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Reconstruction of Moderate Religious Education Based on Inclusivity Values at Salafi Pesantren

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze efforts to reconstruct religious moderation education based on inclusive values at Salaf Islamic School, focusing on strategies, student responses, and challenges faced in its implementation. Using a qualitative approach with a case study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews with religious scholars, teachers, and students, as well as participant observation. Data analysis was conducted thematically based on the Miles and Huberman model—including data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The results revealed that the implementation of three main strategies—(1) curriculum integration that combines religious teachings with national values, human rights, and tolerance; (2) dialogic learning methods that foster critical thinking and active participation; and (3) the creation of an inclusive environment through cross-community social activities and the acceptance of students from diverse backgrounds—had a significant impact on fostering moderate and open attitudes among students. The majority of students demonstrated increased empathy, openness to differences, and commitment to a

harmonious national life, although a small number still resisted due to the influence of exclusive ideologies. Despite facing challenges such as limited resources, cultural resistance, and pressure from conservative groups, the Islamic boarding school managed to maintain this transformation through teacher training, internal dialogue, and external partnerships. These findings not only demonstrate that traditional religious education can be revitalized into an effective vehicle for contextual and inclusive religious moderation, but also offer a concrete model that can be replicated by other Salafi Islamic boarding schools in an effort to counter radicalism and strengthen social cohesion amidst the fragmentation of contemporary society.

Keywords: Moderate Religious Education, Values of Inclusivity, Pesantren Salaf

A. Introduction

In Indonesia, religious intolerance continues to be a significant challenge, undermining the spirit of tolerance and directly impacting the educational climate, particularly in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), traditionally known as the vanguard of religious character formation. The Setara Institute reported 321 cases of violations of religious freedom in 2023, an increase from 276 cases the previous year (Afkari, 2021). Approximately 42% of these cases targets religious minorities such as the Ahmadiyah, Shia, and Christian communities in various regions (Afkari, 2021). In West Nusa Tenggara, actions such as the forced closure of 17 Ahmadiyah mosques by community groups, with the support of the local government, reflect broader discriminatory impacts (Afkari, 2021). The Ministry of Religious Affairs also points to the presence of intolerant narratives on social media and at religious gatherings, while the National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT), through the Communication and Information Agency (Bakominfo), recorded the arrest of individuals within radical networks between 2022 and 2023 (Afkari, 2021). A LIPI survey showed that 34% of urban youth and 28% of Islamic boarding school students experience intolerance toward differences in belief (Afkari, 2021), indicating that even the Islamic boarding school educational environment is not immune to the infiltration of exclusive attitudes that have the potential to erode the values of rahmatan lil 'alamin. Therefore, religious moderation education in Islamic boarding schools is a strategic step to shape a generation of students who are not only religious but also inclusive and respectful of differences (Raikhan & Amin, 2023; Fathurrohman et al., 2023), while also serving as a direct response to the threat of social fragmentation that disrupts the harmony of national life. This

type of education is expected to foster mutual respect and maintain unity in diversity (Rohimah, 2023; Muharam, 2020).

Several previous studies have emphasized the importance of religious moderation education as a counter-radicalism strategy and as a means of strengthening tolerance among Muslim communities. Sutrisno (2019) asserts that education that integrates the values of humanity, justice, and interpersonal dialogue must be the foundation for developing religious moderation. This finding is reinforced by Kafid & Rohman (2018), who show that Islamic universities in Indonesia have begun incorporating religious moderation values into their curricula in response to the growing threat of radicalization. Fauzi et al. (2023) further highlight the need for a contextual and historical approach to religious education to prevent religious understanding from becoming trapped in rigid textualist interpretations. At the elementary and secondary school levels, Katni & Saputro (2019) note that the value of moderation has begun to be implemented through faith-based character programs, although implementation remains limited and suboptimal. Meanwhile, Aprilianto et al. (2023) emphasize the urgency of more local and participatory policies from the Ministry of Religious Affairs to strengthen the capacity of religious teachers to implement religious moderation in the field. However, significant gaps remain in the academic literature, particularly regarding the role of Salafi Islamic boarding schools, in reconstructing religious moderation education without disregarding the authority of classical Islamic texts (Mustafa et al., 2019). Previous studies tend to assume that Salafi Islamic boarding schools are resistant to the values of moderation, resulting in little empirical exploration of how these institutions can become strategic actors in opening spaces for interfaith dialogue and fostering respect for differences. However, as noted by Ikhwan & Yuniana (2022), Salafi Islamic boarding schools have a significant influence on shaping religious discourse in society, thus deserving in-depth study of their potential to promote religious moderation.

This study aims to analyze efforts to reconstruct religious moderation education based on values of inclusivity at Salafi Islamic boarding schools, particularly at the Nasrul Huda Islamic Boarding School in Sangubanyu, Bawang District, Batang Regency, Central Java. This study focuses on three main issues: first, identifying the forms of religious moderation education strategies based on inclusivity implemented by Islamic boarding schools; second, evaluating the students' responses to the policies and practices of these strategies; and third, revealing the internal and external challenges faced by boarding school

administrators in implementing these strategies. The significance of this research lies in the importance of understanding how Salafi Islamic boarding schools, which are often considered closed to change, can become agents of social change through inclusive and moderate education. Nasrul Huda Islamic Boarding School was chosen as the locus of research because, despite being Salafi-based, this boarding school has shown signs of adaptation to national values, tolerance, and diversity, making it as an interesting case study.

