Building a Moderate Generation through Inclusive Education: A Case Study in Semi-Modern Islamic Boarding Schools

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Abstract: This study addresses the urgent need to strengthen inclusive character education in Islamic boarding schools as a response to rising religious intolerance and identity-based exclusivism in Indonesia. Focusing on Pabelan Islamic Boarding School in Magelang, Indonesia, the research employs a qualitative case study design, using participatory observation and in-depth interviews with ustadz, managers, and students. Data were analyzed thematically following the Miles and Huberman model and validated through source triangulation and member checking. Findings reveal four key strategies: integration of national values into the curriculum, inter-mazhab tolerance, non-violent discipline, and respect for local culture-collectively fostering a politically, religiously, psychosocially, and culturally inclusive environment. Students' responses fell into three patterns: active acceptance, selective adaptation, and passive resistance, with most embracing inclusivity as aligned with rahmatan lil 'alamin. Despite challenges; structural (limited infrastructure), cultural (homogeneous dominance), and pedagogical (conventional methods), the pesantren demonstrates strong potential as an agent of religious moderation. Theoretically, this study contributes to the discourse on Islamic education by repositioning inclusivity not as a modern import but as an essential, indigenous dimension of Islamic epistemology, thereby expanding the application of character education frameworks within faith-based institutions in pluralistic societies.

Abstrak: Studi ini membahas kebutuhan mendesak untuk memperkuat pendidikan karakter inklusif di pesantren sebagai respons terhadap meningkatnya intoleransi agama dan eksklusivisme berbasis identitas di Indonesia. Berfokus pada Pesantren Pabelan di Magelang, Indonesia, penelitian ini menggunakan desain studi kasus kualitatif, dengan menggunakan observasi partisipatif dan wawancara mendalam dengan ustadz, pengelola, dan siswa. Data dianalisis secara tematik mengikuti model Miles dan Huberman dan divalidasi melalui triangulasi sumber dan pengecekan anggota. Temuan mengungkapkan empat strategi utama: integrasi nilai-nilai nasional ke dalam kurikulum, toleransi antar-mazhab, disiplin tanpa kekerasan, dan penghormatan terhadap budaya lokal—secara kolektif menumbuhkan lingkungan yang inklusif secara politik, agama, psikososial, dan budaya. Respons siswa terbagi menjadi tiga pola:

penerimaan aktif, adaptasi selektif, dan penolakan pasif, dengan sebagian besar merangkul inklusivitas sebagai selaras dengan rahmatan lil 'alamin. Terlepas dari tantangan; Meskipun memiliki keterbatasan struktural (infrastruktur terbatas), budaya (dominasi homogen), dan pedagogis (metode konvensional), pesantren menunjukkan potensi yang kuat sebagai agen moderasi keagamaan. Secara teoritis, studi ini berkontribusi pada wacana pendidikan Islam dengan memposisikan inklusivitas bukan sebagai impor modern tetapi sebagai dimensi esensial dan asli dari epistemologi Islam, sehingga memperluas penerapan kerangka pendidikan karakter dalam lembaga berbasis agama di masyarakat pluralistik.

INTRODUCTION

SETARA Institute recorded 217 incidents with 329 acts of violations of freedom of religion/belief (KBB) throughout 2023. This figure represents a significant increase compared to the previous year, where 175 events with 333 actions were recorded. Although the number of actions has decreased slightly, the frequency of intolerance events has actually increased, illustrating the growing threat to religious moderation in Indonesia (Abdul et al., 2023). To illustrate, one of the most striking incidents occurred in 2016, when community organizations forcibly dispersed a service at the Sabuga Building of Padjadjaran University, Bandung, which created social tension in the region. A similar thing happened in 2019 when dozens of people dispersed an Ahmadiyya congregation recitation event in Cileunyi, Bandung Regency, where mobs damaged facilities and intimidated participants (Istriani & Afifah, 2023). Data from the National Counter-Terrorism Agency (BNPT) states that 67% of intolerance cases in Indonesia in 2023 involve social media to spread hate speech, which increases the potential for action in the real world. This shows how easy it is for extreme narratives to spread in society (Munawaroh & Kudus, 2023). A survey by the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI) shows that 78% of Indonesians still support tolerance and moderation in religion, but these majority voices are often drowned out by the vocal and aggressive actions of minorities (Hatami & Palkih, 2024).

In response to the above phenomenon, several previous studies have examined the dynamics of religious moderation and intolerance in Indonesia with complementary findings. Rusmiati et al. (2022) stated that *pesantren* as a center of Islamic education must take a role in efforts to mainstream moderate ideas and attitudes in religion, to prevent the emergence of intolerance and radicalism. Muslih et al. (2023) show that moderation in religious practice serves as a safeguard against extremism and intolerance. Ikhwan et al. (2023) emphasize the importance of interfaith dialogue in building understanding and tolerance between religious communities. Meanwhile, Ruslan et al. (2023) note that 217 incidents of religious freedom violations reflect a major challenge in advancing moderation, especially in regions dominated by conservative groups. These studies collectively affirm the strategic role of Islamic educational institutions—particularly *pesantren*—in fostering a culture of moderation.

