen existing cross-cultural psychological theories but also open the possibility of local variants or *adaptations* typical of Indonesia. These findings highlight the importance of contextualizing the cultural realities of Islamic education and contribute to the development of cross-cultural psychology grounded in the local wisdom of Islamic boarding schools.

D. Discussion

This research shows that the educational culture in the NU and Muhammadiyah Islamic boarding schools reflects institutional differences and represents two major paradigms of Islam in Indonesia: Nusantara Islam and Progressive Islam. These two models affect the curriculum and learning methods and, more deeply, shape the psychological structure, social relations, and the construction of students' religious identity systemically. Findings on the structure of authority, strategies for socializing values, group identity, and attitudes towards religious and cultural differences are concrete evidence of how institutions' ideological construction and cultural values work at the psychosocial level. Thus, this discussion not only reviews what was found, but also why these findings are significant, what should be done next, and the typical contribution of pesantren as a cultural-spiritual space in Indonesia's Islamic education context.

First, this study shows that the value difference between NU and Muhammadiyah is rooted in culturally standardized ideological paradigms, namely the concepts of Nusantara Islam and Progressive Islam. Islam Nusantara, which is a characteristic of NU, carries Islam that is rooted in local traditions, has an accommodative pattern, and upholds

manners, solemnity, and diversity of religious practices [50] This is evident in the hierarchical but loving relationship between santri and kiai and the internalization of values through ritual and collective appreciation [51] On the contrary, Muhammadiyah expressly carries the spirit of Progressive Islam, which is a paradigm of Islamic reform based on rationality, purification of faith, and modern education that encourages students to think critically, be open to knowledge, and be active in shaping society through the principles of social monotheism [52]. The difference between these two paradigms explains why NU students build religious identities based on local cultural values and hereditary practices [53], while Muhammadiyah students build identities based on textual rationality and loyalty to the modern da'wah movement.

Second, these results are significant because they show that religious moderation does not belong to a single approach but can emerge from various cultural paths. NU Islamic Boarding School demonstrates culture-based moderation through living among the diversity of Islamic traditions. MBS shows rationality-based moderation, from scientific arguments

[50] Nasikhin et al., "Tantangan Pendidikan Agama Islam Di Era Posh Truth," *Al Manam* 2, no. 1 (2022): 25–36; Januddin Muhammad Yusuf, Nawir Yuslem, and Dhiauddin Tanjung, "The Inclusion of Ulema in the Application of Islam Nusantara Law for the Aceh Community," *Al-Risalah: Forum Kajian Hukum Dan Sosial Kemasyarakatan* 23, no. 2 (2023): 186–97, https://doi.org/10.30631/alrisalah.v23i2.1428.

[51] R. Nasikhin, N., & Raharjo, "Moderasi Beragama Nahdlatul Ulama Dan Muhammadiyah Dalam Konsep Islam Nusantara Dan Islam Berkemajuan," *Islamic Review: Jurnal Riset Dan Kajian Keislaman* 11, no. 1 (2022): 19–34, https://doi.org/10.35878/islamicreview.v11i1.371.

[52] Putri Rusmawati, "Pengarusutamaan Integrasi Keilmuan Islam Dan Sains Di Lembaga Pendidikan Islam: Tinjauan Baru Menuju Islam Berkemajuan," *Sosaintek: Jurnal Ilmu Sosial Sains Dan Teknologi* 1, no. 1 (2024): 11–22, https://doi.org/10.33367/sosaintek.v1i1.5234; Syamsul Arifin, Syafiq A. Mughni, and Moh Nurhakim, "The Idea of Progress: Meaning and Implications of Islam Berkemajuan in Muhammadiyah," *Al-Jami'ah* 60, no. 2 (2022): 547–84, https://doi.org/10.14421/AJIS.2022.602.547-584.

[53] Leonie Schmidt, "Aesthetics of Authority: 'Islam Nusantara' and Islamic 'Radicalism' in Indonesian Film and Social Media," *Religion* 51, no. 2 (2021): 237–58, https://doi.org/10.1080/0048721X.2020.1868387.

to differences. These findings are situated in the social context of Islam in Indonesia, which has recently been marked by exclusivism and polarization. When extreme religious narratives grow in the public sphere, the educational model of pesantren – both NU and Muhammadiyah –shows that religion can be studied and instilled with a peaceful, polite, and argumentative approach.

