



The Leadership Communication of the Kiyai in Internalizing Religious Moderation: at the Kiyai Gading Islamic Boarding School

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the role of kyai's intrapersonal and interpersonal communication in instilling religious moderation at Kiai Gading Islamic Boarding School, Mranggen, Demak. The research employs a descriptive qualitative approach using interviews, observations, and documentation as data collection techniques. The findings indicate that the kyai's intrapersonal communication is reflected in role modeling through discipline in worship, emotional control, patience, and self-reflection, which shape the students' moderate attitudes. Interpersonal communication is carried out through open dialogue, personal guidance, and a persuasive *bi al-hikmah* approach in both formal and informal activities. Values of religious moderation such as *tawasuth* (moderation), *tasamuh* (tolerance), *tawazun* (balance), and *ta'adul* (justice) are well internalized in daily pesantren life. This success is supported by a strong *Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah* (Aswaja) culture, harmonious relationships between the kyai and students, and a conducive pesantren environment. Challenges related to digital media influence and students' diverse backgrounds are addressed through adaptive communication and the strengthening of moderation-based digital literacy. This study contributes to the development of da'wah communication and Islamic boarding school education studies and may serve as a practical reference for Islamic educational institutions. However, the limitation of this study lies in its focus on a single pesantren, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Future research is recommended to involve more pesantren and employ diverse research methods.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis peran komunikasi intrapersonal dan interpersonal kyai dalam menanamkan moderasi beragama di Pondok Pesantren Kiai Gading Mranggen, Demak. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan teknik wawancara, observasi, dan dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa komunikasi intrapersonal kyai tampak melalui keteladanan dalam ibadah, pengendalian emosi, kesabaran, dan refleksi diri, yang membentuk sikap moderat santri. Komunikasi interpersonal dilakukan melalui dialog terbuka, bimbingan personal, dan pendekatan *bi al-hikmah* yang persuasif, baik dalam kegiatan formal maupun nonformal. Nilai moderasi beragama seperti *tawasuth*, *tasamuh*, *tawazun*, dan *ta'adul* terinternalisasi dengan baik dalam kehidupan pesantren. Keberhasilan ini didukung oleh budaya Aswaja yang kuat, hubungan harmonis antara kyai dan santri, serta lingkungan pesantren yang kondusif. Tantangan berupa pengaruh media digital dan perbedaan latar belakang santri diatasi melalui komunikasi adaptif dan penguatan literasi digital moderasi. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada pengembangan kajian komunikasi dakwah dan pendidikan pesantren, serta dapat menjadi rujukan praktis bagi lembaga pendidikan Islam. Keterbatasan penelitian ini terletak pada lokasi penelitian yang hanya mencakup satu pesantren, sehingga hasilnya belum dapat digeneralisasi. Penelitian selanjutnya disarankan melibatkan lebih banyak pesantren dan metode penelitian yang beragam.

Keywords: Komunikasi, Kiyai, Moderasi beragama, Pesantren

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Introduction

Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) are Islamic educational institutions that play a strategic role in shaping the religious character of Indonesian society. Amidst the challenges of increasing intolerance, social polarization, and the spread of religious extremism, strengthening religious moderation has become a crucial agenda for Islamic education, particularly for students (santri), the next generation of ulama (Islamic scholars) and community leaders (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2019). Within the context of Islamic boarding schools, kyai (Islamic religious leaders) possess full authority and strong charisma as caregivers, teachers, and role models in the religious lives of their students.

Various previous studies have examined the role of communication and exemplary behavior of kyai in fostering the character of students. The kyai's persuasive communication contributes to the formation of inclusive religious attitudes among students (M. Arifin, 2021). Meanwhile, Rahmawati emphasized that the kyai's interpersonal communication serves as a medium for internalizing the value of religious moderation (Rahmawati, 2022a). However, studies that integrate the kyai's intrapersonal and interpersonal communication in strategies for fostering and internalizing religious moderation, as well as in-depth analysis of the supporting and inhibiting factors, are still limited and require further research. Based on this gap, this study focuses on the kyai's communication process, both intrapersonal and interpersonal, in fostering and internalizing religious moderation at the Kiai Gading Mranggen Demak Islamic Boarding School, which is based on Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah.

