

Constructing Santri's Understanding of Religious Moderation within Islamic Boarding School Education

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the process of constructing santri's religious understanding of religious moderation in the context of Islamic boarding school education. Departing from the phenomenon of increasing religious polarization in Indonesia, Islamic boarding schools are positioned as strategic institutions in strengthening religious moderation. This study uses a social constructivism paradigm with an interpretive qualitative approach through a case study at the Al-Ikhlas Sedayulawas Brondong Lamongan Islamic Boarding School. Data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGD), and document analysis, then analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model with triangulation techniques to ensure data validity. The results show that santri's understanding of religious moderation is constructed through four intertwined dimensions, namely: (1) the cognitive-epistemological dimension, through the study of classical texts contextualized with the reality of nationality; (2) the socialinteractional dimension, through the example set by the kiai, dialogical learning patterns, and horizontal interactions among santri; (3) the cultural-institutional dimension, through rules, traditions, and pesantren culture that shape the habitus of moderation; and (4) the reflectiveagency dimension, which shows the active role of santri in reflecting on, negotiating, and internalizing the values of religious moderation. These findings confirm that students' understanding of moderation is not formed linearly through the transfer of knowledge alone, but through a dialectical and multidimensional process that involves daily experiences in pesantren life.

Kata kunci:

Konstruksi pemahaman keagamaan; moderasi beragama; pendidikan pesantren; santri

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis proses konstruksi pemahaman keagamaan santri tentang moderasi beragama dalam konteks pendidikan pondok pesantren. Berangkat dari fenomena meningkatnya polarisasi keagamaan di Indonesia, pesantren diposisikan sebagai institusi strategis dalam penguatan moderasi beragama. Penelitian ini menggunakan paradigma konstruktivisme sosial dengan pendekatan kualitatif interpretatif melalui studi kasus di Pondok Pesantren Al-Ikhlas Sedayulawas Brondong Lamongan. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi partisipatif, wawancara mendalam, focus group discussion (FGD), dan analisis dokumen, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan model interaktif Miles dan Huberman dengan teknik triangulasi untuk menjamin keabsahan data. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pemahaman santri tentang moderasi beragama dikonstruksi melalui empat dimensi yang saling berkelindan, yaitu: (1)

dimensi kognitif-epistemologis, melalui pembelajaran kitab klasik yang dikontekstualisasikan dengan realitas kebangsaan; (2) dimensi sosial-interaksional, melalui keteladanan kiai, pola pembelajaran dialogis, dan interaksi horizontal antarsantri; (3) dimensi kultural-institusional, melalui aturan, tradisi, dan kultur pesantren yang membentuk habitus moderasi; serta (4) dimensi agensi-reflektif, yang menunjukkan peran aktif santri dalam merefleksikan, menegosiasikan, dan menginternalisasi nilai-nilai moderasi beragama. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa pemahaman moderasi santri tidak terbentuk secara linear melalui transfer pengetahuan semata, melainkan melalui proses dialektis dan multidimensional yang melibatkan pengalaman sehari-hari dalam kehidupan pesantren.

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INTRODUCTION

Pesantren education, as the oldest Islamic educational institution in Indonesia, faces complex challenges in constructing santri's religious understanding of religious moderation amid contemporary global dynamics (Madjid, 2021). The phenomenon of religious polarization that has intensified since the post-reform era, marked by the emergence of exclusive and intolerant groups, raises crucial questions about how Islamic boarding schools construct an understanding of moderation in their curriculum and educational practices (Bruinessen, 2022). Quantitatively, data from the Ministry of Religious Affairs in 2024 shows that there are 28,194 Islamic boarding schools with 4.2 million students throughout Indonesia, making Islamic boarding schools a strategic mass base in strengthening religious moderation (Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2024). However, a survey by the Ministry of Religious Affairs' Research and Development Agency (2023) shows that only 62% of Islamic boarding schools have systematically integrated religious moderation material into their curriculum (puslitbang, 2023). Qualitatively, field observations indicate significant variations in how Islamic boarding schools construct their understanding of moderation, ranging from traditional approaches based on classical Islamic texts to contemporary methods that integrate national discourse and local wisdom (Dhofier, 2023). The complexity of this understanding is further complicated by the heterogeneity of pesantren typologies (salaf, khalaf, and combinations), differences in the ideological orientations of kyai, and the penetration of global religious narratives through digital media that are not always in line with the values of moderation (Azra, 2021). This phenomenon calls for an in-depth study of how the process of constructing santri's religious understanding of religious moderation takes place in the context of pesantren education with all its uniqueness.