Third, regarding applicative implications, the cross-cultural psychological approach provides a map of a deeper understanding of how religious identity is formed in a living cultural context. NU and Muhammadiyah students differ not only in how they learn religion but also in how they experience religion affectively, symbolically, and cognitively. Therefore, the approach to Islamic education should not only focus on teaching materials and cognitive competencies, but also on building an ecosystem of values aligned with the local cultural background. This research suggests that Islamic educational institutions, especially Islamic boarding schools, are beginning to realize the importance of integrating these two poles of approach: the values and traditions of Islam Nusantara, and the rationality and social transformation of Progressive Islam. Strengthening religious moderation at the grassroots level will be much more effective if it is grounded in a comprehensive understanding of the cultural values that shape students' worldviews.

Fourth, this discussion also highlights that pesantren is not just a religious school, but a social-spiritual environment that shapes personalities collectively and symbolically. In Islamic boarding schools, values are instilled through memorization and daily experiences: solemnizing recitals, interpreting joint prayers, submitting to kiai, or discussing the meaning of Islam critically. Therefore, the strength of pesantren education lies in cultural consistency and an educational inner atmosphere, not only in the curriculum structure. In this context, cross-cultural psychology is a highly

relevant analytical tool because it can capture meanings that normative educational theories alone cannot.

Finally, it is essential to emphasize that the results of this study do not aim to compare which is better between NU and Muhammadiyah Islamic boarding schools, but rather to show that both present a moderate, grounded face of Islam with distinct characteristics. It is where the strength of Indonesian Islam lies: in its structured diversity, the tolerance instilled through culture, and the awareness that differences in ways are not differences in direction. For this reason, future research is suggested to expand the context of loci and methods, as well as raise new themes such as gender, digitalization, or generational change in the context of pesantren values, so that Islamic education is spiritually strong and socially adaptive.

E. Conclusion

This study concluded that the institutional cultural differences between the NU Islamic Boarding School and Muhammadiyah Boarding School Yogyakarta (Muhammadiyah) shape the religious and psychological character of students with different but complementary approaches in building religious moderation in Indonesia. Santri in NU Islamic Boarding School are formed through a hierarchical authority structure and the internalization of values rooted in local traditions, symbolic rituals, and collective spiritual experiences, producing an inclusive, communal-oriented, and empathetic personality towards the diversity of Islamic practices. On the other hand, students in MBS Muhammadiyah are honed through a rational, discursive, and evidence-based education system, with a functional authority structure and the formation of a more normative and ideological religious identity, resulting in a person who is critical, independent in thinking, and selective in how they behave towards differences.

This finding answers the problem formulation that institutional culture greatly influences how students understand religiosity, authority, and diversity through internalization mechanisms consistent with cross-cultural psychological theories, namely power distance (Hofstede), acculturation strategies (Berry), and social identity (Tajfel). This study finds the novelty that the model of internalization of values based on collective emotional experience in NU Islamic Boarding School and the combination of structural collectivism with individual rationality in SBM is not fully explained by Western theory, suggesting the existence of local variants in the formation of the religious psychology of students that are typical of Indonesia. Theoretically, this research extends cross-cultural psychology frameworks (Hofstede, Berry, and Tajfel) by contextualizing them in Islamic educational environments, illustrating how cultural dimensions such as collectivism (individualism and traditionalism) rationalism manifest in faith-based identity formation. In practice, these insights encourage educators to design pesantren learning systems that harmonize the emotional, spiritual, and rational aspects of Islamic character formation. However, this study has limitations because it was conducted in only two locations and used a qualitative approach, so it cannot be generalized widely. Therefore, follow-up research is recommended using a quantitative or mixed-methods approach with a more diverse population of pesantrens across various regions to strengthen the validity of the findings and produce a more comprehensive generalization of Islamic educational culture.

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