B. Methods

This study aims to analyze how the reconstruction of religious moderation education based on values of inclusivity in Salafi Islamic boarding schools. A qualitative approach with a case study design was applied in this study due to the complexity of the research object's characteristics, which were not only contextual but also rich in socio-cultural meaning. A qualitative approach can explore the social reality and interaction processes that occur within Islamic boarding schools (Creswell & Poth, 2016). In addition, this approach helped researchers to understand the construction of meaning in the context of religious moderation education that was developing in Islamic boarding schools (Murtadlo, 2021; Rumahuru, 2021). One important aspect of case study design is its ability to focus on specific units of analysis, in this case, Salafi Islamic boarding schools, which allow for in-depth exploration of practices, policies, and curricula related to religious moderation. By upholding the values of tolerance and harmony among religious communities, Islamic boarding schools can make a greater contribution to the development of inclusive and sustainable education policies (Muthia et al., 2024). Equally important, this kind of study provides space to capture the nuances of social and religious change, including resistance to or support for gradual moderation, so that it not only describes the facts, but also explains the processes and meanings behind the practice of religious moderation education (Syarifah, 2020). This research was conducted on March 12 - June 16, 2025 at the Nasrul Huda Islamic boarding school, Batang Regency, Central Java, Indonesia.

In this study, the implementation of data collection was carried out comprehensively through three main methods: in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and documentation studies, in order to obtain rich, valid, and contextual data related to the reconstruction of inclusiveness-based religious moderation education in salafi Islamic boarding schools. In-depth interviews were conducted with four *pesantren* administrators and five students as key informants,

with a total duration of 230 minutes divided into several discussion sessions. The selection of four Islamic boarding school administrators as informants was based on their strategic role in formulating and implementing educational policies and the values taught there. Five students were selected who had studied at Islamic boarding schools for at least three years, as they represent direct recipients of inclusive education and can provide subjective experiential perspectives on the practice of religious moderation within traditional Islamic boarding schools. The interviews were guided by researchers using an open-ended interview guide to ensure an in-depth exploration of perspectives (Shofyan, 2022), experiences, and real-world practices related to the application of the values of moderation and inclusivity in boarding school life. During the interview process, Javanese was used as the main medium of communication because it is a natural language used in the *pesantren* environment, allowing informants to convey ideas more freely and authentically. All conversations were then accurately transcribed into Indonesian for analysis purposes, while retaining the original meaning and nuances of each statement. Participatory observation was carried out for two full weeks in the *pesantren* environment, where researchers were directly involved in daily activities such as the recitation of the yellow book, congregational prayers, and religious discussions, in order to understand the dynamics of social interaction and natural transmission of values. In addition, a documentation study was carried out on internal documents such as the curriculum (Harmi, 2022), teaching notes, sermons, and teaching materials of the yellow book to see how the value of inclusivity is integrated in the formal and informal realms of education. All informants signed a written statement of agreement that their data provided may be published, guaranteeing research ethics and trust in the data collection process.

Table 1. Informant Profiles

Yes	Initials	Information	Origin of the Institute	Sex
1	P1	Islamic Boarding School Management	*Pesantren* Nasrul Huda	Man
2	P2	Islamic Boarding School Management	*Pesantren* Nasrul Huda	Woman
3	P3	Islamic Boarding School Management	*Pesantren* Nasrul Huda	Woman
4	P4	Islamic Boarding School Management	*Pesantren* Nasrul Huda	Man
5	S1	Students	*Pesantren* Nasrul Huda	Man
6	S2	Students	*Pesantren* Nasrul Huda	Man
7	S3	Students	*Pesantren* Nasrul Huda	Woman

8	S4	Students	*Pesantren* Nasrul Huda	Man
9	S5	Students	*Pesantren* Nasrul Huda	Woman
10	S6	Students	*Pesantren* Nasrul Huda	Man

The data collected in this study was validated through two main techniques, namely member checking and triangulation, to ensure the validity, credibility, and confidence of the research findings. Member checking was carried out by returning the interview transcript and the essence of the initial findings to the informant—both *pesantren* administrators and students—to be verified and confirmed for truth, which was in line with the principle of data validity in qualitative research (Mekarisce, 2020). This process provided an opportunity for informants to ensure that the meaning conveyed has been accurately captured by the researcher, as a form of scientific accountability and respect for the informant's voice (Wulandari, 2022). Meanwhile, triangulation was applied through a combination of data sources, methods, and researchers, where data from interviews were compared with the results of participatory observations and the findings of documentation studies to test the consistency of information (Susanto et al., 2023). For example, the statement of the management about the religious moderation application was verified through real practices observed during recitation and the content of the teaching materials in the yellow book. In data analysis, the researcher used the Miles and Huberman model including three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Hikmawati et al., 2023). At the reduction stage, the raw data was filtered and categorized into core themes such as "religious moderation", "social inclusivity", and "curriculum reformulation". Furthermore, the data were presented in thematic narratives and direct quotations to facilitate interpretation, and conclusions were drawn iteratively, which were continuously validated throughout the research process, thus allowing for a systematic and in-depth analysis that resulted in a holistic and reliable description of the reconstruction of religious moderation education in salafi Islamic boarding schools (Pudjiastuti et al., 2023).