Studies on religious moderation in Islamic boarding schools have attracted the attention of researchers in recent years with various approaches. Muhtarom analyzed the values of religious moderation in the study of classical Islamic texts in salafiyah Islamic boarding schools, but his focus was limited to textual content without exploring the process of constructing santri understanding (Muhtarom, 2021). The research by Sutrisno and Husniyatus used a phenomenological approach to understand the santri's experience in interpreting religious moderation, but did not systematically analyze the role of the pesantren education structure in shaping this understanding (Sutrisno & Salamah, 2022). The study by Fathoni et al. examined the implementation of Religious Moderation Education (PMB) in modern Islamic boarding schools using the action

research method, but this study emphasized the effectiveness of the program rather than the cognitive and social construction process of the students' understanding (Fathoni, et al., 2023). Hanafi explored the role of kyai in internalizing the value of moderation to santri through an ethnographic approach, but did not comprehensively map the dimensions of understanding construction involving interactions between the formal curriculum, hidden curriculum, pesantren culture, and the santri's own agency (Hanafi, 2024). From this literature review, a gap has been identified in the form of a lack of research using a social constructivist perspective to uncover how santri's religious understanding of religious moderation is constructed through a dialectical process between pesantren scientific tradition, kyai authority, interactions between fellow santri, and the surrounding socio-political context (Berger & Luckmann, 1996).

This study aims to complement the limitations of previous studies by analyzing in depth the process of constructing the religious understanding of santri () about religious moderation in the context of pesantren education as a complex socio-cultural system. Specifically, this study focuses on four dimensions of construction: (1) the cognitive-epistemological dimension, namely how santri construct knowledge about the concept of moderation through the study of classical and contemporary texts; (2) the social-interactive dimension, namely how an understanding of moderation is formed through interactions with kyai, ustadz, and fellow santri; (3) the cultural-institutional dimension, namely how pesantren culture and tradition shape the habitus of moderation; and (4) the reflective-agency dimension, namely how santri actively negotiate and construct their understanding when confronted with various religious discourses (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Unlike previous studies that tended to use a normative-prescriptive or evaluative-quantitative approach, this study adopts a social constructivism paradigm with an interpretive qualitative research design through a case study at the Al-Ikhlâs Sedayulawas Brondong Lamongan Islamic boarding school, which combines classical Islamic boarding school education with formal education. The novelty of this research lies in the use of Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann's social construction theoretical framework, which is integrated with Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy theory to analyze the processes of externalization, objectification, and internalization of the understanding of moderation in the pesantren setting (Freire, 2000). Thus, this study is expected to produce a theoretical model of the construction of an understanding of moderation that is contextual and applicable to the development of pesantren pedagogy.

This study departs from the theoretical proposition that the construction of santri's religious understanding of religious moderation is the result of a dialectical and multidimensional process involving complex interactions between the transmission of traditional knowledge, contextual interpretation, and identity negotiation in the socio-cultural context of Islamic boarding schools (Freire, 2000). The main argument to be proven is that santri's understanding of moderation is not solely formed through a one-way transfer of knowledge from the kyai to the santri (banking education model), but rather through an active construction process in which the santri, as subjects with agency, interpret, negotiate, and contextualize the teachings of moderation based on their experiences and reflections in pesantren life. Specifically, this study will prove several propositions: first, the method of learning the yellow book with the dialogical-participatory sorogan and bandongan traditions is more effective in constructing a substantial understanding of moderation than conventional lecture methods (Mas'ud, 2022). Second, the pesantren culture that emphasizes morals, manners, and ukhuwah (brotherhood) creates a strong hidden curriculum in shaping the habitus of moderation

