

## ISLAMIC EDUCATION

## Journal of Islamic Education

Vol. 8 No. 1 June 2023 Hlm. 810 P-ISSN: 2548-723X; E-ISSN: 2548-5822

# Significance of Islamic Education Institutions "Pesantren" in Strengthening Moderate Islamic Studies in Indonesia

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DOI:			
Received: 24 Mar 2023	Revised: 9 May 2023	Approved: 21 June	Available Online: 25
		2023	June 2023

#### Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji peran pendidikan Islam moderat dalam mengembangkan studi Islam di Indonesia. Pendidikan pesantren telah terbukti keampuhannya dengan meluluskan banyak santri yang bekerja di berbagai profesi, termasuk sebagai dosen kajian Islam di Perguruan Tinggi Islam. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dimana peneliti berperan sebagai pengumpul data primer. Peneliti mengumpulkan data dengan menggunakan wawancara, observasi, dan penarikan kesimpulan dengan menggunakan enam tahap pengelolaan data. Temuan penelitian telah mengungkap hal-hal sebagai berikut: Pertama, pendidikan Islam memperdalam wawasan keislaman dengan mempelajari kitab kuning menginternalisasikan nilai-nilai Islam moderat dalam pergaulan siswa. Kedalaman metodologi, praktik keterbukaan, dan pengembangan mindset berkembang menjadi tiga kekuatan Islam moderat di pesantren. Kedua, alumni yang berprofesi sebagai dosen secara konsisten menjadi corong moderasi beragama melalui perkuliahan, pengabdian masyarakat, sosialisasi sintesa pemikiran, pengembangan keilmuan, dan pengembangan kelembagaan. Dengan demikian, dengan kelebihannya, pendidikan Islam moderat di pesantren dapat melahirkan tokoh-tokoh bangsa yang mempengaruhi dinamika dan kemajuan studi Islam di perguruan tinggi.

Kata Kunci: Moderasi Beragama, Pendidikan Islam, Studi Islam, Pesantren

#### **Abstract**

This research examined moderate Islamic education's role in developing Islamic studies in Indonesia. *Pesantren*'s education has proven worthwhile by graduating many students in various professions, including lecturers in Islamic studies at Islamic higher education. This study employed a qualitative approach where the researcher was the primary data collector. The researcher collected data using interviews, observations, and conclusions

using six stages of data management. The research findings have exposed the following: first, Islamic education deepens Islamic insight by studying the *turats* and internalizing moderate Islamic values in student interactions. The depth of methodology, practicing openness, and developing a growth mindset are three strengths of moderate Islam in *pesantren*. Second, alums who work as lecturers consistently become the representation of religious moderation through lectures, community service, thought synthesis dissemination, scientific development, and institutional development. Thus, with its

advantages, moderate Islamic education in pesantren can produce national figures who

Keywords: Religious Moderation, Islamic Education, Islamic Studies, Pesantren

influence the dynamics and progress of Islamic studies in universities.

#### INTRODUCTION

Pesantren is an authentic educational institution in Indonesia undergoing dynamic development in curriculum and learning systems that effectively adjust to changing circumstances to address the genuine necessities of Muslims (Azra et al., 2007). It has the potential to significantly contribute to shape a seasonal generation capable of participating in the community as actual work in national development. Its existence serves as a center for human development, allowing them to find its identity and maximize its function as the caliph of Allah, responsible for maintaining a balance between nature, humans, and God's obligation. So far, this institution has performed an excellent job of producing a generation of people who adhere to Pancasila ideology, have a noble character, are religiously obedient, uphold the values of tolerance and peace, and humanize humans.

Several *pesantren* alums have significantly contributed to the national increase in various fields in the public and private sectors. They actively involve professionals based on their expertise and abilities, such as teachers, lecturers, researchers, traders, preachers, and civil servants. The graduates generally consist of two large groups: those who work in the government environment as civil servants or political officials and those who work or volunteer outside the government in various fields such as humanity, economics, politics, law, and applied sciences. Some people choose to become lecturers in higher education to devote their lives to teach, research, and do community service, particularly in the faculty of Islamic studies. *Pesantren* education, which emphasizes wisdom, openness, unity, and civilized and free guided teacher relations as essential principles, enables the generation to be inclusive, tolerant, and devoid of racism and fundamentalism (Aini, 2018). The fundamental idea encourages the development of highly educated scholars who are open and critical and strive to develop themselves to tackle new difficulties.