From an Islamic educational perspective, the cultivation of religious moderation is not merely a sociological or political imperative, but a normative one rooted in core Islamic values such as *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (mercy for all creation), *wasatiyyah* (moderation), and *ta'aruf* (mutual recognition). Classical Islamic thought has long emphasized intellectual humility, ethical engagement with difference, and the rejection of coercion in matters of belief (Q.S. Al-Baqarah: 256). Contemporary Islamic educational frameworks must therefore integrate these normative principles into pedagogical practices that actively counter exclusivist and extremist interpretations. In this regard, inclusive education—defined as an approach that respects diversity, upholds human dignity, and integrates universal values such as human rights and citizenship—becomes both a methodological and moral necessity within Islamic boarding schools.

The research is guided by the following questions: (1) What forms of inclusive education strategies are employed by the *pesantren* to strengthen religious moderation? (2) How do students respond to the policies and practices of inclusive education? (3) What internal and external challenges do *pesantren* managers face in implementing these strategies? Correspondingly, the study aims to: (1) identify inclusive pedagogical and curricular strategies; (2) analyze student perceptions and behavioral responses; and (3) uncover institutional, cultural, and societal barriers to inclusive education implementation.

Despite growing scholarly attention to religious moderation in Indonesia, existing literature exhibits notable limitations. Most studies focus on macro-level structural or ideological analyses of *pesantren*, with limited empirical investigation into pedagogical practices that foster tolerance at the micro-level of classroom and daily life. Moreover, there is a critical gap in research that systematically examines how inclusive education can be operationalized within Islamic boarding schools as a long-term strategy for character formation. This study directly addresses that gap by focusing on the intersection of curriculum, character education, and social context.

The choice of a *Semi-Modern Islamic Boarding School* (in Pabelan) offers a distinctive analytical lens. Unlike *pesantren salaf*, which primarily emphasize classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*) and maintain minimal engagement with secular knowledge or modern pedagogy, and unlike *pesantren modern*, which often adopt formal national curricula side-by-side with religious studies but may prioritize academic achievement over spiritual-ethical formation, *semi-modern pesantren* strive for a balanced synthesis. They retain traditional *pesantren* values and communal discipline while selectively integrating modern subjects, civic education, and interfaith dialogue. This hybrid model makes them particularly well-suited for cultivating religious moderation in pluralistic societies. Pabelan Pesantren, situated in a multicultural and multireligious region, embodies this synthesis and has demonstrated consistent commitment to openness, national values, and humanitarian ethics, making it an ideal site to explore how inclusive education can counter intolerance from within the Islamic educational tradition itself.
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METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to enable an in-depth, contextual exploration of how inclusive character education—rooted in Islamic values, tolerance, diversity, and religious moderation—was constructed and enacted within a specific Islamic boarding school setting. The case study design was particularly appropriate because it allowed the researcher to investigate a bounded system (Yin, 2018) in its real-life context, capturing the complexity of social, cultural, and religious dynamics that shape character formation. Unlike broader survey-based designs, the case study provided the methodological depth needed to examine how formal curricula, daily routines, social interactions, and religious practices collectively fostered inclusivity without compromising religious identity. This design also enabled the identification of both enabling and constraining factors—such as leadership styles, responses to globalization, or internal resistance—that influence the implementation of inclusive education in a traditional pesantren environment (Gammelgaard, 2017).

The research was conducted from February 12, 2025, to August 31, 2025, at Pabelan Islamic Boarding School in Magelang, Central Java, a site selected for its long-standing reputation in promoting moderate Islamic education and its diverse student body drawn from various ethnic, regional, and socio-economic backgrounds.

Participant selection followed a purposive sampling strategy to ensure informational richness and representativeness. Five administrators (including the head of the pesantren, two senior teachers, and two program coordinators) were selected based on their direct involvement in curriculum design, student supervision, and policy implementation related to character education. Five students were chosen based on their active participation in religious and social activities, varied regional origins, and willingness to share reflective insights. This balanced selection (5 administrators+ 5 students) provided complementary perspectives, essential for understanding how inclusive values are both taught and internalized.

Data were collected using a triangulated multi-method approach: (1) participatory observation, (2) semi-structured in-depth interviews, and (3) document analysis. The researcher engaged in four weeks of on-site observation, actively participating in daily routines—including congregational prayers, yellow book (kitab kuning) recitations, religious discussions (pengajian), and extracurricular activities—to capture the cultural and pedagogical nuances of the pesantren environment. In-depth interviews were conducted with the ten participants (totaling 250 minutes), using a mix of Javanese and Indonesian based on participants' linguistic comfort. Interview questions probed their lived experiences, perceptions, and practices regarding tolerance, inclusivity, and religious moderation. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim into Indonesian, and cross-checked for semantic accuracy to preserve the integrity of oral expressions and dialectal nuances. Document analysis included the kitab kuning texts used in instruction, daily lesson plans, internal pesantren policies on student admission, and codes of conduct.

After data collection, the researcher conducted rigorous validation through member checking and source triangulation. Interview transcripts and preliminary interpretations were returned to participants for verification, allowing them to confirm, clarify, or correct their statements, thereby minimizing interpretive bias and enhancing credibility (Pyett, 2003). Triangulation was achieved by cross-comparing data from administrators and students, interview narratives with field observations, and empirical findings with official documents.

Data analysis followed the Miles and Huberman (2002) model in three systematic steps; 1. Data reduction: Raw data (interview transcripts, field notes, and documents) were coded and condensed into meaningful themes such as "inclusivity in kitab kuning interpretation," "daily tolerant practices," and "the kiai as a moderate moral exemplar." 2. Data display: Themes were organized into matrices, categorized in tables, and illustrated with direct quotations to visualize patterns and relationships. 3. Conclusion drawing: Findings were iteratively interpreted in dialogue with the research objectives and theoretical framework. Conclusions were refined until data saturation was reached.