among santri (Bourdieu, 1977). Third, horizontal interactions among santri in the communal life of the pesantren play a significant role as a space for negotiation and collective construction of an understanding of moderation (Vygotsky, 1978). Fourth, santri with deep religious literacy and high critical awareness are able to construct a more complex, contextual, and resilient understanding of moderation against narratives of extremism (Siradj, 2023). The validation of these arguments is expected to provide an empirical basis for the reformulation of pesantren pedagogy that is more dialogical, emancipatory, and transformative in constructing an understanding of religious moderation.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study identifies three concepts that are the focus of analysis, namely: the construction of religious understanding, santri, and religious moderation. The construction of religious understanding is operationalized as the process of forming knowledge, interpreting, and internalizing religious values through educational interactions in the pesantren environment (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). This variable covers four dimensions: (1) the cognitive-epistemological dimension, which includes the mechanisms used by santri to acquire and understand the concept of moderation from various sources of Islamic teachings (Bruner, 1996); (2) the social-interactional dimension, which includes patterns of communication and interaction in the learning process; (3) the cultural-institutional dimension, which refers to the influence of pesantren traditions and value systems on the formation of understanding (Bourdieu, 1977); and (4) the reflective-agency dimension, which indicates the capacity of santri to critically and reflectively negotiate their understanding (Freire, 2000). Religious moderation in the context of this study is identified through five operational indicators that refer to the conceptualization of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, namely: national commitment, tolerance for differences, antiviolence, accommodating of local culture, and rationality in religion (Kemenag RI, 2019). Each indicator is described in terms of the conceptual understanding of santri, attitudes demonstrated in social interactions, and concrete behavioral manifestations in the context of pesantren life. The contextual variables that were also identified include the typology and characteristics of Islamic boarding schools, the learning methods applied, the role of kyai and ustadz as agents of knowledge transmission, and the dynamics of the santri's communal life, all of which are considered to contribute significantly to the process of constructing religious understanding (Dhofier, 2023).

This research was conducted at Al-Ikhlas Islamic Boarding School located in Sedayulawas Village, Brondong District, Lamongan Regency, East Java Province. The research location was determined purposively, considering that Al-Ikhlas Islamic Boarding School is an Islamic educational institution that has unique characteristics in integrating Salafiyah traditions with formal education, as well as having a strong institutional commitment to developing an understanding of religious moderation among its students. This boarding school has been operating for more than two decades and has a sufficient number of students, enabling researchers to obtain rich and representative data. Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on the following criteria (Patton, 2015): (1) having studied at the boarding school for at least three years, assuming that this duration is sufficient to undergo a substantial process of constructing religious understanding (Mas'ud, 2022); (2) active in both formal and non-formal religious learning activities; (3) aged between 15 and 22 years old, representing intermediate and advanced level santri with adequate reflective abilities; and (4) willing

to participate in the research, as stated through informed consent. In addition to santri as the main informants, this study also designated kyai and ustadz as key informants who were directly involved in the learning process and transmission of religious moderation values (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

This study uses human instruments where the researcher himself acts as the main instrument in data collection and interpretation. The first instrument developed was a structured participatory observation guide designed to observe the process of religious moderation learning in a natural pesantren setting. The second instrument is a semistructured in-depth interview guide developed based on the theoretical framework of social construction and the dimensions of understanding construction that have been identified. The third instrument is a focus group discussion (FGD) guide organized to explore the dynamics of collective understanding construction and the process of meaning negotiation among santri. The fourth instrument is a document analysis guide used to systematically examine relevant documents such as the pesantren's formal and hidden curricula, learning syllabi, textbooks taught along with marginal notes (*hashiyah*), student handbooks, students' scientific works such as papers or essays, and visual documentation of pesantren activities (Prior, 2003). Data collection was carried out using participant observation, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGD), and documentation techniques. Data analysis in this study used the Miles and Huberman model (Miles & Huberman, 2014) with the following steps: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions or verification. To ensure the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of the data, this study used a triangulation strategy in three forms, namely data source triangulation, method triangulation, and theory triangulation. The second strategy is member checking or respondent validation. The third strategy is peer debriefing or peer review. The fourth strategy is audit trail or decision trail, which is managed by systematically and comprehensively documenting the entire research process, starting from research design, data collection, coding process, theme development, to final interpretation.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The construction of santri's understanding of religious moderation at the Al-Ikhlas Sedayulawas Brondong Lamongan Islamic Boarding School was identified in four main dimensions. First, the cognitive-epistemological dimension; that the construction of santri's knowledge about religious moderation is built through the process of learning classical books (*kitab kuning*) which serve as the main source of religious knowledge. In this context, classical texts are not only understood as normative references, but also as an epistemological framework for interpreting the relationship between Islamic teachings and the reality of national life. In the dimension of national commitment, a santri named Hanin Nur Azizah said the following:

