

Management Religious Moderation in Islamic Boarding Schools in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT:

This study examines the implementation of religious moderation management in Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia. Religious moderation (*wasathiyah al-diniyah*) is considered the most effective instrument for managing the nation's diversity, which consists of various races, cultures, and religions. The research questions are: (1) How is religious moderation planned in Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia? (2) How is the organization of its implementation carried out? (3) How is its implementation supervised? The research employed a qualitative method. The study was conducted in eight Islamic boarding schools located across Sumatra, Java, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, and West Nusa Tenggara. The findings show that planning is undertaken by the Family Council (*Dzuriyat*), school caretakers, and administrators. The organization of implementation involves the study council, Islamic boarding schools, schools/madrasahs, and Kyai figures. Supervision is carried out by promoting values of tolerance, national commitment, anti-violence, respect for local traditions, and monitoring students. The study concludes that the management of religious moderation in Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia has been effectively implemented through the active role of these actors.

Keywords: Religious Moderation; Islamic Boarding School.

1. Introduction

Violations of religious freedom are becoming increasingly concerning in Indonesia. Data from the Setara Institute reported 62 acts of intolerance, 36 cases of blasphemy, 18 rejections of houses of worship, 10 prohibitions of worship activities, 5 cases of vandalism of worship facilities, 4 acts of violence, and 3 rejections of activities. Most violations of religious freedom were committed by non-state actors [1]. In 2020, there were 422 violations of religious freedom in Indonesia, of which 184 were carried out by non-state actors, such

as community groups, individuals, and mass organizations.

One of the non-state actors often identified is mass organizations (*ormas*), which are usually led by religious leaders (*kyai*) who reside in Islamic boarding schools (*pondok pesantren*). The *pesantren* is a distinctive Indonesian educational institution. Historically and up to the present, Indonesia has two main types of educational institutions: nationally based schools and Islamic-based education known as *pesantren*. Historical records indicate that *pesantren* existed before the

establishment of the Republic of Indonesia, making them one of the most deeply rooted educational institutions in the country. Students (*santri*) who study in *pesantren* generally come from diverse backgrounds, with varied ethnicities, languages, and cultures. Therefore, diversity is a common feature within the profile of *pesantren*. For this reason, the teaching of religious moderation is commonly practiced in *pesantren*.

In general, *pesantren* communities already practice moderate behavior, although it has not been widely addressed within structured planning frameworks. This means there are ongoing efforts to guide *pesantren* learning toward the principles of religious moderation, such as adopting a middle path (*tawassuth*). *Santri* are taught moderation when discussing issues that involve pros and cons, as well as in forming opinions and conducting daily social interactions wisely.

Religious moderation (*wasathiyah al-diniyah*) is believed to be one of the most effective instruments for managing the megadiversity of Indonesia, whose population consists of various ethnic groups, cultures, and religions. Therefore, the teaching of religious moderation must be implemented across different aspects of life, particularly through Islamic educational institutions, both formal and non-formal, such as *pesantren*.

The grounding of religious moderation values is an essential aspect of the existence of *pesantren* institutions. As an indigenous Islamic educational institution in Indonesia, *pesantren* have made significant contributions to shaping Islamic civilization (*ats-saqofah al-Islamiyah*) by fostering comprehensive and contextual understandings of Islam that embody the principle of *ummatan wasathan* in national and civic life. The Islamic values developed in *pesantren* serve as the foundation for shaping the nation's character, inseparable from the prophetic mission of perfecting noble morals (*liutammima makarimal akhlaq*) [4].

Thus, religious moderation becomes a guiding principle for *santri* within *pesantren*. *Pesantren*, as the oldest educational institutions in Indonesia, are considered authentic to the nation's identity. They must now serve as a bulwark against various threats

to Indonesia, particularly radicalism and religious violence. Repeated acts of violence committed in the name of religion have exacerbated negative stigma toward Islam, which has become increasingly difficult to control. Cases of violence and terrorism in Indonesia are often associated with Islam, as though the religion itself is at the core of the problem.