Besides holding the highest authority within the pesantren structure, the kyai is also an authentic symbol of Islamic moderation in Indonesia. The scholarly tradition of pesantren encourages the creation of religious practices that balance text and context, making the kyai's communicative role key to maintaining the continuity of this tradition. Fostering religious moderation should not be merely normative but must be strengthened through effective communication that is relevant to the character of the younger generation.

According to the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, the concept of religious moderation encompasses four indicators: commitment to nationalism, anti-violence, tolerance, and accommodation of local culture (Azra, 2020). These indicators must be comprehensively internalized by students through various interaction contexts within Islamic boarding schools. Therefore, communication with the kyai, as an authoritative figure, is one of the most essential educational tools.

However, the effectiveness of fostering religious moderation also presents challenges. Islamic boarding school students (santri) are now exposed to a rapid and unfiltered flow of digital information. They may be exposed to transnational religious ideologies that conflict with the values of moderation within Islamic boarding schools. Furthermore, the diverse socio-cultural backgrounds of Islamic boarding school students present unique dynamics in the acceptance of moderate values. These obstacles need to be balanced with adaptive and sustainable communication strategies.

research is directed to describe in depth how the intrapersonal and interpersonal communication of kyai in fostering and internalizing the values of religious moderation of students, while also analyzing the supporting and inhibiting factors that influence the fostering process at the Kiai Gading Mranggen Demak Islamic Boarding School. In line with this focus, the purpose of this research is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the communication strategies implemented by kyai in instilling moderate values, as well as identifying conditions that can strengthen or weaken the implementation of fostering religious moderation in the Islamic boarding school environment.

This research is expected to provide theoretical benefits in enriching the study of Islamic boarding school-based religious communication and practical benefits as recommendations for strengthening strategies for fostering and internalizing religious moderation values among Islamic boarding school students, relevant for other Islamic educational institutions. Therefore, this research holds a crucial position in addressing the need to strengthen religious

moderation in Islamic boarding schools through a kyai-based communication approach that possesses humanistic, persuasive, and spiritual characteristics.

Theoretical Studies

1. Kyai's Intrapersonal Communication

Intrapersonal communication is an internal process within an individual that involves managing feelings, thoughts, beliefs, and personal values, which then influence actual attitudes and behavior (Mulyana, 2019). In the context of Islamic boarding schools, the kyai's intrapersonal communication is evident through spiritual integrity, self-control, exemplary behavior, and deep inner reflection on Islamic teachings. Every action, advice, or decision taken by the kyai stems from a process of reflection and high moral awareness. The kyai's consistent exemplary behavior serves as a primary source of inspiration for students in internalizing the values of religious moderation such as *tawasuth* (middle stance), *tawazun* (balance), and *tasamuh* (tolerance) (Qomar, 2019b). This is in line with the findings of (Susanti et al., 2021). The relationship between the kyai and students, which is based on spiritual values and personal exemplary behavior, is an effective means of instilling a moderate character in the Islamic boarding school environment.

Furthermore, the kyai's self-control in displaying polite, wise, and balanced behavior is a concrete representation of intrapersonal communication practices that align with the Islamic principle (N. Hasan, 2021). This exemplary behavior is evident in how the kyai responds to students' differing views, resolves conflicts, and faces external challenges arising from the social environment and the media. The moderate attitudes of students in Islamic boarding schools are greatly influenced by the policies and exemplary behavior of their caregivers in displaying balanced and open behavior (Budiyanto, 2024). Thus, the kyai's intrapersonal communication not only influences their personality and emotional stability but also serves as a key driver in developing students' moderate, tolerant, and adaptive characters to socio-religious dynamics.