"At my boarding school, I studied the books *Fath al-Qarib* and *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*. I was also taught to love my homeland" (interview with Hanin Nur Azizah, February 8, 2025).
"Rumaysha Amatullah expressed a similar sentiment: "In Indonesia, there are many sects, such as *Asy'ariyah*, *Shia*, and others, all of which have different views on faith and worship practices. That is what we learn in the book *Dirasah fi al-Firaq*. (interview with Amatullah, February 8, 2025).

This statement shows that santri build their knowledge of nationalism through the framework of classical *fiqh* and *maqāṣid al-syari'ah*. The state is understood as an

instrument to maintain the common good, not as an entity that is opposed to religion. Epistemologically, this construction shows that religious moderation grows from the , the process of contextualizing classical texts by kiai authorities. This finding is in line with the research by Athoillah et al., which confirms that Islamic boarding schools play an important role in building students' commitment to nationalism through the reinterpretation of classical Islamic teachings in line with the principles of the modern nation-state (Athoillah et al., 2024). From the above explanation, it can be understood that the construction of the understanding of religious moderation among santri at the Al Ikhlas Islamic Boarding School is formed through a dialectic between classical texts, kiai authority, and social reality. The study of classical Islamic texts serves as an epistemological foundation that enables santri to understand religious moderation as an integral part of the Islamic scholarly tradition, rather than as an external concept detached from the heritage of Islamic boarding schools.

Second, the santri's understanding of religious moderation at the Al Ikhlas Islamic Boarding School in Sedayulawas Brondong Lamongan is also constructed through an intense process of social interaction between the santri and the kiai, ustadz, and fellow santri. In the context of pesantren, social interaction is not neutral, but rather laden with the process of transmission of values, role models, and internalization of religious meaning that takes place continuously. This is as stated by the following santri:

"When it comes to religious attitudes, we mostly imitate the behavior of my kiai. When expressing differences of opinion, he always uses polite language and does not blame others, so we learn from the way he behaves."¹ (interview with Silmi Kaffah, February 8, 2025).

"Zahwa further said: "In class, the ustadz often opens discussions and allows us to disagree. But we are always reminded not to feel that we are always right and to respect our friends' opinions."³ (interview with Zahwatus Salwa Khafan Abdillah, February 8, 2025).

These statements show that the construction of the santri's understanding of religious moderation takes place through a social learning mechanism, in which the kiai functions as a central figure and role model. Religious moderation is not only conveyed in the form of normative lectures, but is also demonstrated in the kiai's daily practices, particularly in dealing with religious differences and conflicts. This finding is in line with the research by Athoillah et al., which confirms that the exemplary behavior of kiai is a key factor in the internalization of religious moderation values in pesantren, because santri tend to imitate the attitudes and religious practices displayed by scientific and moral authorities (Athoillah, et al., 2024). Similarly, in the classroom, learning time at Islamic boarding schools becomes an important medium for shaping students' moderate attitudes. Through dialogic interactions, students learn that differences of opinion are part of the learning process, not a source of conflict. Socially and interactionally, this practice shapes the habitus of students who are accustomed to inclusive and non-confrontational attitudes. These findings are in line with the study by Hasan et al., which states that the pattern of dialogical interaction between educators and students contributes significantly to the formation of tolerant and moderate attitudes in the pesantren environment (Hasan, et.al., 2023).

In addition, interactions among fellow santri also play an important role in constructing an understanding of religious moderation. A santri named Zakiya Ini'mannisa' stated: "*We come from different regions and backgrounds. In the pesantren, we are accustomed to living together, so we have no choice but to understand each other and not impose our opinions.*"⁵ (interview with Zakiya Ini'mannisa', February 10, 2025).