The importance of managing Religious Moderation in Islamic boarding schools lies in shaping students and alumni to adopt a moderate attitude so they do not assume they are the only ones who are correct in religious practice. This is why the researchers are interested in this theme. The implementation of religious moderation education needs to be carefully designed as part of the curriculum, learning syllabus, learning resources, curricular activities, co-curricular activities, and extracurricular activities. These may take both explicit forms (core) and implicit forms (hidden), ensuring that the values of religious moderation such as *tawasuth*, *tawazun*, *tasamuh*, *musyawarah*, *syura*, anti-radicalism, and the accommodation of local culture are considered in ways of thinking, attitudes, actions, and behavior.

2. Method

This study employed a qualitative approach. The choice was based on the consideration that the research examined the social setting of Religious Moderation in Indonesian Islamic boarding schools. The qualitative method provided flexibility in accessing the social situation so the research could be conducted naturally. The study sought to understand rational reality as a subjective reality, particularly among members of Islamic boarding schools. Data collection techniques included observation and in-depth interviews. Data were gathered directly in the field as well as through the Google Form platform.

The study was conducted in several Islamic boarding schools across major islands of Indonesia, namely Sumatra, Java, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, and West Nusa Tenggara. Specifically, these included Yogyakarta (Pondok Pesantren Krapyak), East Java (Pondok Pesantren Al Hikam Malang and Pondok Pesantren Syabilurosyad Gasek Malang), Bengkulu (Pondok Pesantren Hidayatul Qomariyah), South

Sumatra (Pondok Pesantren Muqimus, Palembang), West Kalimantan (Pondok Pesantren Al Ikhlas, Pontianak), South Sulawesi (Pondok Pesantren As'adiyah, Sengkang, Makassar), and West Nusa Tenggara (Pondok Pesantren Al Irsyad, Lombok). Data analysis followed Spradley's Model, consisting of (1) domain analysis, (2) taxonomic analysis, (3) componential analysis, and (4) cultural theme analysis [12].

3. Results and Discussion

The study revealed several important findings related to the management of Religious Moderation in Islamic boarding schools. In the initial stage, the researchers sought to understand the schools' knowledge of Religious Moderation. The results from the Google Form are presented below. The researchers found that almost all Islamic boarding schools had already heard about Religious Moderation, as shown in the following figure.

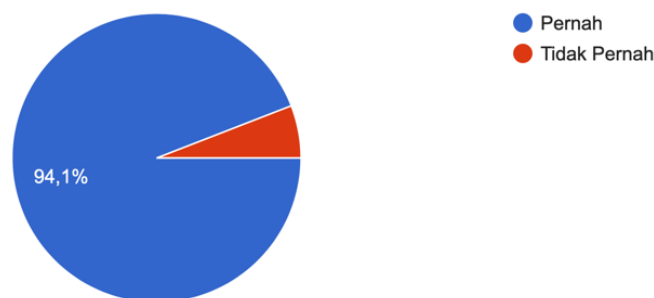


Figure 1: Knowledge of Religious Moderation

In addition to knowledge of Religious Moderation, the researchers also examined the cultural profiles of the schools, specifically the extent of ethnic, tribal, and cultural diversity among their students. The data indicated that 52% of Islamic boarding

schools were attended by students from various ethnic backgrounds. This shows that more than half of the schools had a diverse student body, as illustrated in the following figure.

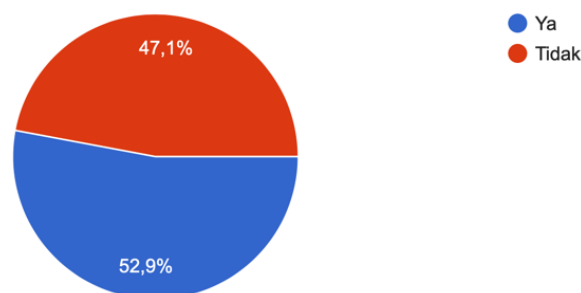


Figure 2: Ethnic Diversity of Students in Islamic Boarding Schools

One example is Pondok Pesantren Al Hikam Malang. The distinctiveness of its educational and teaching system (*ta'lim ma'badī*) lies in three approaches: the Care Pattern, the Teaching Pattern, and the Student Life Pattern. The Care Pattern has the mission of providing advice, religious guidance, assistance in addressing life challenges, and solutions to *fiqh* issues in society, with the goal of shaping students who are faithful, knowledgeable,

and virtuous, with broad insights. The Teaching Pattern (*dirosah*) refers to classroom learning conducted by teachers (*asatidz*), aimed at developing students' intellectual capacity through instructional activities (cognition). The Student Life Pattern serves as an institution that supports students in self-actualization and the transformation of knowledge to achieve the educational objectives

formulated by Pondok Pesantren Al Hikam Malang [10].