In recent years, Indonesia has focused heavily on the revival of moderate Islamic ideas as a response to radicalism and terrorism through the Ministry of Religion (Litbang Kemenag, 2021). Islam that upholds the values of mercy for all nature in a reasonable manner is not new in Indonesia, particularly among Muslims structurally and culturally affiliated with the most prominent religious organization, Nahdlatul Ulama. As adherents of the Sunni theology of Asy'ariyah and Al-Maturidiyah (Awaluddin, 2020), they always regard Islam as a religion that teaches the importance of not being radical or liberal in proportionality. *Pesantren*'s education can function as the power of seeding moderate Islamic values which are prominent in Indonesia.

Previous research has examined its education and its various characteristics. Van Bruinessen's work was one of them, as it explained how the *pesantren* functions as a place for Islamic religious learning and its intensive experience from year to year. *Pesantren* has evolved and improved the mode of teaching Islam, both in theories and in practices, over time (Dudung, 2018; Martin van, 1994). Azyumardi Azra straightforwardly reviewed this theme to describe the early development of the oldest education system in Indonesia and the impact of school education modernization on it (Azra, 2013). Hamruni wrote about the challenges and chances faced by it, as well as its dynamics in the current situation (Hamruni, 2016). The publication of research findings recently discusses the modernization transformation of Salaf *pesantren*. This paper examines patterns of educational change and adjustment in the *pesantren* in response to current issues (Shulhan, 2021).

This paper supplements previous works by focusing on the impact of moderate Islamic learning in *pesantren* on Indonesian Islamic studies. As the research locus, the *pesantren* and its dynamics play a strategic role in building the government to educate the nation through the Muslim community (Hadi & Anggraeni, 2021). The research focuses on the patterns found in this institution and their significance to Islamic studies in Indonesia. Although many studies have discussed *pesantren* and religious moderation, something has yet to be brought up regarding the angles and perspectives used as themes in this study.

#### **METHODOLOGY**

The research implemented a qualitative research method. Qualitative research investigates specific issues from a particular point of view (J. W. Creswell, 2014, p. 120). Purposive

sampling is the determination to choose the population or sample of this research which allows researchers to select research targets with specific considerations based on rational scientific arguments. Purposive sampling allows researchers to select the subjects under study to thoroughly examine by using scientific principles (Creswell, 2009). This study's subjects are *pesantren* institutions, while the object is the contributions of its Islamic education, particularly religious moderation on Islamic studies in Indonesia.

The data collection and analysis tools used here were interview and observation techniques. The researcher is self-served as a critical instrument in the data collection process. It encourages them to return to the lab or subject location to collect data from the primary resource to obtain data from the source to make decisions in the conclusion stage (Sugiyono, 2014). Researchers at the research site must interact directly with those subjects to reach valuable information supporting research data. Researchers can use all their senses and emotions to gather information from research subjects.

The analytical technique used here is a six-step procedure. First, perform data coding and transcription. Second, the researcher actively collects and analyzes data simultaneously. Third, read the data several times to correct and evaluate its validity. Fourth, the researcher thoroughly examines the findings data. Fifth, examine the data from various angles. Sixth is the process of completion (Creswell, 2014). The data analysis technique described above is to obtain valid and accountable data, allowing researchers to move more quickly to the conclusion stage.

#### **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The research findings are as follows. The first, moderate Islamic education in *pesantren*, includes advancing sensible Islamic sciences, its practice in the dormitory, and strengthening it there.

Table 1. Moderate Islamic Education in *Pesantren* 

No.	Part
1	The advancement of sensible Islamic sciences
2	The practice of it in the dormitory in moderate
	manner
3	The strengthening of moderate Islam capacities
4	Global citizen building

The second, *pesantren* alums who teach Islamic studies on Islamic campuses under the Ministry of Religious Affairs become agents of moderate Islam strengthening through

lecturing, research, community service, scientific thought and development, and the establishment of higher education.