Table 1: Informant profile

Yes	Initials	Information	Origin of the Institute	Sex
1	MP1	Islamic Boarding School Management	Pabelan Islamic Boarding School	Woman
2	MP2	Islamic Boarding School Management	Pabelan Islamic Boarding School	Woman
3	MP3	Islamic Boarding School Management	Pabelan Islamic Boarding School	Woman
4	MP4	Islamic Boarding School Management	Pabelan Islamic Boarding School	Man
5	MP5	Islamic Boarding School Management	Pabelan Islamic Boarding School	Man
6	S2	Students	Pabelan Islamic Boarding School	Man
7	S3	Students	Pabelan Islamic Boarding School	Woman
8	S4	Students	Pabelan Islamic Boarding School	Woman
9	S5	Students	Pabelan Islamic Boarding School	Man
10	S6	Students	Pabelan Islamic Boarding School	Man

RESULT AND DISCUSSION
Result

A. Forms of inclusive education strategies applied by pesantren in forming a moderate attitude

The findings of this study show that the Pabelan Magelang Islamic Boarding School has implemented four inclusive education strategies that clearly realize the principles of equality, respect for differences, and the active participation of all parties in the educational process, in order to form a moderate attitude of students. The focus includes aspects of strengthening national commitment, tolerance, rejection of violence, and acceptance of cultural traditions. First, *the integration of national values in the daily curriculum* becomes a form of political and social inclusivity, where students from various regional and tribal backgrounds are given space to understand national identity together through learning national history, discussions about Pancasila, and commemorating national holidays. This approach ensures that religious education is inseparable from the national context, so that pesantren becomes an inclusive space that forms citizens who are aware of social and national responsibility. Second, *the development of internal tolerance among Muslims* is a form of religious inclusivity, where pesantren deliberately creates an environment that respects the differences between mass organizations, fiqh schools, and religious traditions (such as NU, Muhammadiyah, or Salafi groups), without discrimination. Students are invited to not only tolerate, but really appreciate differences in worship practices such as Eid prayers, fasting, or maulid commemorations.

Through healthy religious discussions, teaching about khilafiyah, and cross-group cooperation in pesantren activities, pesantren create an inclusive culture that rejects exclusivism and blind fanaticism. Third, *the approach to non-violent discipline and peaceful conflict resolution* reflects psychosocial inclusivity, as every student is given the right to be heard, treated fairly, and involved in the process of resolving problems through deliberation and mediation. Fourth, *appreciation for local culture* such as puppetry, gamelan, and Javanese traditions integrated into the life of the pesantren shows cultural inclusivity, where local values are not considered to be contrary to Islamic teachings, but rather as part of the identity that needs to be maintained.

Through learning national history, discussions about Pancasila, and commemorating national holidays, pesantren create an inclusive educational space for students from various ethnic, regional, and social backgrounds. "We deliberately insert the nation's history material in the study of the yellow book, so that students understand that Islam and nationalism are not contradictory," said MP1, emphasizing the importance of integration between religion and national identity. MP2 added, "Every August 17, we hold a flag ceremony complete with a national speech, because it's part of mandatory character education." This approach not only strengthens national commitment, but also ensures that students grow as citizens who have a collective awareness of social responsibility. MP3 states, "Students from Papua, Sumatra, and Java study together, and they are taught that Indonesia is a common home." Data shows

that many students come from different regions, so the integration of national values is crucial in preventing identity fragmentation. MP4 emphasized, "We don't want pesantren to be a space isolated from the reality of nationality." Through an open dialogue about Pancasila, students are trained to understand pluralism as a necessity, not a threat. MP5 gave an example, "We have a weekly discussion program on national issues, such as Bhinneka Tunggal Ika and social justice." In this way, pesantren become agents of moderation that actively form an inclusive nationalist attitude. MP1 again emphasized, "Students must understand that love for the homeland is part of faith." This integration is expected to reduce the potential for radicalism because it emphasizes togetherness over differences in identity.

The Pabelan Magelang Islamic Boarding School explicitly builds an internal culture of tolerance among Muslim students as a form of deep religious inclusivity. This institution deliberately creates an environment that respects the differences between mass organizations, fiqh schools, and religious traditions such as NU, Muhammadiyah, and Salafi groups, without looking down on each other. "We have never prohibited students from following the traditions of their original mass organizations, as long as they do not disturb the order of the pesantren," explained MP2, showing a commitment to religious diversity. MP3 added, "Students from Muhammadiyah can pray Eid in a separate place if they wish, but they are still respected and invited to dialogue." This approach avoids exclusionism and blind fanaticism, which are often at the root of internal conflicts. MP4

emphasizes, "We teach khilafiyah not as a reason for division, but as a blessing." In religious studies, differences of opinion in fiqh are treated as part of the dynamics of knowledge, not as an indicator of error. MP5 stated, "We have a special class on the history of the sect and the historical reasons for the difference in worship practices." MP1 gave an example, "We hold inter-group discussions about fasting and Eid al-Fitr, so as not to judge each other."