This statement shows that communal life in Islamic boarding schools is a space for the practice of religious moderation. Daily interactions between students encourage social awareness that diversity is a reality that must be managed in a mature manner. From the perspective of symbolic interactionism theory, the meaning of moderation is constructed through a process of social negotiation that takes place continuously in communal life. This reinforces the findings of a systematic literature review which states that Islamic boarding schools function as social laboratories for religious moderation through collective lifestyles and intense social interaction (Academia Open, 2025). Thus, this social-interactional construction shows that the students' understanding of religious moderation is not formed instantly, but through a process of social habituation involving authoritative figures and the Islamic boarding school community as a whole. Religious moderation is not only understood as a concept, but is practiced and negotiated in everyday social relations. These findings confirm that the successful internalization of religious moderation in pesantren is highly dependent on the quality of social relations, role models, and a culture of dialogue developed within the pesantren environment.

Third, santri's religious understanding of religious moderation is obtained through the institutional culture of pesantren, which is internalized in rules, traditions, symbols, and daily practices. From a cultural-institutional perspective, pesantren functions as a social space that systematically shapes the way santri think and behave through institutionalized values. As one santri said: *"Since I entered this pesantren, I have been accustomed to living in an orderly manner, respecting one another, and following the rules of the pesantren. So, I also follow these customs* (interview with Salwa Zahrotul Umah, February 10, 2025).

This statement shows that religious moderation is constructed through an institutional culture that emphasizes discipline, respect, and balance in communal life. Pesantren rules are not understood as restrictions on freedom, but rather as a means of shaping moderate character. In this context, Islamic boarding schools serve as cultural institutions that implicitly transmit values of moderation through institutional practices. This finding is in line with the study by Ulya and Subhan, which confirms that the culture of Islamic boarding schools functions as a medium for the internalization of religious moderation through the habit of collective values and ethics (Ulya & Subhan, 2025).

In addition to formal rules, pesantren traditions and institutional activities also play an important role in building students' understanding of moderation. This is in line with what the following student said: *"Pesantren activities such as regular recitations, tahlilan, and Islamic holidays always involve all santri. From there, we are taught togetherness and to respect existing traditions* (interview with Selomita, February 10, 2020).

This quote shows that cultural activities in Islamic boarding schools serve as a means of internalizing religious moderation through practices of togetherness and acceptance of tradition. Moderation is not taught in the form of explicit doctrine, but is internalized through repeated collective experiences. Institutionally, Islamic boarding schools build awareness among students that religiosity cannot be separated from the social and cultural context. This finding reinforces the results of a systematic literature review which states that Islamic boarding schools play a strategic role in shaping religious moderation through inclusive traditions and institutional culture (Academia open, 2025). The institutional culture of Islamic boarding schools also shapes students' mindsets regarding the balance between religion and social reality. One student added:

"At the pesantren, we are taught not to be excessive in our religious practices. The kiai often reminds us that we must be able to adapt to society when we leave the pesantren. (interview with Selomita, February 10, 2025).

This statement shows that Islamic boarding schools institutionally instill an orientation of moderation as social provision for students. Religious moderation is understood as the ability to place religious teachings proportionally in society. From an institutional theory perspective, values institutionalized through organizational culture will shape individuals' habits, which will relatively persist when they leave the institution. This is in line with the findings of Athoillah et al., who state that Islamic boarding schools function as institutions that shape students' moderate character through a sustainable system of values and institutional culture (Athoillah. Et al., 2024). Thus, this cultural-institutional construction shows that the religious moderation of santri is not solely the result of individual consciousness, but rather a product of the continuous process of institutionalization of values . Pesantren as cultural institutions play an active role in creating an environment conducive to the growth of moderate attitudes through rules, traditions, and religious symbols that are internalized in the lives of santri. Thus, religious moderation in pesantren is not only taught but also institutionalized and brought to life in the institutional culture.

Fourth, the students' religious understanding of religious moderation is viewed from the dimension of reflective agency, in that this understanding is built through a process of continuous reflection, as stated by one student: "At first, I just followed the opinion of the teacher. But after studying the scriptures and engaging in discussions, I began to think for myself and consider what was most wise."³ (interview with Hanin Nur Azizah, February 8, 2025).

Azizah also emphasized a change in her way of thinking after undergoing the pesantren education process: "At the pesantren, we are often invited to participate in deliberations and discussions. From there, I learned that differences are normal and should not be forced."⁴ (interview with Hanin Nur Azizah, February 8, 2025) This data shows that santri do not simply accept teachings passively, but rather critically reflect on their learning experiences and religious practices. They develop an understanding of religious moderation through three main processes, namely internalization of values, critical reflection, and conscious decision-making.