Table 2. Contribution of *Pesantren*'s alums to Islamic Studies

No.	Part
1	Becoming an agent of Moderate Islam
2	The strengthening of Moderate Islam through
	lecturing, research, community service, scientific
	thought, and development
3	The Establishing higher education performance

#### Moderate Islamic Education in Pesantren

Moderate Islamic education in *pesantren* aims to provide students with a deep understanding of Islam so that they avoid doctrines that lead them to behave and act radically (Alam, 2020). It is also encouraged in this institution to ensure that children do not participate in a liberal understanding that is very permissive and emphasizes Islamic values and provisions while daring to behave in opposition to religious provisions. People who have the tension to radicalize will regard those who disagree as enemies or will be unfairly punished. Meanwhile, liberalism-contaminated people will open up and equate all religions without limitations.

In the *pesantren* educational system, moderate Islam has two ways to build student understanding. The first method is through *turats*-based instruction in intensive teaching. Every learning activity at this institution uses Arabic language literature written by world-renowned scholars from the Middle East and elsewhere. The books chosen are from the works of moderate scholars who can appreciate differences and spread wisdom in their daily lives. The book's teaching is based on the teacher's experience studying with his teacher before the end of the vicious meeting. When completing the book, the teacher systematically explains his scientific chain continued directly to the author. The continuity of the *sanad* of knowledge here is constantly maintained to ensure that the invited sciences can be accounted for and do not contain bias that is too far from the author's intention.

It is regular for authors of unique books, particularly in Sufism, to hide the secret digested by everyone reading them by himself in the context of religious knowledge and experience. Every Muslim needs a tutor guide with a good understanding and in-depth experience regarding direction from Murshid. However, this writer conceals certain secrets obtained by reciting them directly to the students; thus, he instructs them not to write them down, but they must memorize them. Through special meetings with

exceptional pupils, the teachers give the secret. For instance, people who read the Ihya Ulumuddin for the first time have different knowledge than those who read it after studying with people who have a knowledge chain that goes back to Imam Ghazali (Indriyanti et al., 2017). This method is a unique model of teaching nurtured and has been used to ensure that students acquire knowledge and *nur* of knowledge that serves as an incentive for them - people who have knowledge but do not apply it (Fontaine, 2022) will be denied the opportunity to practice it in real life by Allah.

The second is through interactions within the santri community that promote moderate Islamic values. The principles of *tawassuth* (middle), *rasmus* (tolerant), *tawazun* (balanced), 'til (fair), and ijtihad (just) were to develop the concept of moderate Islam in simple meaning (Azis, 2019). This term is functionally applicable and can be interpreted as a commendable character that protects a person from the tendency to act and be extreme on both the right and left sides of the political spectrum. In other words, moderation can be defined as a way of thinking, acting, and behaving based on the *tawazun* (balanced) attitude in dealing with two opposites that can be analyzed and compared. It is to find an appropriate attitude for the circumstances and does not contradict the principles of religious teachings and community traditions.

Several actual activities conducted by santri were to demonstrate the value of religious moderation in the *pesantren* circumstance. First, interaction with other students from various cultural, economic, and financial backgrounds necessitates a moderate attitude on the part of each student. They share a home and have different habits, hobbies, desires, and expectations. This condition shapes their thinking and attitude, enabling them to accept and respect differences. Mutual respect can be effectively realized if each individual can balance his or her ego with the rights of others to be respected as fellow human beings. Moderate Islam encourages its adherents to practice religious values inclusively and allows others to express their beliefs within certain boundaries.

Moderate Islamic education among the *pesantren* community significantly impacts the development of an Islamic worldview capable of adapting to the dynamics of social cohesion within the context of the nation-state (AR & Supriyadi, 2022). Moderate Islam in the education system led by *Kiai* has three strengths that can help to strengthen *Santri's* capacity. First is the depth of the methodology. The education system uses various methods to educate students, especially *salaf* mode. Several approaches are used in studying Islam, including a linguistic perspective ranging from grammar to stylistics.

Logic, such as usual *fiqh*, is also employed to develop knowledge among students and enhance knowledge openly while maintaining a pearl of wisdom. History, ethics, and sociology are the basis for scientific development in Islamic education.