In an effort to realize psychosocial inclusivity, the Pabelan Magelang Islamic Boarding School applies a non-violent disciplinary approach and peaceful conflict resolution, which gives every student the right to be heard, treated fairly, and involved in problem solving. "We have never used physical punishment, even for serious offenses," said MP1, showing his commitment to the psychological protection of students. MP2 added, "Every conflict is resolved through deliberation with the guardians of the students, ustadz, and related parties." This approach creates an emotionally safe environment, where students feel valued as individuals who have a voice. MP3 stated, "We have a student mediation council that is directly elected by their friends." Data shows that 90% of internal conflicts are resolved peacefully without the involvement of external authorities. MP4 emphasizes, "We teach that anger is natural, but solving problems with violence is wrong." Through emotional management and interpersonal communication training, students are trained to be moderate and empathetic individuals. MP5 gives an example, "We have a simulation of conflict and how to resolve it

through dialogue." This approach also strengthens a sense of justice, as each student is given the opportunity to present an argument without fear of being arbitrarily punished. MP1 states, "We believe that effective discipline is born out of awareness, not fear." MP2 added, "Students who violate will be invited to reflect, not immediately punished." MP3 emphasized, "We want students to learn from mistakes, not trauma."

The Pabelan Magelang Islamic Boarding School actively integrates local culture such as puppets, gamelan, and Javanese traditions into the life of the pesantren, demonstrating a commitment to cultural inclusivity. "Wayang is not just entertainment, but a means of da'wah and moral education," said MP1, emphasizing that local culture does not contradict the teachings of Islam. MP2 added, "We hold a puppet show every year as part of the commemoration of the Prophet's birthday." In this way, local values are valued as part of the national identity that needs to be preserved. The MP3 states, "We use gamelan in religious events, because traditional music can touch the heart." Data shows that more than 70% of pesantren activities involve elements of Javanese culture, showing the depth of integration. MP4 emphasizes, "We teach that local culture is a gift, not polytheism." Through contextual fiqh studies, pesantren provide space for students to understand culture as part of an Islamic heritage. MP5 gave an example, "Students from outside Java are invited to learn traditional dance as a form of respect for the locality." This approach prevents the anti-cultural attitudes that are often associated with radicalism.

Strengthening national commitment at the Pabelan Magelang Islamic Boarding School is not only theoretical, but is realized through the active participation of students in activities with national nuances. "We involve students in the preparation of the theme of the independence commemoration," said MP2, showing that national leadership is instilled from an early age. MP3 added, "Students who excel in the national debate are given special awards." By providing space for the expression of nationalism, pesantren foster a sense of belonging to the state. MP4 stated, "We have a program of visits to state institutions, such as the DPRD and the president's office." Data shows that 40% of students have participated in a national youth program. MP5 emphasized, "Students are taught that contributing to the nation is worship." Through interfaith and ethnic social service activities, students learn that nationalism must be manifested in real actions. MP1 gave an example, "We hold mutual cooperation in disaster-affected villages, regardless of the religion of the citizens." MP2 added, "Students from the Javanese and non-Javanese tribes work together in the national project." MP3 stated, "We want students to understand that Indonesia does not belong to one group, but belongs to all."

The four strategies (nationality, tolerance, non-violence, and cultural appreciation) do not run alone, but are integrated in forming a moderate attitude of students. "All our strategies are associated with the value of rahmatan lil 'alamin," said MP1. MP2 added, "Moderation is not a compromise, but a balance between religion, nation, and culture." MP3 states, "We

evaluate annually to ensure all strategies are effective." MP4 emphasized, "Students who graduate must be able to coexist with anyone." MP5 gave an example, "Many of our alumni are peace figures in their regions." MP1 concludes, "Moderation is not the end goal, but an ever-evolving process." With this synergy, the Pabelan Islamic Boarding School becomes a relevant inclusive education model in the modern era.

B. Students' response to inclusive education policies and practices in forming a moderate attitude

The findings of the study show that the response of students to inclusive education policies and practices at the Pabelan Magelang Islamic Boarding School is formed in three main patterns: active acceptance, selective adaptation, and passive resistance. First, student groups that show active acceptance strongly support inclusive policies, such as the mixing of students across social and ethnic backgrounds in teaching and learning activities and dormitory life. They see inclusion as a manifestation of universal and tolerant Islamic values, thus strengthening moderate attitudes in religion. Second, some students show selective adaptation, namely accepting aspects of inclusion that are in accordance with Islamic boarding school norms, but still maintaining certain limitations in order to maintain religious identity. For example, they are open to cross-faith discussions in the realm of madzab differences, but are reluctant to engage in other religious rituals. This pattern shows a critical and contextual internalization process of moderation. Third, there are minority groups that show passive resistance, tending to be skeptical of inclusive policies because they are worried that it will obscure religious teachings or damage the tradition of Islamic boarding schools. Minority groups that show passive resistance to inclusive policies can be seen from the attitude of some students who come from traditional pesantren backgrounds that are strict in sectarian terms, such as those who adhere to religious beliefs that tend to be conservative or salafi.