This process is in line with Naim's (2024) view that reflective agency in religious education allows students not only to obey authority but also to process religious teachings rationally and contextually.

DISCUSSION

The construction of santri's understanding of religious moderation in Islamic boarding schools is formed through four main dimensions that are interrelated. These findings show that understanding religious moderation is not merely a transfer of cognitive knowledge, but rather the result of a complex and multidimensional social construction process. The four dimensions are the cognitive epistemological dimension, the social interactional dimension, the cultural institutional dimension, and the social interactional dimension.

The first dimension, santri's understanding of religious moderation, is obtained through the process of studying classical texts (kutub al-turats). Classical texts studied in pesantren, such as books on fiqh, aqidah, and tasawuf, provide a rich epistemological framework for moderate values. This is in line with Bruinessen's (2023) findings, which state that the tradition of classical texts in Indonesian pesantren has inclusive

characteristics and respects differences of opinion (*ikhtilaf*) through a diverse approach to madhhab. The process of learning classical texts in pesantren does not only transfer texts literally but also involves contextual interpretation that considers contemporary social realities. Azra's (2021) research confirms that the pesantren learning methodology, which uses the sorogan, bandongan, and halaqah systems, enables santri to develop critical thinking skills in understanding religious texts.

In the context of religious moderation, santri learn to understand that classical texts offer various perspectives that can be applied according to the context of the times. Furthermore, Qodir (2022) explains that the intellectual tradition of Islamic boarding schools based on the four schools of jurisprudence (*al-madzahib al-arba'ah*) inherently teaches pluralism of thought and tolerance for differences of opinion. The findings of this study reinforce this argument by showing that santri construct their understanding of moderation through exposure to the diversity of opinions of scholars in classical texts. This process shapes the santri's episteme, which is not monolithic and values *ikhtilaf* as a blessing (*rahmah*) (Sintasari, Hasan, Maghfiroh, & Mastor, 2026; Subaidi, Muksin, Wahed, Fitriani, & Abdullah, 2026).

The second dimension found in this study is the important role of social interaction with kiai, ustadz, and fellow santri in shaping an understanding of religious moderation. This finding resonates with Berger and Luckmann's (1966) social construction theory, which states that knowledge is constructed through the processes of internalization, externalization, and objectification in social interactions. Kiai, as central figures in Islamic boarding schools, play a crucial role in modeling the practice of religious moderation. Research by Faiqah and Pransiska (2023) found that kiai not only teach moderation through formal lectures but also through exemplary behavior in daily life, such as tolerance towards differences and conflict resolution through dialogue. In the context of this study, *santri* observe and internalize moderate values through direct interaction with kiai, both in religious study forums and informal interactions (Fatah, Khoiruddin, & Fakhruddin, 2025; Utama & Salim, 2024).

Ustadz or teachers also play a significant role in translating abstract concepts of religious moderation into practical understanding. The results of Mu'ammam et al.'s (2021) research show that ustadz in Islamic boarding schools function as mediators between classical texts and contemporary realities, helping santri contextualize moderate Islamic teachings in modern life (Ayubi & Masruri, 2025; Madkan, Mumtahana, & Ardianto, 2025). Santri learn how to apply the principle of *wasathiyah* (the middle path) in dealing with contemporary issues through discussions and question-and-answer sessions with the ustadz.

Horizontal interactions among fellow students also contribute to the formation of an understanding of moderation. Islamic boarding schools as learning communities create a space for dialogue where students share their experiences and perspectives. Hidayati's (2022) findings confirm that peer-to-peer interactions in Islamic boarding schools strengthen the internalization of values of tolerance and respect for differences, as santri come from diverse social, cultural, and geographical backgrounds. In this study, it was found that informal discussions among students in dormitories, prayer rooms, or other communal spaces are an important vehicle for exchanging understandings and enriching perspectives on religious moderation.