Religious Moderation activities in Islamic boarding schools are carried out through the internalization of values in subjects, such as linking lessons to Indonesia's diversity, recognizing that the country consists of many ethnic groups, religions, and languages (based on interview results). These activities are planned in advance, beginning with meetings involving the principal, vice principal, teachers, administrative staff, and dormitory supervisors to determine their form and implementation. Another activity is the parade, especially during Santri Day, where students wear traditional clothing from across the archipelago. This practice helps them understand Indonesia's cultural and clothing diversity and realize that such diversity is unavoidable and must be acknowledged, both during their time in the Islamic boarding school and after completing their studies [17].

In addition, Religious Moderation activities in schools are carried out through guidance provided by dormitory supervisors, *kyai*, *mudir*, and teachers, emphasizing that students come from different regions of Indonesia. This is done to instill in students the understanding that they must respect one another and prioritize unity over differences [13].

The Religious Moderation program also provides direction to teachers and educational staff on various occasions, such as ceremonies and annual meetings, stressing that as educators they must set an example for students, particularly in practicing tolerance among fellow teachers, staff, and students from diverse backgrounds. It also reinforces that Islam is a religion of *rahmatan lil alamin* [20].

Teachers are involved in various stages of the program, starting from initial planning meetings to

determine the activities to be carried out, including preparation meetings. Although not all teachers are directly involved—only the designated team—their representation is considered sufficient. Once preparations are deemed complete, the plan is communicated to those responsible for implementation, including teachers, dormitory supervisors, and students. This ensures that the planned activities are carried out accordingly. If challenges arise, teachers are also involved in decision-making to resolve those issues [22].

For implementation, the vice principal explained that activities are first planned through meetings with the principal, vice principal, homeroom teachers, and faculty to determine the programs. Usually, several preparation meetings are held, and a committee or team is formed, consisting of the principal, vice principal, teacher representatives, and staff. Once preparations are completed and the activities are ready to be implemented, the plan is socialized to all participants, including teachers, dormitory supervisors, and, if necessary, students [21].

Most importantly, Religious Moderation is instilled in students through classroom instruction, dormitory supervision, and emotional and mental guidance to help them face differences. They are strongly reminded to avoid conflicts arising from diversity in the country. Supervisors also ensure that students do not bully one another, particularly over differences such as regional backgrounds [18].

Based on the above data, Religious Moderation activities in Islamic boarding schools are conducted through classroom lessons, dormitory programs, training, and guidance during report card distribution. These activities are carefully planned in advance through joint meetings.

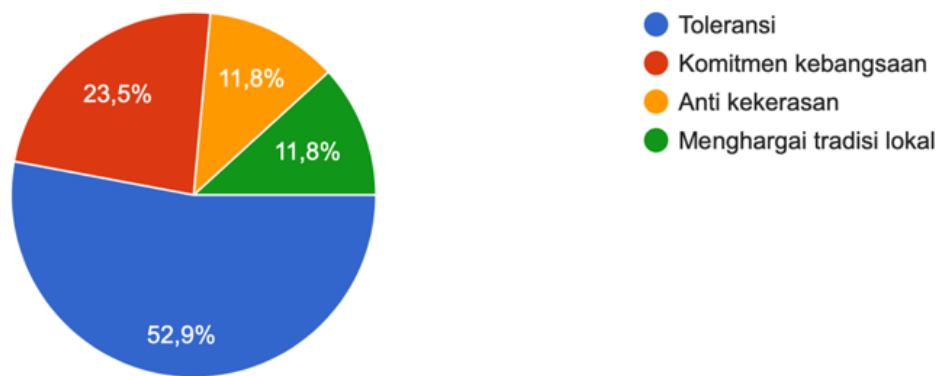


Figure 3: The Role of Kyai in the Four Indicators of Religious Moderation

Planning Religious Moderation in Islamic Boarding Schools

The planning of Religious Moderation begins with the establishment of procedures. Before carrying out various activities and programs of Religious Moderation in Islamic boarding schools, meetings are first held, usually through the Annual School Meeting or the Teachers' Council Meeting. These meetings discuss the forms of activities or programs related to Religious Moderation. Once approved, coordination is conducted with the foundation. When preparations are considered complete and no obstacles remain, the teachers or dormitory supervisors are called to implement the activities.