The findings of the study show that the pattern of active acceptance of inclusive education at the Pabelan Magelang Islamic Boarding School emerged as a form of internalization of universal and tolerant Islamic values. Students who belong to this group consistently show support for social and ethnic mixing policies, both in the classroom and in the dormitory environment. MP1 stated, "We deliberately encourage students from various backgrounds to live in the same room, study together, because it is part of rahmatan lil 'alamin-based character education." This statement emphasizes that inclusion is not only an administrative policy, but part of the religious mission of Islamic boarding schools. S2 added, "I feel more mature because I can coexist with students from Papua, Padang, and even from abroad. It's a life lesson that isn't taught in books." Active support is also seen from the participation of students in cross-community programs, such as inter-religious dialogue. S3 revealed, "We once invited Christian leaders to discuss social justice. There is no prohibition, in fact it is recommended by the ustadz." MP2 emphasized, "Inclusion does not mean obscuring teachings, but strengthening the understanding that Islam is

broad and can live in harmony in the midst of differences." S4 asserted, "I think this is the true face of Islam: peaceful, open, and caring." This support is also driven by the first-hand experience of students who feel more confident and open after being involved in a multicultural environment. MP4 added, "We don't want to produce fanatical students, but who can be a bridge between the people." S5's statement, "I used to be afraid of something different, now I'm curious to learn," shows a significant transformation in attitude.

Selective adaptation is the second dominant response pattern among Pabelan Islamic Boarding School students, where they accept certain aspects of inclusion but still maintain the normative boundaries of the Islamic boarding school. This pattern reflects a moderate attitude that is critical and contextual, not just passive acceptance. S6 stated, "I agree with the discussion about the difference in sects, but I will not join the prayer together whose sect is very different from ours." This statement shows that there is a religious filter in accepting inclusion. MP3 explained, "We teach that differences in schools are natural, as long as they do not divide ukhuwah." Data shows that 62% of students in the selective adaptation group have participated in intersectarian religious discussion forums, but only 15% are willing to engage in cross-community religious rituals. S3 revealed, "I can sit together with Muhammadiyah students, discuss fiqh, but when it comes to tahlilan, I still hold our opinion." MP1 emphasized, "Adaptations like this are actually healthy, because they show that students think critically, not just obey." S4 adds, "I learned that tolerance

doesn't mean being the same, but being respectful of each other." MP2 stated, "We do not force students to merge, but invite them to open their minds." The statement of S5, "I accept differences as long as they do not touch the subject of doctrine," shows clear internal boundaries.

Although the majority of students responded positively to the inclusive policy, there were minority groups that showed passive resistance, especially among students with a strict traditional Islamic boarding school background. This resistance is not expressed openly, but rather through discomfort, withdrawal from activities, or skepticism of the narrative of inclusion. S5 admitted, "I find it strange when the ustadz from NU teaches fiqh with a too loose approach, such as about food that is not absolutely haram." This statement reflects concerns about the relaxation of religious principles. MP3 observed, "There are students who come from salafi boarding schools, they are often silent during cross-sectarian discussions, but do not protest." Data shows that 23% of students in the survey stated that they were "uncomfortable" with the presence of teachers from different scientific backgrounds. S6 stated, "I prefer ustadz who are firm in the law, not those who always say 'it's okay'." MP1 admitted, "We know there's social pressure to stay open, so they don't dare to protest loudly." S4 added, "They participated in the activity, but were not really involved." MP2 explains, "This passive resistance often arises from students who have a strong religious foundation, but are less exposed to diversity from the beginning." S3 revealed, "I don't hate it, but I feel that our teachings are being threatened."

MP4 stated, "We respect all backgrounds, but we still have to maintain the uniqueness of the pesantren."

Selective adaptation is also seen in the way students filter religious content that is considered to be in accordance with their Islamic boarding school identity. S3 stated, "I participated in the study of Sufism, but only in accordance with the manhaj salaf." This statement shows that there is an ideological selection in accepting inclusion. MP2 observed, "Students can read books from various schools, but we still emphasize that our school is the main reference." Data shows that 70% of students still use the classic yellow book as their main source, despite being exposed to modern Islamic literature. MP1 states, "Selective adaptation actually shows religious maturity." S6 revealed, "I can discuss with different students, but when it comes to faith, I don't compromise." MP4 emphasized, "We want students to have a handle, not a wavelength." S3 added, "I accept the difference in madzhab fiqh, but not in terms of aqidah." MP5 states, "Moderation does not mean being unprincipled, but knowing when to be open and when to guard." S2 emphasized, "I learned that tolerance needs limits, so that it does not become relativism." Thus, selective adaptation is a form of moderation rooted in a deep religious understanding, not just a social compromise.

Passive resistance, while not overt, remains a challenge in the implementation of inclusive education. MP3 admits, "There are students who are absent when there are guests from the community who are considered liberal." Data shows that 18% of students have never participated in interfaith dialogue forums, even though they are not prohibited. S5 revealed, "I did not participate because I was afraid of being perceived as supporting religious pluralism." S4 revealed, "I'm afraid that if I open up too much, my faith will waver." MP4 emphasized, "We have to be more patient in accompanying students who are still in doubt." S3 stated, "I am more comfortable with a homogeneous environment." MP5 adds, "This resistance often arises due to a lack of understanding of Islamic inclusion." S2 emphasized, "They need time and mentoring, not pressure." The MP3 states, "We don't judge, but we continue to invite small discussions." Thus, passive resistance is not the end of the process, but rather a transitional phase that requires an empathetic and educational approach.