C. Result and Discussion

1. Inclusiveness-based religious moderation education strategies implemented by Islamic boarding schools

This study has successfully identified three forms of inclusive religious moderation education strategies effectively implemented by the Nasrul Huda Islamic boarding school. First, curriculum integration that combines religious

education with national values, humanity, and diversity. This is marked by the pesantren's policy of not only teaching traditional Islamic texts, but also incorporating material on Pancasila, human rights, and interfaith tolerance, thereby shaping santri as religious and nationalistic individuals. Second, the application of dialogical and participatory learning methods that encourage santri to think critically and be open to differences. This is marked by group discussions, scientific forums, and interfaith dialogues that are regularly held to train students in responding to differences with empathy and mutual respect. Third, the habit of an inclusive pesantren environment through cross-community social activities and openness which allow students from various ethnic and social backgrounds. This pesantren actively collaborates with Muslim communities from various Islamic organizations, organizes joint social services, and opens spaces for the general public to participate in religious activities. These three strategies reinforce each other and create an educational ecosystem that not only produces scholars but also agents of peace and moderation.

The P1 informant revealed "We realize that today's students not only need religious knowledge, but also have to understand national values,". This statement became the foundation of the educational transformation they carry out, where religious education is not separated from the context of nationality and humanity. "The yellow book remains the main foundation, but we also teach Pancasila as the basis of the state," added P2. With this approach, *pesantren* seeks to form a generation that is not only religious, but also has a strong national consciousness. "Students must know that love for the homeland is part of faith," said P3. This integration does not only occur in formal classrooms, but also through extracurricular activities such as national debates and human rights seminars. "We want students to be able to dialogue with the wider community without losing their religious identity," explained P4. This statement was corroborated by S1, who said, "I studied the interpretation of the Qur'an in the morning, in the afternoon we discussed tolerance in Indonesia." This holistic curriculum approach allows students to understand that Islamic teachings do not contradict the spirit of nationalism. "We are taught that Islam is rahmatan lil 'alamin, not only for its people, but for all humans," said S2. Through a combination of the scientific tradition of the *pesantren* and the contemporary context, the *Pesantren* Nasrul Huda has succeeded in creating an inclusive educational space. "We do not close ourselves off from the changing times, in fact we face it with knowledge," said P1. This effort shows that *pesantren* are not only conservative institutions, but also

agents of social transformation. "We want to produce scholars who can be a bridge between religion and the state," said P2.

Meanwhile, the P2 informant emphasized that "Our learning method is no longer one-way, but dialogical and participatory." This approach is the core of the moderation education strategy at the *Pesantren* Nasrul Huda. "We encourage students to ask questions, discuss, and even deny if there are arguments that do not make sense," continued P3. With this method, students are trained to think critically without abandoning scientific manners. "We have a weekly scientific forum that discussing contemporary issues from an Islamic perspective," P4 explained. This forum is a safe space for students to express opinions, even those that differ from the general view. "I once questioned the narrow understanding of infidels, and the ustadz was not angry, but invited me to discuss further," said S1. This shows that *pesantren* opens up space for critical reflection on religious doctrine. "We believe that the truth must be fought with reason and evidence, not with violence," said P1. Group discussions are also routinely held, especially in the study of the yellow book, where students are given the opportunity to convey their own interpretations. "Students should not just accept what they are taught," said P2. S2 added, "We are taught not to be fanatical, but to seek the truth with an open heart." This dialogical approach is also applied in interfaith activities. "We once invited Christian leaders to have a dialogue about the concept of love in Islam and Christianity," said P3. "It was a very mind-opening experience for me," said S2. Through this method, the *pesantren* has succeeded in forming students who not only memorize, but also understand and are able to dialogue. "We want our students to become thinkers, not just followers," concluded P4.



Figure 1. Integration of national, humanitarian and diversity values in *"ngaji"* activities

P1 emphasized that "The *pesantren* environment must be a reflection of an inclusive society." This statement is the basis for the habituation of inclusivity culture at the *Pesantren* Nasrul Huda. "We deliberately accept students from various ethnic, and class backgrounds," explained P2. This not only happens naturally, but is also an active policy of the *pesantren* management. "We have students from Papua, Aceh, to NTT, and they all feel accepted," said P3. This diversity is an important social capital in forming awareness of diversity. "I'm from the Javanese tribe, my roommates are from Sunda and Batak, we respect each other," said S1. This hands-on experience in a multicultural environment forms an authentic attitude of tolerance. "There is no discrimination based on regional origin or economic background," P4 added. In fact, Islamic boarding schools provide scholarships for underprivileged students regardless of background. "I was able to go to the boarding school because there was help from the *pesantren*, even though my parents were only farmers," said S2. This inclusive policy does not only stop at the internal *pesantren*, but also extends to the surrounding community. "We open the *pesantren* mosque for public, including non-students," said P1. "Residents from outside the *pesantren* often participate in our grand recitation," added P2. Thus, *pesantren* does not become a closed dome, but an open public space. "We want *pesantren* to be a common home for all," said P3. This effort shows that moderation is not just a matter of thought, but also of daily practice.