2. Interpersonal Communication of Kyai

On the other hand, interpersonal communication is a process of direct interaction between the communicator and the communicant to build effective, harmonious, and meaningful relationships (DeVito, 2021). In the context of Islamic boarding schools, kyai use interpersonal communication as the primary means of guiding students, whether through religious dialogue, moral advice or *mauidzah hasanah* (good advice), deliberation, or a humanistic persuasive approach (Z. Arifin, 2021). This interaction allows the kyai to deeply understand the needs, abilities, and character of the students, so that the message of religious moderation can be well received and applied in everyday life. The emotional closeness that is built between the kyai and students becomes a strong foundation of trust, so that the messages conveyed are not only followed but also voluntarily internalized.

In addition to formal dialogue, the kyai's interpersonal communication is reflected in daily spiritual guidance, such as yellow book recitation, routine worship guidance, prayer guidance, and evaluation of individual and group student behavior (Rifa'i, 2022). This continuity of interaction strengthens the kyai's position as the primary moral and spiritual reference. Students learn through direct observation of the kyai's attitudes and behavior, which reflect the values of moderation, patience, and tolerance. Thus, interpersonal communication becomes a bridge connecting theoretical learning with real-life practices in Islamic boarding school life. The *bi al-hikmah approach* requires the kyai to convey religious messages wisely, adapting his communication style to the character, level of understanding, and psychological condition of the students (Nawawi, 2020). The kyai's sensitivity to the students' differing needs makes moderation guidance personal and humanistic, not rigid or dogmatic. This strategy allows each student to receive appropriate attention, so that the internalization of the values of tolerance, balance, and openness can occur naturally, effectively, and sustainably.

3. Religious Moderation in Islamic Boarding Schools

Religious moderation in Islamic boarding schools is not only a theoretical concept but also implemented practically through daily interactions between kyai (Islamic clerics),

caretakers, and students. Students are accustomed to respecting differences of opinion and understanding the diversity of religious understandings through discussions, deliberations, and group activities (Suharto, 2020). This approach trains students to prioritize tolerance as part of their religious behavior, thus fostering the value of moderation as a sustainable part of their personal character.

The role of the kyai (Islamic religious leader) is strategic in internalizing religious moderation through concrete examples in everyday life. Kyai who demonstrate patience, fairness, and openness to criticism and questions from their students serve as effective role models (Anwar, 2021). Thus, moderation is not only memorized as subject matter but also practiced through behavior directly observed by the students.

Furthermore, the Aswaja-based Islamic boarding school curriculum integrates the teachings of moderation into various subjects, both religious and general. Study of yellow books, regular religious studies, and discussions of moral values systematically shape students' understanding of the concept of balance in religion (Rahmawati, 2022b). These activities also foster a collective awareness among students to live harmoniously and avoid intolerant or extreme behavior.

Strengthening religious moderation is also carried out through extracurricular activities of a social and community nature, such as community service, community service, and interfaith dialogue forums (Fauzi, 2023). Through these direct experiences, students learn to apply the values of tolerance, accommodating differences, and committing to national unity. These concrete activities serve as an effective means of character education and emphasize the role of Islamic boarding schools as laboratories for moderate religious life.

Finally, religious moderation in Islamic boarding schools is enriched by a supportive environment, encompassing both the structure of the boarding school, the guidance of the kyai (Islamic religious leader), and the social interactions between students. This conducive environment helps students understand that moderation is not only a religious obligation but also a social and cultural necessity in everyday life (Zainal, 2021). Thus, Islamic boarding schools play a dual role: as institutions of religious education and as institutions for developing tolerant and moderate character traits relevant to the modern Indonesian context.

4. The role of Kyai in fostering and internalizing religious moderation among students

The Kyai has full authority in determining the direction of the academic, spiritual, and moral development of students (Dhofier, 2011). This authority makes the Kyai the center of decision-making that influences all educational dynamics in the Islamic boarding school. The Kyai's charisma and authority build a strong emotional closeness with the students, so that religious messages and values of moderation can be accepted without resistance. The harmonious relationship between the Kyai and students is an important basis for the internalization of religious moderation in the Islamic boarding school environment (Hilmy, 2013). This closeness confirms that the Kyai's leadership is not only based on formality, but also based on strong moral and spiritual influence (Anwar, 2020).