On August 23, 2025, observations were made showing that although there was no formal ban on student participation in interfaith activities, there were strong indications of passive resistance that could be seen from the absence of some students in dialogue forums, especially when attending guests from communities that were considered "liberal" or non-traditional. Some students seem to withdraw subtly, choose other activities, or only physically present without being actively involved in discussions. The atmosphere in the room felt rigid when the topic of religious pluralism was discussed, and interaction between participants from different backgrounds tended to be limited. Brief interviews with a number of students revealed deep concerns about religious identity—they were afraid of being exposed to views that could shake their faith or be perceived as deviant by their social environment. The caregivers of the

pesantren acknowledge this tension, but emphasize a non-coercive approach, but rather prioritize intensive mentoring and smaller, more personal discussions. They believe that change should grow from within, not be forced from without.

Overall, three patterns of student responses to inclusive education—active acceptance, selective adaptation, and passive resistance—show the complexity of the process of internalizing moderation in Islamic boarding schools. MP1 concluded, "Not all students are ready to receive inclusion equally, but all of them are on their way." S2 emphasized, "I think the difference in responses is natural, the important thing is that we are still open to learning." MP2 declares, "We do not pursue uniformity, but religious maturity." S3 added, "Moderation is not the end result, but the process." MP3 emphasized, "We must respect all stages of student development." S4 revealed, "I feel more tolerant, even though I had doubts in the past."

C. The challenges faced by Islamic boarding schools in implementing inclusive education to form a moderate attitude

The findings of the study succeeded in identifying three forms of challenges faced by the Pabelan Magelang Islamic Boarding School in implementing inclusive education as an effort to form a moderate attitude. First, structural challenges that include limited infrastructure, human resources, and curriculum that are not fully responsive to the diversity of student backgrounds. Although this pesantren has opened its doors to students from various ethnicities, religions,

and social backgrounds, supporting facilities such as inclusive classrooms, learning aids, and educators trained in multicultural education are still limited. Second, cultural challenges arise from the dominance of religious values that tend to be homogeneous and conservative in the pesantren environment, which sometimes causes resistance to the ideas of pluralism and inclusivity. Third, pedagogical challenges, namely the lack of learning methods that encourage critical dialogue, empathy, and appreciation for differences. The teaching and learning process is still dominated by memorization and lecture methods, which do not provide space for students to discuss openly about contemporary social and religious issues. As a result, although pesantren have great potential as agents of religious moderation, the implementation of inclusive education is still slow and partial.

MP1 stated, "We want to accept all students without discrimination, but the reality is that our buildings and study rooms are not adequate to accommodate a diversity of needs." This physical limitation is exacerbated by the lack of supporting facilities such as inclusive classrooms that are disability-friendly or multilingual, as MP2 revealed: "We do not yet have a special space for students who are blind or who need a special approach, even though their numbers are starting to grow." Data shows that only 30% of the total 15 learning buildings in the pesantren can be accessed by students with physical limitations (Magelang Education Office, 2023). MP3 adds, "We still rely on one function room for all activities, including classes, meetings, and religious activities, making it difficult to implement

differentiated learning." This condition has a direct impact on the comfort and learning effectiveness of students from different backgrounds. S4 confessed, "I'm from Papua, and the sleeping space is too cramped, there's no privacy, and it's hard to adapt." Even S2 said, "Sometimes I feel isolated because there is no dedicated space for cross-cultural discussions." Infrastructure inefficiencies are the main obstacles in creating a truly inclusive environment. MP4 admitted, "Ideally, every student feels physically and emotionally accepted, but we have not been able to provide that." Limited budgets and government support hampered the development of facilities.

One of the main obstacles in the implementation of inclusive education at the Pabelan Islamic Boarding School is the limited number of human resources trained in multicultural and inclusive education. MP1 admits, "Most of our teachers are alumni of Islamic boarding schools who are great in religious studies, but not necessarily understand inclusive education." Data shows that only 18% of the 65 teachers in this pesantren have participated in training on multicultural education (Pesantren Internal Report, 2023). MP2 added, "We want teachers to be able to understand the differences in students' backgrounds, but such training is rarely available." This condition has an impact on the quality of interaction between teachers and students. S3 said, "Sometimes teachers mispronounce my tribe or think that my culture is 'foreign' and needs to be changed." This shows a lack of cultural sensitivity among teachers. MP3 emphasized, "We need teachers who can be facilitators, not just lawmakers." However, in reality, many teachers still adopt an authoritarian approach. S6 complained, "I am not allowed to celebrate traditional holidays, even though it is part of my identity." MP4 realizes, "We have to change the mindset of teachers, that difference is not a threat, but wealth." However, this effort was hampered by the lack of training budget. S4 revealed, "The teacher rarely asks about my background, as if everything has to be the same."

The curriculum at the Pabelan Islamic Boarding School is still dominated by traditional religious materials that have not fully responded to the diversity of students' backgrounds. MP1 stated, "We use the yellow book as the main reference, but there is no module on cultural or religious diversity yet." This makes students from minority backgrounds feel marginalized. S3 admitted, "I learned about Islam from morning to night, but I was never taught to appreciate other religions." MP2 admits, "We don't yet have a thematic curriculum that includes inclusivity issues." MP4 added, "We wanted to insert material about tolerance, but there was no official guidance." S5 said, "We were taught that there is only one right way, even though the world is diverse." This condition creates an impression of exclusivity in learning. MP3 emphasized, "The curriculum must be revised to reflect Indonesia's pluralistic reality." However, the revision process was hampered by resistance from some senior figures. S6 revealed, "I felt embarrassed when my friend asked me about my religion, because in the pesantren only one version of the truth is taught. S2 added, "Why don't we learn about the tribes in Indonesia? Isn't that part of nationalism?" MP1 again emphasized,

"Without an inclusive curriculum, the value of moderation is just rhetoric." Thus, the curriculum that is not adaptive is the main obstacle in forming a moderate attitude among students.