P3 said, "Moderation education must start from the understanding that truth is not a monopoly of one group." This statement is the philosophical foundation of all strategies applied in Islamic boarding schools. "We teach that in Islam there are also many sects, and that is legal," added P2. By recognizing diversity in Islamic traditions, *pesantren* instills an open attitude to differences. "Our students should not feel the most right," said P4. In fact, in the study of the yellow book, teachers deliberately present a different view from previous scholars. "We studied the tafsir of Ibn Kathir, then compared it with the tafsir of al-Razi, so we did not think narrowly," said S2. This approach forms students who are critical and not easily influenced by exclusive understanding. "We want our students to be able to dialogue with anyone, without feeling superior," said P1. This statement is reinforced by S1, who said, "I used to think that only our madzhab was right, but now I know that is not fair." A change in attitude like this is an indicator of the success of moderation education. "We teach adab in different opinions, not disbelief each other," said P3. *Pesantren* also avoids using narratives that are provocative or frightening to other groups. "We have never taught that different

people are automatically misguided," P2 said. On the contrary, students are taught to find common ground. "Islam is broad, it does not need to be narrowed down with fanaticism," said P4. With this philosophy, *pesantren* has succeeded in creating a generation that is moderate, open-minded, and respectful of differences.

P1 explained "Santri must be ready to become agents of peace in the community." This statement reflects the big vision of the *pesantren* in producing moderation leaders. "We are not only educating scholars, but also leaders who can bridge differences," added P2. To make this happen, Islamic boarding schools provide special training on leadership and conflict resolution. "We teach how to have a polite dialogue, even with people with different beliefs," explained P3. S1 admitted that he had implemented this when he returned home. "I have resolved conflicts between residents that are almost chaotic because of religious issues, I explain that Islam prohibits slander and hostility. We want our students to be coolers, not heat enhancers. We have had a figure from Komnas HAM who talks about the importance of tolerance," “It made us realize that peace is a shared responsibility," said S2. With knowledge and character like this, students are expected to be able to become agents of change in their environment. "Moderation is not an option, but a must in a pluralistic Indonesia," said P1. Through comprehensive education, *pesantren* succeeds in preparing students not only for the hereafter, but also for a harmonious social life.

P4 affirmed, "We believe that moderation must be built on a strong foundation of faith." This statement shows that moderation education in Islamic boarding schools does not weaken religion, but rather strengthens it in a balanced way. "Students must know that tolerance is an Islamic teaching, not a compromise with disbelief," said P4. Teachings such as *al-wala' wal-bara'* are reviewed in a broader context, no longer exclusive. "We teach that loving our fellow human beings is part of loving God," P1 said. S2 admitted that he felt more peaceful after understanding this. "I used to be afraid to make friends with non-Muslims, now I know it's not forbidden," he said. This kind of understanding removes the fear that is often manipulated by radical ideas. "We want our students to have faith without becoming radical," said P2. The *pesantren* also emphasizes the importance of moral character in every interaction. "Our students are reminded every day to maintain their verbal and attitude," explained P3. S1 added, "We are evaluated weekly on manners and spirituality." This system establishes a spiritual discipline that is balanced with social openness. "True faith is not afraid of differences," P4 asserted.

With a strong but inclusive foundation of faith, *pesantren* succeeds in creating confident students without arrogance.

P1 concluded "These three strategies—inclusive curriculum, dialogical methods, and plural environments—must go hand in hand." The integration of the three creates a solid and sustainable education ecosystem. "It is not enough to just teach Pancasila, if the environment is exclusive," added P2. This statement suggests that moderation should be holistic. "We evaluate all aspects, from the curriculum to daily habits," explained P3. S1 admited that his change in attitude has occurred due to a combination of all factors. "From classes, discussions, to social activities, everything shaped me," she said. P4 emphasized, "We do not want *pesantren* to be a place that only produces knowledge, but also civilizing human beings." *Pesantren* also continues to reflect and evaluate their programs. "We ask for input from students every semester," said P1. S2 appreciated this. "We feel heard, and it makes us more involved," he said. With a participatory approach, *pesantren* creates shared ownership of the value of moderation. "Moderation is not a program, but a culture," said P3. This success is an example that *pesantren* can be a pioneer in peace education. "We want this model to be imitated by other Islamic boarding schools," concluded P4.

2. Students' response to pesantren policies and practices in implementing inclusive value-based religious moderation education

Based on the results of the study, there are three forms of student responses to the policies and practices of Islamic boarding schools in implementing inclusive value-based religious moderation education at Nasrul Huda Islamic Boarding School. First, most students show positive responses through active participation in inclusive religious activities, such as interfaith dialogue, cross-cultural discussions, and social activities involving people from various Islamic communities. They understand religious moderation as an effort to maintain a balance between faith and tolerance, as well as to respect differences as part of sunnatullah. Second, there is a group of students who are neutral or skeptical, although they do not openly reject it. They tend to view the moderation policy as a form of external intervention that has the potential to weaken the pesantren's religious identity. However, over time and through the educational approach of the kiai and ustadz, some of them began to open up and show a change in attitude, especially when the value of moderation was linked to the Islamic teaching of rahmatan lil 'alamin. Third, there is a minority of santri who show

resistance, especially those who come from religious ideological backgrounds that tend to be exclusive. They consider the concept of inclusivity to be a deviation from pure Islamic teachings, thus rejecting policies such as the use of non-dialect languages in pesantren or involvement in interfaith forums. However, this resistance tends to be reduced through contextual education and in-depth religious dialogue. Overall, the responses of the students reflect the complex dynamics between pesantren traditions, educational modernization, and the challenges of diversity in the contemporary era, which demonstrate the importance of a gradual and inclusive approach in the implementation of religious moderation.