They were second, nurturing openness. An open-minded attitude is also instilled in every student because openness, honesty, and justice are crucial to living together. Education of santri promotes egalitarian values that recognize everyone's equal standing before God, complete with inherent rights and obligations. An open-minded community will strike a balance between giving and taking. They openly accept whatever comes their way, whether pleasant or unpleasant, because they have the perspective that life is a process of maturation in which the input of happiness serves as a motivation to improve their quality and the input of sadness as a material for self-evaluation. This openness can bring social sense to feel the suffering of others, making it difficult to harm them to fulfill personal desires.

Third, developing a growth mindset enables everybody to improve through struggling and maximal effort, as the belief is constructed that intelligence is malleable and could change through failures, learning, and growing (Rhew et al., 2018, p. 3). *Pesantren* education fosters the development of students' mindsets. It allows them to remain grateful for God's grace by placing their gifts according to their designation. At the same time, they are not easily satisfied with accomplishments because their entire life is a process of perfecting themselves before Allah. As individuals compete to carry out the goodness in totality, this pattern becomes the basis of motivation. People who have a growth mindset use the process to improve their quality because it all can be honed and developed.

The three items described above can be formed because they have two fundamental instruments. First, *santri* come from various backgrounds, families, cultures, and societies. They live together in the *pesantren* community by emphasizing themselves to behave openly and tolerantly. At first, they must suppress them to control their emotions and reduce self-habits that are inappropriate to the situation. Living in diversity builds a sense of respect for others, helping needs and working inclusively with limits of tolerance, and not entering the privacy of others, such as matters of other people's beliefs. A person's attitudes and actions are strongly influenced by habits rooted in him, especially those carried out at the age of development and search for identity. If, while at the *pesantren*, he is used to living in moderation and placing other people's interests above his interests, he will always act this way even though he has left the *pesantren*.

Second, It continues teaching the *turats* with various innovations and approaches adapted to the times. Studying the *turats* is one of the main characteristics of *pesantren* education, which is still practiced today. Unlike modern written works, the *turats* is notoriously difficult because it requires more qualifications and punctuation. To master the *turats*, students must first master the sciences of *nahwu* and *sorrof* and gain hands-on practical experience reading and understanding its contents. These activities take a long time beyond formal learning and require patience and self-disclosure. Gus Baha is an example of a *pesantren* who can explore the treasures of Islamic values through sources in Arabic. His appearance is straightforward, reflecting the Islamic boarding school education, which emphasizes simplicity but broad-mindedness and mastery of in-depth knowledge.

Efforts to accelerate mastery of the *turats* have resulted in various fast methods of practicing reading books, such as the *Al-Fashih* method developed by *Kiai* Hafidhi Syarbini. This method emphasizes the importance of understanding *wazan*, *shighat*, meaning, and sentence structure to comprehend the text's contents. *Kiai* Mufti Khazin also developed a quick and skillful method of reading *Al-Fatih*, a book whose strength lies in the technique of repetition until it is memorized. In response to students' declining interest in exploring the *turats*, this method is an alternative to making it easier for them to become skilled at reading books in a relatively short period. Aside from that, the *pesantren* is looking for an intensive program of deepening *turats* in the form of polar markers, similar to what is being done at the An-Nuqoyah Sumenep Islamic boarding school and the small Nubdzatul Bayan Bata-Bata Pamekasan.

The activity encourages students to learn about Islam through primary sources such as the *Koran*, *hadith*, and other sciences such as *fiqh* and *tasawuf* (Wekke, 2018, pp. 44–45). Understanding Islamic teachings from primary sources in Arabic differs significantly from understanding them from secondary sources such as translations. Understanding religious understanding through secondary literature will be influenced by the translator's understanding, resulting in an incorrect transmission of the original message. Patterns cause misunderstanding or are purposefully deflected to serve specific interests. This awareness must be maintained so that no Islamic teachers or leaders, even religious teachers, refer to non-primary sources. People who do not understand religious values from primary sources cannot have true principles other than those based solely on fanatically following the opinions of figures they admire.