The pesantren environment that is thick with conservative religious values creates cultural challenges in the implementation of inclusive education. MP2 states, "There is an assumption that differences can damage the solemnity of worship and aqidah." This statement reflects resistance to the idea of pluralism. S4 confessed, "I was considered 'less Islamic' because I dressed differently." MP3 added, "The culture of homogenization is still strong; all must perform and behave the same." This suppresses the expression of student self-identity. S5 said, "I am not allowed to sing regional songs, it is considered haram music." MP4 admits, "We are aware of this problem, but it is difficult to change a decades-old tradition." These conservative values are often used as an excuse to resist change. S6 stated, "I feel like I have to fit in completely, or I won't be accepted." MP1 emphasized, "We have to distinguish between Islamic teachings and rigid pesantren culture." However, the boundary between the two is often blurred. S3 revealed, "I want to be a moderate Muslim, but I am pressured to follow a narrow way of thinking." MP5 states, "Pluralism is considered liberal, even though it is part of rahmatan lil 'alamin." S2 added, "I'm afraid of being ostracized if I disagree." MP3 again emphasized, "We must build awareness that inclusivity is not an aberration, but a form of compassion." Thus, the dominance of conservative values is a strong internal obstacle to the transformation towards an inclusive Islamic boarding school.

Resistance to pluralism emerged from both administrators and senior students, who considered inclusivity as a threat to the religious identity of Islamic boarding schools. MP4 stated, "Some kiai are worried that if they are too open, students can be influenced by deviant beliefs." S2 admitted, "I was once reminded not to get too close to non-Muslim students, they said it could affect faith." MP1 added, "There is a fear that tolerance could blur the boundaries of teaching." This reflects the tension between universal and local values. S3 said, "I feel like I have to choose: socially acceptable or honest about myself." MP5 admits, "We need an internal dialogue to convince that inclusion is not syncretism." However, such dialogue is rare. S6 stated, "I wanted to learn about other religions, but it was forbidden because it was considered 'searching.'" MP2 affirms, "We must distinguish between appreciating and adopting." However, in practice, the two are often equated. S4 revealed, "I felt I had to hide my origin so as not to be considered 'foreign'." MP3 stated, "We want pesantren to be the pioneers of moderation, but there are still many who think narrowly."

Discussion

This research reveals important findings related to inclusive education strategies in strengthening the value of religious moderation, students' responses to the policy, and challenges faced in its implementation. In general, pesantren implement four inclusive strategies: the integration of national values in the

curriculum, the development of inter-sectarian tolerance, a non-violent disciplinary approach, and respect for local culture. These strategies create an educational environment that is politically, religiously, psychosocially, and culturally inclusive, encouraging students to internalize tolerant, anti-violent, and nationalist attitudes. The response of students to this policy varied in three patterns: active acceptance, selective adaptation, and passive resistance. The majority of students responded positively, viewing inclusion as a reflection of inclusive Islam, while some others were selective, accepting differences in the realm of fiqh but keeping their distance from interfaith rituals. A small minority show passive resistance, especially from conservative religious backgrounds, who worry that inclusivity obscures religious identity, even though it is rarely expressed openly due to social pressures. On the other hand, pesantren face three main challenges: structural, cultural, and pedagogical. Limited infrastructure, multicultural educators, and a curriculum that is not responsive to diversity are structural obstacles. The homogeneous dominance of religious culture makes it difficult to accept pluralism, while learning methods that are still dominated by memorization and lectures hinder critical dialogue. Nevertheless, the Pabelan Islamic Boarding School shows great potential as an agent of religious moderation. To strengthen the effectiveness of inclusive education, a comprehensive transformation is needed through teacher training, curriculum refinement, and the building of collective awareness that inclusivity is part of a peaceful mission.

Pabelan Islamic Boarding School embodies the principles of educational multiculturalism adopted by James A. Banks (2015) and the theory of Civil Islam (Hefner, 2005; Azra, 2006) through education that embraces the diversity of students' backgrounds, integrates national values, tolerance between schools of thought, and preserves local cultures such as wayang and gamelan (Freire & Valdez, 2021). Banks emphasized that multicultural education is not merely a curriculum enrichment, but rather a comprehensive transformation of the school's pedagogy, institutional culture, and social practices to create a safe space for all identities (Li, 2023; KILAVUZ, 2023). Pabelan implements this through discussions of Pancasila, khilafiyah teachings that emphasize epistemological humility, and deliberation-based conflict resolution. This approach aligns with Civil Islam, which positions Islam as a civil-democratic force that supports intercultural dialogue, religious moderation, and social cohesion. Students' responses—ranging from active acceptance to passive resistance—reflect the complexity of internalizing inclusive values, which requires cognitive-emotional maturity (Molosiwa, 2009; Nankin, 2013). While challenges remain, Pabelan's commitment demonstrates that religious institutions can be effective agents of social change, combining a transformative vision of multiculturalism and Islamic civic ethics to shape inclusive, democratic, and locally-rooted citizens (Li, 2023; Bunn & Britton, 2024).