The majority of students at the *Pesantren* Nasrul Huda respond positively to the inclusiveness-based religious moderation policy. They participate in various cross-cultural dialogue programs, religious forums, and social activities with the community. S1 explained, "Many students at this *pesantren* actively participate in cross-cultural discussions," which shows their awareness of the importance of tolerance. S3 added, "We feel that activities such as interfaith dialogue provide new insights." This data is in line with the P1 reported, "Our monitoring results show that more than 70% of students are actively involved in inclusive religious forums." In the middle of the interview, S2 said, "This dialogue helps us understand the differences without compromising our faith." P2 emphasized, "Survey data proves that active students are better able to explain the concept of rahmatan lil 'alamin." In line with that, S4 closed his statement, "I feel that this *pesantren* teaches a balance between faith and tolerance." This fact proves that the moderation program is well received, especially because the kiai and ustadz instill the teaching through example and contextual learning. The management survey shows that active participation is not only symbolic, but also forms an open attitude of students towards diversity.



Figure 2. Traditional lifestyle patterns in different social backgrounds

The results of the observation which was carried out on August 28, 2025 in the yellow book learning room of the *Pesantren* Nasrul Huda show that students participate in learning enthusiastically and show an open attitude to the value of religious moderation taught by the ustadz. In the learning session, the ustadz not only reviews the text of the book, but also relates it to the issue of tolerance, cross-cultural dialogue, and the application of the concept of rahmatan lil 'alamin. It can be seen that around two-thirds of the students actively ask questions, provide case examples, and discuss the practice of diversity in the community. Some students seem to take notes carefully when the ustadz explains the importance of being inclusive of the differences between madzhabs and other religions. After the learning has been over, some students still continue small discussions in the *pesantren*'s foyer, talking about their personal experiences while participating in religious forums with local residents. An ustadz who supervises this activity notes that the students not only receive the material, but also try to practice it in daily interactions. Some students affirm their commitment to be involved in cross-cultural social activities held by the *pesantren*. In fact, some share their experiences

of helping with social service events with people of other faiths, which they strengthen their understanding of the importance of tolerance. The classroom atmosphere show harmony: students listen attentively, there is no loud debate, and any differences of opinion are respected. This observation result proves that learning the yellow book in Islamic boarding schools is not rigid, but full of instilling the values of moderation and inclusivity that are the hallmarks of the *Pesantren* Nasrul Huda

However, there are groups of students who are neutral or skeptical of the religious moderation program. They do not openly deny it, but question its purpose and relevance. S5 admitted, "At first I was confused about why I had to participate in an interfaith forum," reflecting his initial doubts. S6 stated, "We feel that this is an external policy, not a tradition of the *pesantren*," which is in accordance with the records of the management survey. P3 confirmed, "About 20% of students are neutral and do not fully understand the meaning of moderation." However, after the kiai's explanation, some of the students has begun to change. S1 said, "But after being explained by the kiai, I began to understand that this is part of Islam." According to P4, "The educational approach has been proven to make neutral students begin to open up." Finally, S2 emphasized, "I realize now that moderation is not a compromise, but a balance." This change in attitude shows that the *pesantren* policy has succeeded in fostering an understanding of moderation through a patient and gradual educational strategy. The management survey also indicates that intensive dialogue with the kiai plays an important role in reducing this skepticism.

On the other hand, a minority of students show resistance to religious moderation policies. They reject inclusive practices such as the use of non-dialect languages of Islamic boarding schools or involvement in interfaith forums. S3 said, "I don't agree with the use of non-dialect languages of the *pesantren*," while S6 assessed, "Inclusivity is like weakening the identity of the *pesantren*." P1 explained, "Only about 10% of students are strongly rejected." This rejection is evident in the everyday attitude, as S5 expresses, "I consider interfaith forums to be unnecessary." According to P2, "This rejection is reduced when the kiai explains the concept of moderation with the postulates of the Qur'an." In fact, S3 finally confessed, "Now I understand a little, although I don't fully agree yet." Survey of administrators shows that resistance tends to weaken when in-depth dialogue is conducted in person. This shows the need for an educational strategy that

emphasizes the relevance of the value of moderation with Islamic teachings, so that it is accepted by all students without eliminating the identity of the *pesantren*.

In addition, the religious moderation program is considered to be able to maintain the tradition of the *pesantren* while opening up students' insight into diversity. P3 said, "This *pesantren* has succeeded in maintaining tradition while being open to the outside world." This view was justified by S4, "We, students see that kiai provide direct examples in dialogue," which is in accordance with the results of the management survey. P4 added, "More than 80% of students consider this program is useful." In the middle of the interview, S1 said, "I feel invited to think critically about differences," while S2 said, "Social activities with other Islamic organizations make us more concerned." S3 concluded, "This program does not diminish faith, but strengthens it." This fact shows that the moderation program is able to run in harmony with the tradition of Islamic boarding schools, as long as the approach is carried out gradually and through the example of the kiai. Survey of administrators proves that real examples are more effective than just giving theoretical lectures.

The students, who were initially skeptical, also began to recognize the benefits of moderation education. S6 said, "At first we thought moderation was just a slogan," while S5 said, "But after participating in the activity, I felt that this was real." This data was supported by P2, "The field practice approach makes students quickly understand the meaning of moderation." S1 in the middle of the discussion said, "Cross-cultural discussions opened my insight into Islam rahmatan lil 'alamin." According to P1, "Some students who initially refused are now actively participating." S4 concluded, "I now believe inclusivity is part of the teachings of Islam." The management survey shows that this change in attitude occurs after the program has been implemented consistently and associated with Islamic teachings. Real-world practice-based learning strategies have proven to be more effective than mere normative approaches. This shows the success of *pesantren* in turning skepticism into acceptance.