Before implementing any school programs, including Religious Moderation, the boarding school organizes planning meetings to decide which activities and programs are feasible. Reports are also

submitted to the foundation to obtain feedback and suggestions. Afterward, teachers or dormitory supervisors are invited to be informed about the Religious Moderation activities.

The naming and design of programs related to Religious Moderation also begin with joint planning through school meetings, usually at the beginning of the academic year. In these meetings, discussions are held on the possible activities, such as integration into lessons, Islamic holidays, Monday morning ceremonies, or the commemoration of Santri Day.

Based on these data, Religious Moderation activities in Islamic boarding schools are planned with predetermined procedures. The implementation of activities follows a procedure that begins with joint meetings to determine the types of activities and to assign responsibilities to each team.

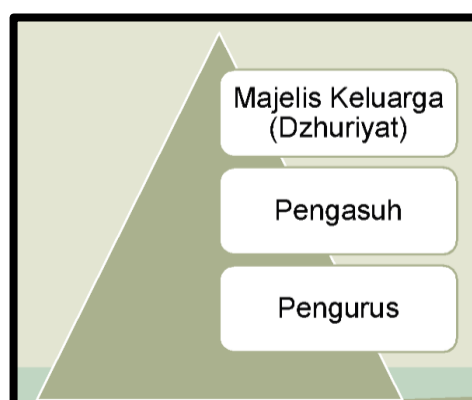


Figure 4. Religious Moderation Planning Triangle in Islamic Boarding Schools

Source: Researchers

Before implementing various Religious Moderation activities, a strong foundation is also analyzed as the basis for organizing them, including the Qur'an and Hadith, Government Regulations such as Presidential or Ministerial Decrees, particularly those from the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Local cultural traditions are also examined. Therefore, Religious Moderation is guided by four pillars: national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence, and accommodation of culture.

The direction and objectives to be achieved are of utmost importance. Students in many Islamic boarding schools come from across the country and naturally have different backgrounds, such as language and customs. Therefore, Religious Moderation in Islamic boarding schools teaches tolerance, respect for differences, and the recognition that diversity is a normal part of society. Religious Moderation helps students avoid extremism and fanaticism in practicing their faith. Through Religious Moderation, students are guided to remain moderate, enabling them to understand the essence of religious teachings correctly without resorting to extreme attitudes or isolating themselves from differences.

Religious Moderation in Islamic boarding schools also fosters mutual respect and cooperation among students, as well as with the surrounding community. The lessons provided on Religious Moderation aim to instill openness and inclusivity. Most importantly, Religious Moderation offers a deep understanding of Islamic teachings, including their essence. This ensures that students do not fall into narrow or radical interpretations of religion. With this, students develop a more mature

understanding of religion and, furthermore, acquire a critical attitude toward social changes while being able to address religious issues or manage conflicts.

Implementation of Religious Moderation in Islamic Boarding Schools

The policies underlying Religious Moderation activities form the initial framework for Religious Moderation itself. In practice, Religious Moderation has already become an essential part of boarding school life, even if it is not always explicitly labeled as such. The guidance and lessons provided to teachers, staff, and students are infused with the spirit of Religious Moderation. The foundation of these activities lies in the principles of justice, balance, and tolerance, which serve as guiding values in implementing Religious Moderation. The programs also refer to Presidential Regulation No. 58 of 2023 on the Strengthening of Religious Moderation and the Minister of Religious Affairs Regulation No. 3 of 2024 concerning the coordination, monitoring, evaluation, and reporting of Religious Moderation programs.

In implementing Religious Moderation, Islamic teachings already command it, as stated in Surah Al-Hujurat verse 13, which serves as a foundation for practicing Religious Moderation in Islamic boarding schools. In addition, Presidential Regulation No. 58 of 2023 and Minister of Religious Affairs Regulation No. 3 of 2024 also provide legal frameworks. The unique cultural heritage of Indonesia, despite beginning to fade, is likewise considered a reference and foundation in organizing Religious Moderation activities.