As educators and caregivers, kyai act as guides, ensuring the balanced character development of their students. This role includes strengthening religious values, fostering social ethics, and fostering tolerance among students (Ridwan, 2023). Internalization of religious moderation in students occurs through practical practices such as cooperation, respect for differences, and adherence to Islamic boarding school rules (Susanti et al., 2021). Kyai who successfully integrate academic and spiritual aspects in their students' development will create a harmonious, productive Islamic boarding school environment that effectively supports the internalization of religious moderation values.

The moral leadership of the kyai acts as a bulwark against deviations in religious understanding. Through polite, persuasive, and wise communication, the kyai is able to prevent the infiltration of intolerant or extreme ideologies into the Islamic boarding school environment (Lubis, 2021). This demonstrates that the moral and spiritual qualities of the kyai are key factors in the success of religious moderation education, as students tend to emulate the behavior and attitudes of the kyai they respect. In many Islamic boarding schools, the

practice of religious moderation has begun to be realized through an inclusive curriculum and dialogue among students from various backgrounds (Hilmy, 2015).

The role of the kyai also includes personal guidance through an intensive interpersonal approach. Kyai can monitor the spiritual development of students, provide guidance tailored to individual needs, and guide them through emerging social or psychological challenges (Fauzi, 2023). This approach allows for moderated learning to be adaptive, relevant, and responsive to the students' diverse backgrounds, ensuring that each student receives attention tailored to their character and capacity (Lukens-Bull, 2010).

In addition, the kyai plays a role as a mediator in maintaining social cohesion among students. In situations of conflict or differences of opinion, the kyai acts as an intermediary, guiding students to resolve problems peacefully, respecting others' perspectives, and practicing the principles of justice and balance (Z. Arifin, 2021). This function emphasizes the kyai's position as a central figure who not only transfers knowledge but also shapes the moderate, tolerant, and harmonious character that is the identity of the Islamic boarding school (Indonesia, 2019).

5. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in Fostering Religious Moderation

Supporting factors for fostering religious moderation in Islamic boarding schools include a strong religious culture, students' obedience to their religious leaders (kyai), and an Aswaja-based curriculum that emphasizes balance, tolerance, and simplicity in religion (Syafii, 2022). A harmonious and collectively religious pesantren environment strengthens the internalization of moderation values, as students are continuously guided in worship practices, religious study, and social interactions that emphasize harmony between religious theory and practice.

The emotional closeness between the kyai and the students is also an important supporting factor. Students who have a warm relationship with the kyai tend to be more receptive to direction and advice, allowing them to sincerely accept the values of religious moderation and apply them in their daily lives (Rifa'i, 2022). The kyai's active involvement in the students' daily activities, both individually and in groups, strengthens the kyai's moral and spiritual influence as a consistent role model.

However, significant obstacles exist in fostering moderation. Differences in the religious, educational, and cultural backgrounds of students can lead to variations in their understanding and acceptance of the value of moderation. Furthermore, the influence of diverse digital media, including radical content, and limited oversight by kyai (Islamic religious leaders) due to the large number of students pose serious challenges in ensuring that the message of moderation is conveyed evenly (Rahmawati, 2022b).

Students' access to unfiltered digital information can shape biased or extreme views, thus requiring digital literacy based on the value of moderation to assess and filter the information they receive (Fauzi, 2023). Guidance strategies must integrate traditional Islamic boarding school approaches with modern ones, enabling students to internalize the value of religious moderation in a contextual and relevant way for the digital era.

Furthermore, support from the pesantren structure, the guidance of the kyai (Islamic cleric), and social interaction among students are mutually reinforcing factors. This synergy helps create an effective moderation learning ecosystem, where students not only learn formally but also gain practical experience in being tolerant, accommodating differences, and maintaining social cohesion within the pesantren environment (Z. Arifin, 2021). With this approach, pesantren can serve as laboratories for moderate education capable of addressing modern social and cultural dynamics.