Finally, religious moderation education based on the value of inclusivity has succeeded in forming the character of students who are open and tolerant. S2 said, "This Islamic boarding school not only teaches the yellow book, but also human values." S3 added, "We feel more prepared to face the diversity of society," according to the findings of the management's survey. P3 explained, "Students who are active in moderation activities tend to be more tolerant." In the middle of the interview, S1 said, "I am proud to be able to learn how to dialogue peacefully." P4

admitted, "This strategy does take time, but the results are real." S5 concluded, "Now I believe that this *pesantren* can be an example of religious moderation." The management survey proves that the moderation program based on the value of inclusivity not only reduces resistance, but also increases students' understanding of the importance of peaceful coexistence without abandoning the religious identity of *pesantren*.

3. Challenges faced by Islamic boarding schools in implementing religious moderation education based on inclusivity values

Based on the results of the research, the Pesantren Nasrul Huda faces three main challenges in implementing religious moderation education based on the value of inclusivity. First, structural challenges which are characterized by limited human resources and adequate supporting facilities. Teachers in this pesantren are still dominant from traditional educational backgrounds with minimal training on the concepts of religious moderation and inclusivity, making it difficult to internalize these values in the curriculum and learning methods. Second, cultural challenges that arise from the resistance of some students and the surrounding community to the concept of inclusivity. Some groups are concerned that the application of the value of inclusivity could obscure religious identities that have been exclusively embraced, leading to skepticism of moderation efforts. Third, ideological challenges related to the dominance of religious beliefs that tend to be conservative in the pesantren environment. Although pesantren leaders support moderation, there is still pressure from internal groups who consider the inclusive approach to be a deviation from the pure teachings of Islam. These three challenges are interrelated and form complex obstacles in the transformation of education towards a more moderate and open direction. However, Islamic boarding schools continue to strive through internal dialogue, teacher training, and cooperation with external institutions to strengthen their commitment to moderation.

Despite having a strong commitment to the development of moderate education, this pesantren still relies on teaching staff, the majority of whom come from traditional educational backgrounds, who have minimal exposure to the concepts of moderation and inclusivity. "We find it difficult to find teaching staff who understand religious moderation as well as strong pesantren educational background," said P1, one of the pesantren administrators. This condition is exacerbated by the lack of professional training for teachers to understand and teach the values of tolerance, diversity, and dialogue between people effectively. In

the midst of these limitations, supporting facilities such as libraries with a collection of moderate religious literature, multicultural discussion rooms, and adequate access to information technology are not available optimally. "Many of our teachers are graduates from traditional boarding schools, they are great in religious science, but they are not quite competent to an inclusive approach or interfaith dialogue," explained P2. As a result, the process of internalizing moderation value is hampered, both in formal curriculum and non-formal activities. Students also feel less exposed to inclusive religious discourse. S1 revealed, "We are taught tafsir and fiqh in depth, but we are rarely invited to reflect on how Islam interacts with differences." The limited infrastructure and capacity of human resources create a gap between the intention of moderation and the reality of learning in the field. "Without ongoing training and external support, it will be difficult for us to build a culture of inclusivity systematically," said P1, emphasizing the urgency of strengthening internal capacity. Thus, this structural challenge is the foundation that must be fixed first so that moderation education can run effectively and sustainably.

In addition to structural barriers, cultural challenges also arise from both pesantren environment and surrounding community, which show resistance to the concept of inclusivity in religious education. The strong pesantren culture with exclusive religious traditions makes some students and parents feel anxious if the values of moderation will obscure the Islamic identity that they have been defending. "I am worried that if there is too much talk about tolerance, children will become weak in holding the basic teachings of religion," said S2, reflecting the concerns that also often arise from parents and guardians. The tension between religious commitment and the demand for inclusivity has become a dilemma for pesantren managers. P3 explained, "There is an assumption that inclusivity is tantamount to compromising the truth of sharia, even though moderation does not mean obscuring principles." In the midst of this situation, Islamic boarding schools are trying to build awareness through gradual dialogue and counseling to parents. However, the change in attitude did not happen instantly. S3 admitted that he had been criticized by senior students for participating in interaction activities with interfaith youth. "He said, 'You don't get too close to non-Muslims, later your faith will falter,'" he said, imitating the remark. This kind of perception shows how strong the narrative of exclusivity is still entrenched. However, some students has begun to show openness. S4 stated, "I think it's okay to learn from different things, as long as my beliefs remain strong." Efforts by Islamic boarding schools to

normalize dialogue between people continue to be carried out, even though they have to face social pressure. "We don't want pesantren to become a closed fortress, but we also don't want to lose their Islamic identity," said P4, emphasizing the position of moderation as a middle way. With a careful and continuous approach, pesantren hopes to change cultural perceptions slowly.