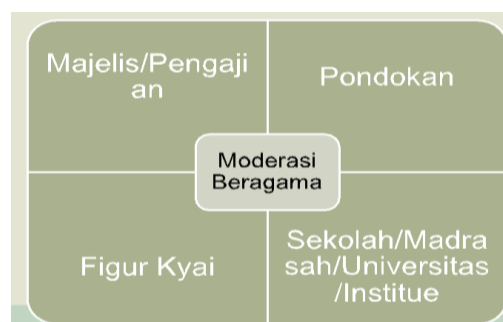


Figure 5. Organization of Religious Moderation Implementation in Islamic Boarding Schools

Source: Researchers

Religious study assemblies (*majelis pengajian*) serve as both a medium and an organization for implementing Religious Moderation. These activities typically include routine religious studies, *manaqiban*, *barzanji* recitations, and the study of classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*) written by the founders of the boarding schools and renowned scholars. The study of these texts often provides insights into Religious Moderation, as the *kyai* deliver messages on diverse scholarly opinions. Such lessons align with messages of tolerance, national commitment, non-violence, and respect for local traditions [23].

The role of the *kyai* as organizer is carried out alongside the role of teachers (*ustadz*), who organize various activities, including innovations such as interfaith programs in boarding schools during Islamic holidays (*PHBI*) or other national celebrations [24]. Supporting facilities are also available to promote Religious Moderation, such as libraries that provide literacy resources, books, and classical texts needed for teaching materials. In line with previous studies, libraries can function as centers for guidance, education, and outreach that are welcoming, open, friendly, and enjoyable [25]. Tolerance is expressed through mutual respect, particularly in dealing with differences [26].



Figure 6. Atmosphere of a Religious Study Assembly at Pondok Pesantren Al Hikam
Source: Researchers

Supervision of Religious Moderation in Islamic Boarding Schools

Work programs are efforts to improve the quality of organizations, both in terms of management and outcomes. For Islamic boarding schools, these programs aim to enhance institutional management and improve the quality of their students. The assessment of Religious Moderation activities depends greatly on the goals formulated beforehand. Most importantly, evaluating such programs is essential for understanding their impact, particularly in relation to the success of Religious Moderation initiatives.

The boarding school leader explained that the purpose of implementing Religious Moderation activities is to encourage students to live harmoniously, avoiding insults, disparagement, or bullying. Students must be able to coexist amid differences. Religious Moderation is also directed at fostering mutual respect among human beings and

among adherents of different religions. This is particularly important when students return to their homes, where they encounter diverse environments in terms of social status, economy, customs, religion, ethnicity, and other backgrounds. Therefore, the objectives of Religious Moderation are formulated collectively through joint meetings and then conveyed to teachers, dormitory supervisors, and students. To ensure its success, students are assigned tasks during school holidays to participate in activities within their local communities. These activities are later reported to their homeroom teachers upon returning to school.

One homeroom teacher stated that before report distribution, students are reminded to continue their religious practices both in relation to God and to fellow human beings while at home. They are encouraged to adapt well to their surroundings, uphold good morals and behavior, and avoid actions that might harm themselves or damage the

reputation of the school. In addition, students are given assignments to prepare reports on activities carried out during the holidays, whether religious practices or community service. Guidelines are provided for these tasks, such as the place of worship, type of activity, community involvement, as well as time and location. The reports must also be accompanied by photos of the activities.

4. Conclusion

The management of Religious Moderation in Indonesian Islamic boarding schools has been implemented in accordance with the fundamental concept of management: planning, organizing, actuating, and controlling (POAC). In the planning stage, comprehensive preparation involves teachers

(*ustadz*) and the student affairs board (OSPAM-Alhikam). Three key elements are evident: (1) the Family Council (*Dzuriyat*), (2) the boarding school caregivers, and (3) the boarding school administrators. In the implementation stage, Religious Moderation is carried out in line with the institution's vision and mission, reflected in four elements: (1) assemblies/study groups (*majelis/pengajian*), (2) dormitory life, (3) school/madrasah, and (4) the figure of the *kyai*. In the supervision stage, the implementation of Religious Moderation is largely centered on the *kyai*, involving five elements: (1) boarding school caregivers, (2) the boarding school chair, (3) the dormitory head (*lurah*), (4) the school principal, and (5) the vice principal for student affairs.

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