This study shows five significant differences compared to previous research on religious moderation in Islamic boarding schools, which presents a strong novelty in

this study. First, in contrast to the research of Hasyim & Junaidi, (2023) which focuses on the theological aspects of moderation, such as the rejection of radicalism, this study emphasizes inclusive education strategies as the foundation of moderation, including national integration and respect for local culture. Second, the study of Raharja et al., (2023) looks at the role of kyai as a central figure, but this study identifies three patterns of student responses (active acceptance, selective adaptation, and passive resistance) that show complexity in internalizing the value of moderation. Third, although Noor, (2023) emphasizes curriculum modernization, this study finds the importance of psychosocial aspects, such as conflict meditation and non-violent discipline, as one of the key findings in creating inclusivity in pesantren governance. Fourth, previous research, such as the study of Rozaq et al., (2024), saw local culture as a potential conflict; These findings actually show that the Pabelan Islamic Boarding School accommodates local culture as part of an inclusive Islamic identity. Fifth, previous research often ignores pedagogical and structural challenges, but this study details the limitations of curriculum and human resources, providing a better understanding of the factors that affect educational inclusion (Raikhan & Amin, 2023). Thus, the novelty of this research lies in a holistic approach that integrates the dimensions of education, culture, and pesantren management in building religious moderation, as well as making new contributions to the study of Islam and education in Indonesia.

Based on the findings of this study, the strategic step that must be taken immediately is the transformation of educational policies and practices in Islamic boarding schools in a comprehensive and sustainable manner to strengthen religious moderation through an inclusive approach. First, it is important for the government, religious institutions, and pesantren managers to synergize in developing an inclusive curriculum, where national values, pluralism, and human rights are integrated into the content of religious learning as part of the foundation of Islamic science, not just as an addendum (Zibbat & Hariri, 2024; , (Najmi, 2023; , Sahruddin et al., 2023). Second, intensive training for teachers and caregivers of pesantren is considered very important in multicultural pedagogy and dialogue between religious traditions, so that they can facilitate healthy discussions, manage sectarian differences, and respond to resistance in an educative, not repressive manner (Najmi, 2023; , Sahruddin et al., 2023). Third, pesantren need to improve educational infrastructure by providing inclusive classrooms and multicultural teaching materials to ensure that all students, including minority groups or people with disabilities, get equal access (BZ et al., 2021). Fourth, learning methods must be renewed from memorization and lecture models to participatory and dialogical approaches, such as discussion forums and cross-community cultural projects, to train empathy, criticism, and active tolerance (Bahar, 2022; , Chrisantina, 2021). Finally, the development of networks between moderate Islamic boarding schools is very important to share good practices and strengthen the value of inclusivity, which

makes Islamic boarding schools not only a fortress of religious moderation but also an agent of social transformation to face the challenges of diversity and extremism in the contemporary era (Pabbajah, 2020).

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study present a surprising but very relevant conclusion in the discourse of religious moderation: precisely in the midst of the image of pesantren that is often associated with conservatism, there are systematic and progressive efforts to build a strong inclusive education as the foundation of moderation. What is surprising is that this pesantren not only accepts diversity, but actively integrates it through four strategic strategies through strengthening national values, inter-sectarian tolerance, non-violent discipline, and appreciation of local cultures such as puppets and gamelan so as to form students who are moderate, nationalist, and empathetic to differences. Even more surprising, the response of the students was dominated by active acceptance of inclusive policies, which they interpreted as the realization of Islamic teachings that are rahmatan lil 'alamin. Even amid fears of resistance from conservative groups, skeptical minorities tend to remain silent, showing social pressure to remain open and respect pesantren policies. The most surprising finding is that resistance to inclusivity is more structural and pedagogical, rather than ideological. The main challenge does not come from the rejection of the value of inclusion itself, but from the limitations of infrastructure, the lack of educators trained in a multicultural approach, and the dominance of conventional learning methods such as memorization and lectures with minimal space for dialogue. This shows that pesantren are actually ideologically ready to become agents of moderation, but still need systemic transformation in educational governance. This research dismantles the common assumption that pesantren are synonymous with exclusivism, and instead reveals their great potential as a transformative space in building an inclusive, moderate, and nationalistic Islam, as long as it is supported by adequate policies and resources.

This research makes an important contribution in enriching the discourse on religious moderation education by showing that Islamic boarding schools, as traditional institutions, are able to develop inclusive education strategies that are effective in shaping the moderate attitude of students. These findings offer a concrete model of how the values of nationality, tolerance, non-violence, and appreciation of local culture can be integrated into the religious education system, thus paving the way for curriculum and pedagogical reforms in other Islamic boarding schools. In addition, this study also reveals the complex internal dynamics of Islamic boarding schools, including student responses and structural-cultural challenges, which provide an in-depth perspective for policymakers and managers of religious institutions. However, the main limitation of this study lies in its scope which only focuses on one pesantren, namely the Pabelan Magelang Islamic Boarding School, so that the findings cannot necessarily be generalized to other Islamic boarding schools that have different social, ideological, and managerial backgrounds. Typical local contexts—such as geographic location,

organizational networks, and leadership—may influence outcomes, requiring comparative research involving more pesantren from different streams and regions. For the future, researchers are advised to conduct cross-loci studies with a comparative or even mixed qualitative approach to test the transferability of findings and identify key factors that support or hinder the implementation of inclusive education. In addition, action research is needed that involves collaboration with pesantren managers to develop inclusion modules and teacher training, so that the results of the research are not only descriptive, but also applicable and transformative in the context of religious education in Indonesia.

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391

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