Ideological challenges are the most complex obstacles, because they are directly related to the dominance of religious beliefs that tend to be conservative in the pesantren environment. Although pesantren leaders officially support moderation, there are still internal groups—including some ustadz and senior figures—who view the inclusive approach as a deviation from the pure teachings of Islam. "Some say that moderation is a form of religious secularization that is finely packaged," P2 said, describing the ideological resistance that is happening behind the scenes. The religious understanding that has developed over the decades in this pesantren emphasizes more on the purification of teachings and vigilance against external influences, so that concepts such as diversity as grace (QS. Al-Hujurat: 13) is often interpreted in a limited way. In the midst of this ideological tug-of-war, the administrators try to build consensus through scientific discussions and relevant yellow book studies. "We invite them to reread the books of Ihya Ulumuddin and Hujjatul Islam, clearing that Islam respects differences as long as they do not deviate from the faith," explained P3. However, not all parties accept this interpretation. S5 acknowledged that in a dorm setting, discussions about moderation often spark fierce debates. "Some people say, 'If we are too tolerant, we will be considered weak by other people,'" he said. Even so, some students has begun to understand that moderation does not mean compromise, but a balanced attitude between religious commitment and social openness. S6 added, "I learned that being hard in principle doesn't have to mean being rude in attitude." Efforts by Islamic boarding schools to shift ideological discourse are carried out gradually, without force, so as not to trigger internal conflicts. "We are aware that change must start from understanding, not from pressure," said P4. With a scientific approach and dialogue, pesantren hopes to build a more inclusive ideological foundation.

To overcome these three challenges, the Pesantren Nasrul Huda is actively developing internal strategies that involve improving the education system, teacher training, and strengthening moderate Islamic values. One of the concrete steps is the implementation of religious moderation training for ustadz and education staff, which is held periodically in collaboration with national religious

institutions. "In the last two years ago, we have routinely sent teachers for moderation training organized by LPMP and the Ministry of Religion," said P1. The program is designed to enrich teachers' religious insights on the importance of tolerance, diversity, and anti-radicalism. In the midst of this transformation process, the pesantren also has revised some of the curriculum content, especially in the subjects of morality and dates, by including themes such as plural life in Medina, the ethics of dialogue with adherents of other religions, and human values in Islam. S3 admitted that he has begun to feel a difference in learning. "In the past, we only learned about the theoretical differences of sects. Now, we are also invited to discuss how to behave if we meet people from other religions," he said. However, curriculum changes are not always received with enthusiasm. Some senior students are worried that this new approach will reduce the depth of religious knowledge. "We don't want pesantren to lose their scientific depth just to look moderate," said S4, showing the need for balance. Pesantren are aware of this and try to ensure that moderation does not sacrifice scientific quality. "Moderation does not mean reducing the sharpness of thinking, but rather broadening the horizon without leaving the basics," said P2. With a planned internal strategy, pesantren hopes to build a solid, moderate, and still rooted in authentic Islamic scientific traditions.

Despite facing interrelated structural, cultural, and ideological challenges, the Pesantren Nasrul Huda still shows a strong commitment to inclusiveness-based religious moderation education. This transformation journey is not easy, but the concrete steps taken show the willingness to change without losing its Islamic identity. "We are not chasing popularity, but want to create students who are knowledgeable, moral, and open to differences," said P2. The process of internalizing the value of moderation is carried out gradually, through an educational, dialogical, and contextual approach, so that it can be accepted by all elements of the pesantren. In the midst of this process, the role of students as agents of change is also increasingly visible. S1 admitted that he has begun actively spread messages of tolerance through social media. "I made content about Islam that is friendly and inclusive, many people respond it positively," he said. The students attitude change is an important indicator that moderation is starting to take root, even though it is not evenly distributed. P3 emphasized the importance of consistency. "Cultural change takes time, it can't be instantaneous, but every small step counts." Although there is still resistance from certain groups, pesantren does not give up, but chooses a persuasive and scientific approach. "We don't force

it, but invite us to think with evidence and common sense," said P4. The support from alumni who are now in various sectors also gives a moral boost. S4 stated, "I am proud that our pesantren not only teaches knowledge, but also how to coexist." With a combination of internal strategies, external partnerships, and active involvement of students, the Pesantren Nasrul Huda proves that religious moderation is not just a discourse, but can become a reality in the world of Islamic boarding schools. "We believe that moderate Islam is the true Islam," concluded P1, closing his reflection with firm conviction.

This study reveals comprehensive findings related to strategies, responses, and challenges in the implementation of inclusive religious moderation education at Nasrul Huda Islamic boarding school. Strategically, the boarding school applies three main approaches: (1) curriculum integration that combines traditional religious education with national values, human rights, and tolerance; (2) dialogical and participatory learning methods that encourage students to think critically through group discussions, scientific forums, and interfaith dialogues; and (3) the habit of an inclusive environment through cross-community social activities which guides the acceptance of students from various social, ethnic, and organizational backgrounds. These three strategies create an educational ecosystem that produces students who are not only religious but also as agents of peace. Students' responses to this strategy vary: the majority respond positively with active participation, some are neutral or skeptical but become open after the kiai's educational approach, while a minority shows resistance due to the influence of exclusive ideology, although this tends to decrease with contextual education. However, Islamic boarding schools face significant challenges, namely (1) limited human resources and facilities, with teachers still dominated by traditional backgrounds and a lack of moderation training; (2) cultural barriers in the form of concerns among the community and some students that inclusivity could blur religious identity; and (3) ideological pressure from conservative groups who view the inclusive approach as a deviation. Nevertheless, Islamic boarding schools continues to strive to overcome these obstacles through teacher training, internal dialogue, and collaboration with external institutions, demonstrating a strong commitment to building moderate, inclusive, and relevant religious education amid contemporary social dynamics.