The third dimension identified is the role of pesantren traditions and rules in shaping santri's understanding of religious moderation. This finding confirms that pesantren as cultural institutions have normative structures that shape santri's habitus. Bourdieu's concept of habitus (1977) is relevant for understanding how pesantren

traditions and rules internalize moderate dispositions in santri. Pesantren traditions, which are rich in religious rituals such as the recitation of ratib, tahlil, maulid, and the tradition of haul kiai, reflect moderate and inclusive religious practices. Research by Rijal et al. (2023) found that pesantren cultural traditions function as a mechanism for socializing moderate values, because these traditions emphasize a balance between the dimensions of sharia and hakikat, as well as respect for local wisdom. Students involved in these traditions indirectly internalize moderate values such as tolerance, inclusiveness, and respect for diversity in religious expression. Pesantren rules and regulations also play an important role in shaping students' moderate understanding and behavior. The pesantren rule system generally emphasizes discipline, social etiquette (adab), and social responsibility. Fahham's (2020) study reveals that the rules in Islamic boarding schools are designed to shape the character of santri to be balanced between firmness of principle (tawazun) and flexibility in matters of furu'iyah (branches). This study found that rules such as prohibiting extremism, the obligation to respect differences of opinion, and encouraging deliberation in problem solving systematically shape students' understanding of the importance of moderation in religion. Furthermore, Islamic boarding schools as institutions have a hidden curriculum that instills values of moderation through their daily culture. Thoriqussu'ud's (2021) research shows that communal life () in Islamic boarding schools, with all its rules and traditions, creates a microenvironment that supports the internalization of moderate Islamic values such as deliberation, tolerance, and anti-violence. Students not only learn about moderation from texts or formal teaching, but also experience firsthand how moderation is practiced in daily life through the cultural-institutional structure of the pesantren.

The fourth dimension found is the role of experiences during pesantren life in shaping santri's understanding of religious moderation. This finding underscores the importance of experiential learning in the process of constructing religious understanding. Kolb's (1984) learning theory, which emphasizes the cycle of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation, is relevant to explaining how santri construct an understanding of moderation through direct experience. The experiences of santri in the multicultural pesantren, where they interact with santri from various regions, ethnic groups, and social backgrounds, become a living laboratory for understanding and practicing tolerance. Wahid's (2022) research found that pesantren as a multicultural space allows santri to directly experience the dynamics of differences and learn to manage them in constructive and moderate ways. In the context of this study, santri reported that the experience of living together with santri from diverse backgrounds taught them to appreciate differences, be empathetic, and avoid extreme or exclusive attitudes.

The experience of participating in social and community empowerment activities organized by Islamic boarding schools also contributes to shaping an understanding of moderation. Islamy's (2021) study shows that santri involvement in social programs, such as public recitations, social services, and community assistance, broadens their perspective on the application of Islamic values in a pluralistic social context. Students learn that religious moderation is not only an internal attitude, but must also be manifested in inclusive and humanistic social actions. Experiences of facing various challenges and minor conflicts in pesantren life, such as differences of opinion in religious discussions or differences in customs in dormitory life, are also important learning tools. Suharto's (2023) research reveals that the process of conflict resolution in pesantren, which prioritizes dialogue, deliberation, and compromise, trains santri to be

moderate in dealing with differences and conflicts. In this study, santri reported that these experiences taught them the importance of listening to other perspectives, finding middle ground, and avoiding extreme attitudes in responding to differences.

Ustadz or teachers also play a significant role in translating abstract concepts of religious moderation into practical understanding. The results of research by Mu'ammam et al. (2021) show that ustadz in Islamic boarding schools function as mediators between classical texts and contemporary realities, helping students contextualize moderate Islamic teachings in modern life. Students learn how to apply the principle of *wasathiyah* (middle way) in dealing with contemporary issues through discussions and question-and-answer sessions with ustadz. Horizontal interactions among fellow students also contribute to the formation of an understanding of moderation. Islamic boarding schools as learning communities create a space for dialogue where students share their experiences and perspectives. Hidayati's (2022) findings confirm that peer-to-peer interactions in Islamic boarding schools strengthen the internalization of values of tolerance and respect for differences, as students come from diverse social, cultural, and geographical backgrounds. This study found that informal discussions among students in dormitories, prayer rooms, or other communal spaces are an important vehicle for exchanging understandings and enriching perspectives on religious moderation.