Research Methodologi

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical method aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of the role of the kyai's intrapersonal and interpersonal communication in the internalization of religious moderation among students at Pondok Pesantren Kiai Gading Mranggen Demak. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows

the researcher to explore experiences, meanings, and social interactions holistically within the pesantren environment (Moleong, 2019).

The primary informant of the study is the kyai, while additional informants include ustadz, pesantren administrators, and selected students, totaling 12 individuals. Informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique based on their involvement in religious guidance activities, complemented by snowball sampling to identify further relevant participants (Sugiyono, 2020). The research was conducted over a period of three months, from August to November 2025. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and documentation of religious guidance programs and daily activities at the pesantren. Preliminary observations were carried out to understand the initial conditions and communication dynamics within the pesantren.

The research steps were conducted systematically, starting with the identification and selection of primary and additional informants, preliminary observations to understand initial conditions, data collection through interviews, observations, and document review, validation of data using source and technique triangulation by comparing findings from interviews, observations, and documents, and data analysis through the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing to categorize and interpret findings according to the research focus. This continuous analysis, carried out from data collection to the preparation of the final report, ensures a comprehensive understanding of the kyai's communication strategies in fostering students' religious moderation (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Results and Discussion

A. Intrapersonal Communication of Kyai in Fostering Religious Moderation

The results of the study indicate that the kyai's intrapersonal communication at the Kiai Gading Mranggen Demak Islamic Boarding School is the main foundation in fostering religious moderation. Based on observations, the kyai displays spiritual exemplars through disciplined worship, consistency in words and actions, and the ability to control emotions when facing differences in student opinion. Students acknowledge that the kyai always displays a patient, calm, and reflective attitude before giving advice or making decisions. This reflects a form of mature intrapersonal communication, as explained by Mulyana, that inner reflection and self-control are important factors in determining the effectiveness of a person's communication (Mulyana, 2019).

The kyai also consistently engages in spiritual contemplation before delivering a message of guidance. Interviews show that every piece of advice must begin with sincere intentions and self-reflection so that the message brings peace and blessings. This reflective process demonstrates how intrapersonal communication plays a role in maintaining the kyai's sincerity of intention and consistency of behavior. This finding aligns with Shihab's assertion that the quality of a person's religious communication is determined by their spiritual depth and moral awareness (Shihab, 2020). Thus, the kyai's intrapersonal communication serves as a source of authenticity and moral strength, reinforcing messages of moderation to students.

Furthermore, the kyai's intrapersonal communication is evident not only in his spirituality but also in his ability to assess and manage each situation with wisdom. Based on field observations, when differences of opinion arise among students, the kyai does not immediately issue a harsh reprimand, but rather considers the student's psychological condition first. This action demonstrates a high level of reflection and self-awareness, demonstrating mature intrapersonal communication. According to Hasan, the ability to manage emotions and understand oneself are essential prerequisites for a spiritual leader to create calming and inspiring communication (A. Hasan, 2021). Therefore, the kyai's calm demeanor and wisdom serve as a concrete example for students to emulate, emulating moderate and balanced behavior.

Furthermore, the kyai's intrapersonal communication is also reflected in his steadfast attitude and moral consistency. Based on documentation of Islamic boarding school activities, the kyai not only advises his students to be tolerant and balanced, but also practices it in their daily lives. For example, in arranging the students' activity schedules, the kyai always

emphasizes a balance between study time, worship, and rest. This exemplary behavior demonstrates how the value of balance (*tawazun*) is internalized through concrete behavior. According to Qomar, a kyai who is able to maintain self-balance will become an effective authoritative figure in instilling religious values. (Qomar, 2019a) . Thus, the moral consistency of the kyai strengthens the students' trust and increases the effectiveness of the message of fostering religious moderation.