Islamic boarding schools develop foreign languages such as English and Arabic to prepare students to become global citizens who value mastery of international languages(Shulhan, 2021). Students interested in studying foreign languages can participate in community-based activities in Islamic boarding schools that are taken intensively to train language skills. They can learn and practice foreign languages to prepare themselves as global citizens capable of interacting with citizens from any country, either directly or through virtual devices. This program gradually prepares students to travel abroad to participate in various student exchange events, continue their studies, or work.

#### Contribution of pesantren's alums to Islamic Studies in Higher Education

Many *pesantren* graduates work as lecturers in Islamic studies at public and private universities. They are spread nationwide on various campuses, ranging from small to large. Lecturers in this field who have graduated from Islamic boarding schools have good reading skills. They can learn about Islam by reading Arabic books written by Arabic and non-Arabic authors and ancient literature and modern manuscripts written by Muslim scholars today. It is one of the benefits of an Islamic studies lecturer with an educational background and learning experience in *pesantren*.

They only require additional skills to carry out their duties as university educators, namely research methods and academic writing. They must be capable of researching to fulfill one of the *Tridharma* of higher education. This activity is required for anyone working as a lecturer to develop knowledge for the benefit of the people. Academic writing is also necessary for every lecturer on campus to publish their research findings that can potentially improve the nation's civilization. If mastered by *pesantren* alums working lecturers, these two skills will provide an excellent opportunity to contribute to the country's development while advancing their careers as professors.

Pesantren alums who are Islamic studies lecturers and have the expertise to read the turats (classical texts)(Shulhan, 2022, p. 970), as well as the ability to research and write scientifically, can serve as role models for the spread of moderate Islamic studies on campus. Therefore, students with radical ideas are uncommon on Islamic campuses in Indonesia as they get accurate information about Islam. They can present inclusive Islamic ideas compatible with a country's social style of ethnic, tribal, and belief religions. The inclusivity of most Muslims here encourages them to make space for adherents of other

religions to practice their faith safely and comfortably. Although Islam is the majority religion, we are not authoritarian or arbitrary in treating minority groups.

On the other hand, religious inclusivity will lead to excessive permission and a lack of passion for preserving the dignity of religion and its community. It becomes risky if not anticipated, such as allowing land to be sold to people of different religions or exploring natural resources by people who do not share their beliefs. Every religious believer has an innate connection to his religion and will believe that other religions are incompatible with his faith. Suppose they have wealth derived from natural resources that they wish to donate. In that case, they choose institutions affiliated with a religion thought impossible for Islam unless there is a certain tendency. It must be emphasized to avoid excessive religious moderation.

Pesantren alums who become lecturers will become muezzins to strengthen religious moderation in all activities, including lectures, research, service, thinking, and scientific development. A lecturer's responsibilities as an educator include teaching, fostering, and guiding. On the sidelines of this task, they can instill moderate Islamic understanding in students so that the significance of this understanding for Indonesian Muslims is ingrained in their subconscious. They naturally act as polite disseminators of Islamic understanding through the dictionary they teach. Though unseen, their work significantly impacted the development of students' attitudes toward Islam and its movements. It is worth noting that almost no students on this campus hold radical ideologies and terrorism. It can naturally counterbalance transnational Islamic movements and their da'wah that incite hatred against other groups.

They are also involved in scientific and institutional development in the areas where they are implemented. Yudian Wahyudi, a lecturer at UIN Sunan Kalijaga and alumnus of the Tremas and Krapyak *pesantren*, is an outstanding figure in Islamic studies, promoting shocking ideas. He has emphasized the importance of mastering religious and applied sciences simultaneously to live a dignified life and maximize his role as an agent of development through knowledge, wealth, and power. He inspires many students to dream big and study abroad in America, Europe, Australia, and Asia. Furthermore, Sahiron (Sahiron, 2022, p. 37) is a *pesantren* alumnus concerned with advancing contemporary interpretation. He provides an interpretation model that focuses on aspects of the meaning and purpose of the revealed verse. Abdul Mustaqin also brought a fresh perspective to studying the Qur'an interpretation by proposing the maqosidi interpretation

(Abdul, 2019, p. 41). Amin Abdullah had experience as a *santri* in Darus Salam Gontor and consistently developed science from a philosophical standpoint with an integration-interconnection approach (Amin, 2016, p. 110). Imam Suprayogo also, as a *pesantren* cadre, contributed to advancing Islamic scholarship by proposing the concept of a knowledge tree (Suprayogo, 2006, p. 112).