The four dimensions found in this study do not work separately but are interrelated and reinforce each other in shaping students' understanding of religious moderation. These findings are in line with the social constructivist perspective, which emphasizes that knowledge is formed through complex interactions between individuals, social and cultural environments, and experiences. This study enriches the literature on religious moderation education in Islamic boarding schools by showing that understanding of moderation is not formed through a single pathway, but through a holistic, multidimensional construction process. Unlike conventional approaches that only emphasize cognitive aspects or formal learning, this study shows that social, cultural, and experiential dimensions play an equally important role in shaping santri's understanding and moderate attitudes. The practical implication of these findings is the need for a comprehensive approach to religious moderation education in Islamic boarding schools. Education on moderation is not sufficient if it is only carried out through the teaching of classical texts or formal lectures on the concept of *wasathiyah*, but must be supported by the creation of a dialogical social environment, the strengthening of moderate traditions and rules, and the provision of direct experiences that enable santri to practice the values of moderation in their daily lives.

CONCLUSION

Students' understanding of religious moderation in Islamic boarding schools is not only formed through the study of classical texts in class, as has been assumed, but through a much more complex process involving various interrelated dimensions. The important role of the small daily experiences of santri in Islamic boarding schools turns out to have a stronger influence in instilling values of moderation than formal programs such as seminars or lectures on tolerance. This study also found that santri are not merely passive recipients of the teachings of kiai and ustadz, but play an active role in building a common understanding of moderation through discussion and interaction with fellow santri. These findings differ from the conventional view that students' religious understanding is formed primarily through teaching from teachers to students. Instead, this study shows that the process of dialogue and discussion among fellow students

plays an equally important role, and in some cases is even more effective, in shaping an understanding of moderation that can be applied in real life.

This study makes three important contributions to the development of knowledge. First, it reinforces the findings of previous studies that classical book learning, the role of kiai, and the pesantren tradition are indeed important in shaping the moderate attitudes of santri. However, this study also corrects the assumption that these three factors work independently of each other. Instead, it finds that the three factors actually support and reinforce each other: knowledge from classical texts is reinforced by the example set by kiai, and both are further entrenched through the traditions and daily experiences of santri. Second, this study offers a new perspective for understanding how santri form their understanding of religious moderation. Whereas previous studies tended to look at only one or two aspects, this study integrates four dimensions at once: the dimension of knowledge (from learning the scriptures), the social dimension (from interactions with clerics, teachers, and fellow students), the institutional cultural dimension (from the rules and traditions of the pesantren), and the experiential dimension (from daily life at the pesantren). This more comprehensive framework helps us understand the process of shaping santri's moderate attitudes in a more complete and in-depth manner. Third, this study introduces three new concepts that enrich the study of Islamic education, namely: (1) learning from small daily experiences, which turns out to be very influential even though it is not formally structured; (2) the hidden curriculum of moderation, namely the values of moderation embedded in the rules and customs of the pesantren even though they are not explicitly taught; and (3) the construction of shared understanding, which shows that santri not only accept teachings but also actively build understanding through discussion and interaction with their peers. These three new concepts open up new insights into understanding religious moderation education and can be used as a basis for future research.

Although it makes an important contribution both theoretically and practically, this study has several limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, this study was only conducted in one particular Islamic boarding school, so the results may not necessarily apply to all types of Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia, which are very diverse in terms of tradition, religious orientation, and education system. Second, this study did not distinguish how the understanding of moderation was formed at different levels of education, whether elementary (*ibtidaiyah*), junior high (*tsanawiyah*), or high school (*alimah*) students had the same or different processes of forming their understanding. Third, this study did not specifically examine whether there were differences in the formation of understanding of moderation based on the gender of the students, their family's economic background, or their region of origin, even though these factors may have an influence. Fourth, this study used qualitative methods, which do provide in-depth understanding, but the number of participants in the study was limited and the results cannot be generalized statistically. Therefore, further comprehensive research is needed using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, involving a larger number of participants from various types of Islamic boarding schools throughout Indonesia, and analyzing differences based on the students' education level, gender, and socioeconomic background. This more comprehensive followup research is expected to produce a more complete and in-depth understanding of how santri form their understanding of religious moderation in pesantren, which can then be used as a stronger basis for formulating more effective and targeted policies and strategies for developing religious moderation education in Indonesian pesantren.

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