Furthermore, the kyai's intrapersonal communication has important implications for the quality of Islamic boarding school leadership. Kyai who are able to communicate with themselves honestly and reflectively will have high integrity in making decisions. Based on interviews with Islamic boarding school administrators, every policy taken by the kyai is always preceded by deliberation and prayer , indicating that the decision is not the result of an emotional reaction, but rather the result of a process of thought and deep reflection. This aligns with the Wasathiyah Islamic theory, which emphasizes the importance of a balance between reason, heart, and spirituality in carrying out the mandate of leadership (A. Hasan, 2021). Thus, the kyai's intrapersonal communication not only forms a complete spiritual personality but also serves as a pillar for fair, wise decision-making that aligns with the values of religious moderation in Islamic boarding schools.

B. Interpersonal Communication between Kyai and Students

In addition to intrapersonal communication, the kyai's interpersonal communication also plays a significant role in the internalization of religious moderation values. Observations show that kyai implement interpersonal communication through open dialogue, *mauidzah hasanah* (good religious instruction), deliberation, and personal guidance. Kyai build empathetic relationships with students, listening to their opinions, and providing space for them to ask questions or express their views. This approach creates an egalitarian and persuasive interaction atmosphere. As Devito explains, effective interpersonal communication is always characterized by empathy, honesty, and openness (DeVito, 2021).

In informal activities such as communal meals, social events, or casual gatherings, kyai often convey light and contextual moral messages. Students find the kyai's gentle and non-patronizing communication style easier to accept and practice. The kyai's *bi al-hikmah* (wisdom) approach aligns with Islamic communication principles that emphasize a balance between truth and gentleness. These findings confirm Rahmawati's (2022) view that interpersonal communication with kyai is an effective medium for instilling the value of religious moderation because it is personal, dialogical, and touches the emotional aspects of students.

Furthermore, interview results indicate that the kyai's interpersonal communication is not only vertical (from kyai to santri), but also horizontal, creating an atmosphere of mutual respect among all members of the pesantren. Kyai often exemplifies the practice of deliberation to resolve minor issues between students, such as the division of tasks or differences of opinion. Thus, students learn that resolving problems through dialogue is more noble than stubbornness or blaming each other. According to Nawawi, communication practices that foster participation and respect for differences are the core of moderation education (Nawawi, 2020). The kyai's interpersonal communication patterns, which emphasize deliberation, strengthen the character development of students who are open, rational, and tolerant of differing views.

Furthermore, the kyai's interpersonal interactions are also evident in their religious studies and routine worship guidance. In each study session, the kyai not only conveys the textual content of the book but also relates it to the realities of social life. For example, when discussing verses about Islamic brotherhood, the kyai emphasizes the importance of mutual respect despite differences in school of thought or background. This approach makes the study session not merely a scientific forum but also a space for the formation of human values. Qomar (2019) calls this strategy a form of affective education oriented towards attitude change, not merely the transfer of knowledge. Thus, the kyai's interpersonal communication in the learning

space serves as a bridge between the cognitive and affective dimensions of students' understanding of religious moderation.

The kyai's ability to adapt his communication style to the character of his students is also a crucial factor in the success of his guidance. Interviews revealed that the kyai consistently tailored his approach to each student: some were more receptive to emotional input, while others required a rational or logical approach. This demonstrates the kyai's flexible and contextual interpersonal communication. This strategy aligns with Arifin's persuasive communication theory, which emphasizes that religious messages must be conveyed according to the recipient's psychological background for effective internalization (Z. Arifin, 2021). Kyai who are sensitive to the psychological needs of their students are able to transform every encounter, both formal and informal, into an educational moment that reinforces the values of religious moderation.

Thus, the kyai's interpersonal communication at the Kiai Gading Mranggen Islamic Boarding School serves not only as a means of conveying teachings, but also as a strategy for character building and harmonious social relations. The kyai has succeeded in fostering trust, openness, and empathy within the pesantren environment, ultimately creating a culture of peaceful and balanced communication. This aligns with the principle of religious moderation, which emphasizes a middle stance, respect for differences, and avoidance of extremism in thought and action. Therefore, the kyai's interpersonal communication can be categorized as a form of transformative education that unites spirituality, humanity, and national values within the framework of pesantren life.