Abdul A'la is an example of a *pesantren* person who succeeded in transforming IAIN Surabaya into a UIN Sunan Ampel while serving as a rector (Prasetyo, 2017, p. 1). Amin Abdullah also successfully transformed IAIN Yogyakarta into UIN Sunan Kalijaga during his tenure as a rector. When Iman Suproyogo led IAIN Malang, he transformed it into UIN Sunan Malik Ibrahim Malang. They prove that *pesantren* alums can significantly advance Islamic studies in Indonesia. They made significant contributions to scientific development as well as institutional improvement. Islamic boarding schools can produce generations who will act as agents in promoting religious moderation in higher education. Waryono is currently *pesantren*, and the madrasah director comes from *pesantren* society and adds a factual report of its contribution to Islamic studies on a specific side and Indonesian Islamic civilization in general.

The *pesantren* alums mentioned above have impacted the development of Islamic studies in Indonesia. In addition to the figures mentioned, *pesantren* strongly desire to strengthen religious moderation within the scope of the nation-state. They are mentioned here as concrete evidence of *pesantren* education's contribution to religious moderation, which impacts the advancement of Islamic studies in universities. With them, the state of Islamic studies would be like today, as it would only be occupied by people skilled in research and scientific writing who could not read classical books.

Many *pesantren* grads are eager to advance their science and methods to broaden and moderate their perspectives. They took advantage of chances provided by the Ministry of religious affairs, such as further study scholarships to the West in America, Canada, and several European countries. The Ministry of Religious Affairs (Mora) recognized early on those alums, particularly those who serve as lecturers in higher Islamic institutes, had excellent Arabic and memory skills but needed to improve in research, publications, and English. It has prompted the establishment of pilot scholarships in the form of lecturer candidates to allow students to continue their studies in the West, where they will be equipped with intensive English language skills and academic writing (Anam, 2022, p. 63). This program is still being improved and is now available to all students, including

recently graduated. More scholarships are available for Islamic studies and general degrees, mainly applied science.

This scholarship provides students with access to knowledge, skills, and a global network. They take advantage of Mora or other agencies' scholarships to gain knowledge and practice of scientific publications in developed countries where the results of scientific culture, research, and publications are rapidly growing. They study in the West to improve their scientific methodology and skills in organizing research findings and presenting them as journal publications. It serves two purposes: it improves memorization skills and oral traditions that are deeply rooted in Islamic boarding schools, and it instills moderate Islamic values that are expected to be the answer to global Islamic dynamics and terrorism. The knowledge gained in Islamic boarding schools is developed into scientific writing formulations to be disseminated to the global community using international language that everyone, regardless of religious background or class, can understand.

Proficiency in moderate Islamic literature in Arabic and scientific publication skills allow them to become voices for peaceful Islam through international academic forums, such as Nadirsyah Hosein, a lecturer at Melbourne University. *Pesantren* alums studied in the West solely as recipients then returned to Indonesia and expanded their knowledge in the archipelago after graduating. A new phenomenon has emerged recently: students who study methodology in developed countries after graduation do not return to their home country but instead work as lecturers or researchers. It allows them to represent moderate Islam as it has developed in Indonesia on the international stage.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Islamic studies are expanding rapidly in this country, particularly in strengthening methodologies and interdisciplinary approaches. The emergence of developing scholars from Islamic boarding schools who can study Islam from Arabic language literature must be expanded so that the scientific core of Islamic studies remains consistent as scientific methodology expands significantly. It ensures that Islamic studies at universities can become trusted and authoritative centers for spreading moderate Islam. The radical communities generally speak Arabic, read classical books, and study Islam to *asatidz*, who graduated from exclusive Islam. Meanwhile, moderate Islam is frequently expressed by people whose Arabic language skills must be improved to persuade the public. This phenomenon necessitates the presence of Islamic studies lecturers from Islamic boarding

schools who are familiar with the *turats* and have inclusive perspectives about religion and humanity.

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