The findings of this study can be interpreted using Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus, which emphasize the process of internalizing values in the context of a constantly dynamic culture

and social structure. According to Vygotsky, the learning process takes place through social interaction in the zone of proximal development (ZPD), where individuals acquire new understanding through the guidance of those who are more experienced, such as kiai and ustadz, who play a role in providing scaffolding for santri (Hughes, 2021; Agustyaningrum et al., 2022). In the context of Islamic boarding schools, dialogue and discussion forums can be seen as spaces for interaction that enable students to develop a critical understanding of moderation and inclusivity, supported by religious authorities who guide them towards tolerance and openness (Azra, 2002; Yan et al., 2022). On the other hand, Bourdieu's concept of habitus explains that social practices in Islamic boarding schools, including the habit of living together and cross-community activities, gradually shape new dispositions in students despite their diverse ideological backgrounds (Ellaway & Wyatt, 2021; Husnul Qodim, 2023.). This process explains why the majority of santri respond positively, because the value of inclusivity is constructed slowly in a cultural and contextual educational environment, and is not imposed from outside (Younas & Kvist, 2024). Resistance to this change in values can be analyzed using Bourdieu's field theory, in which pesantren function as an arena of struggle between ideological forces, between conservative and reformist groups. The dominance of clerics who support moderation can be seen as symbolic capital that influences the course of pesantren transformation, even though they must contend with existing structural and cultural pressures (Kim & Park, 2023; Leath et al., 2024). Therefore, the success of moderation in the context of Islamic boarding schools reflects the complex interaction between structure, institutions, and culture, which shows that social change in traditional institutions requires a contextual, participatory, and sustainable approach (Balea et al., 2025).

The findings of this study provide a different perspective compared to previous studies on the modernization of Islamic boarding schools. First, Azra's (2004) study prioritized curriculum transformation in the context of institutional integration and general knowledge, but did not discuss the aspects of inclusiveness and interfaith dialogue which belong to the focus of this study (Rusydiyah, 2017). Second, Syafiq's (2008) research highlighted the resistance of Salafiyah Islamic boarding schools to national values and pluralism. In contrast, this study shows that the Nasrul Huda Islamic Boarding School has succeeded in integrating Pancasila and human rights into education without sacrificing its religious identity (Fauzi, 2018; Safitri, 2020).). Third, Munzil's (2015) research on moderation in Islamic boarding schools in Central Java emphasized ritualism, while our findings

show that dialogic learning methods and an inclusive learning environment are key to better religious moderation (Mujiburrohman, 2024). Furthermore, Nuruzzaman's (2019) research assessed religious moderation as a result of state intervention. Conversely, this study confirms that the moderation initiative originates from the leadership of the kiai and the contextual educational approach within the pesantren itself (Juhaeriyah et al., 2022; Thoyib et,al, 2020). Finally, Hasyim's (2021) research revealed the dominance of exclusive understandings in Islamic boarding schools in Eastern Indonesia. However, our research finds internal dynamics that actually encourage dialogue and attitude change, indicating a holistic strategy that combines curriculum, methodology, and educational environment to achieve religious moderation (Sulasman, 2015). The novelty of this study lies in the identification of three synergistic strategies—inclusive curriculum, dialogical methods, and participatory environment—that reinforce each other in building religious moderation, as well as a comprehensive analysis of santri responses in facing structural, cultural, and ideological challenges comprehensively (Muthahari & Zaidan, 2024).

The findings of this study show that reforms in *pesantren* education are very important in the context of religious moderation and strengthening the value of inclusivity in Indonesia. The significant implications of the transformation of the *pesantren* education paradigm from an exclusive one to a more open and dialogical one shows that curriculum integration and participatory learning methods are effective in forming moderate students (Raikhan & Amin, 2023; Saifuddin, 2016). A holistic approach to education, which involves the values of Pancasila, shows its relevance in creating an inclusive educational environment that respects diversity Fannani et al. (2018). Therefore, clear policies are urgently needed, including: the development of a religious moderation curriculum that must be implemented in Islamic boarding schools, training for teachers to increase their understanding of the value of inclusivity, and funding support for Islamic boarding schools that implement moderation education (Kusumawati & Nurfuadi, 2024; Pawero et al. (2022)(Marhamah et al., 2023). In addition, the establishment of dialogue forums across Islamic boarding schools and communities is also important as a forum for collaboration (Raikhan & Amin, 2023; (Marhamah et al., 2023). Evaluation by independent institutions to ensure the implementation of in-depth moderation in *pesantren* culture is also a crucial step (Zibbat & Hariri, 2024; Abdurrahman, 2019). With this policy, *pesantren* education can play a more important role in building a religious and tolerant Indonesian society in the midst of the existing diversity (Fannani et al, 2018; Achmad, 2024).

D. Conclusion

This research reveals that Islamic boarding schools (often stereotyped as conservative or radical) are capable of becoming pioneers of progressive, inclusive religious moderation, as exemplified by Nasrul Huda Islamic Boarding School. It is showed on Pesantren' success in integrating universal values (human rights, Pancasila, interfaith dialogue) into the traditional "yellow books" curriculum, employing dialogical and humanistic teaching methods, and cultivating an inclusive environment collectively nurtured critical, tolerant, and nationally conscious students without weakening their Islamic identity. Contrary to external assumptions, internal transformation flourishes through empathetic religious leadership and creative adaptation despite limited resources. Further, the main obstacles arise from external conservative pressures and societal fears that moderation compromises religious authenticity. These findings challenge the notion that traditional Islamic education is incompatible with pluralism and position such institutions as vanguards of rahmatan lil 'alamin-based moderation. However, as a single-case qualitative study, the results lack generalizability; future research should adopt a multi-site comparative design across diverse boarding school contexts to validate and expand this integrative framework.

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