C. The Value of Religious Moderation in Islamic Boarding School Environments

The values of religious moderation, such as *tawasuth* (middle stance), *tasamuh* (tolerance), *tawazun* (balance), and *ta'addul* (justice), have been effectively implemented in the lives of students at the Kiai Gading Mranggen Islamic Boarding School. Based on activity documentation, students are trained to respect differences of opinion, participate in deliberations, and avoid fanaticism toward a single viewpoint. In religious study and discussion activities, the kyai encourages students to think critically yet civilly. This development model demonstrates the integration of textual and contextual learning, a hallmark of moderate education. The kyai utilizes each study forum as a means to strengthen the balance between spiritual and social aspects in students' religious practices.

Social activities such as community service, community service, and cross-community activities also serve as concrete means of moderation education. Students are taught to live in harmony, help others, and adapt to the surrounding community. Based on field observations, community service activities initiated by kyai always emphasize the message that true religiousness must engender social concern. This approach confirms Azra's view that religious moderation is not merely an intellectual concept, but a social practice that reflects a balance between Islamic and humanitarian values (Azra, 2020). Through the students' active involvement in social activities, they learn that moderate religiousness is demonstrated not only through rituals but also through concrete contributions to the welfare of society.

Furthermore, the implementation of religious moderation is also evident in the daily interaction patterns among students. Interviews revealed that students are accustomed to engaging in polite discussions and respecting differing opinions. In deliberation forums, differing views are viewed as a blessing, not a source of conflict. This interaction pattern demonstrates the successful internalization of the value of *tolerance* in the students' lives. Shihab stated that tolerance grounded in spiritual values is an indicator of religious maturity (Shihab, 2020). By practicing open and respectful communication, students at this Islamic boarding school develop into moderate individuals who respect differences and avoid extreme attitudes.

In addition to social activities and daily interactions, the value of moderation is also integrated into the Islamic boarding school curriculum. Based on documentation, each religious subject, such as *aqidah* (faith), *fiqh* (jurisprudence), and *tafsir* (interpretation of the faith), is linked to a relevant social context. For example, in *tafsir* lessons, kyai (Islamic

scholars) explain the meaning of verses that promote social justice and anti-violence, and relate them to the realities of life for Muslims in Indonesia. This curricular approach aligns with Rahmawati's view that the integration of religious knowledge and humanitarian values is a hallmark of moderate Islamic education (Rahmawati, 2022b). Thus, Islamic boarding schools serve not only as a place to transmit religious knowledge but also as a vehicle for the transformation of social and cultural values based on the principle of *wasathiyah* (moderation).

The Kyai also plays a crucial role in ensuring that the values of religious moderation are consistently implemented within the Islamic boarding school environment. Interviews with administrators revealed that the Kyai routinely provides guidance to the ustadz (Islamic teachers) and mentors to ensure that all learning activities and student discipline continue to reflect the values of balance, justice, and tolerance. This top-down approach aligns with Islamic character education, which places the role model of leaders as a source of moral inspiration. Anwar (2021) emphasized that a Kyai who demonstrates openness and patience is a key factor in the success of moderation education. Thus, the Kyai's communicative and consistent leadership has made this Islamic boarding school a model Islamic educational institution that fosters a generation of students with moderate, adaptive characters and is ready to face the challenges of religious globalization.

D. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in Fostering Religious Moderation

The research identified several supporting factors that strengthen the effectiveness of fostering religious moderation in Islamic boarding schools. First, the religious culture of Islamic boarding schools, based on Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah (Aswaja), creates a conducive learning environment and instills values of balance and tolerance. The Aswaja tradition, which emphasizes *tawasuth* (religious tolerance), *tasamuh* (compassion), and *tawazun* (religious tolerance), provides a strong foundation for developing a moderate mindset among students. Second, the close emotional bond between kyai (Islamic cleric) and students strengthens trust and openness in the development process. Third, the Islamic boarding school curriculum, which emphasizes the integration of religious and social sciences, helps students understand Islamic teachings rationally and contextually. These findings support Syafii's view that a strong religious environment is the primary social capital in fostering moderation (Syafii, 2022).

In addition to these factors, the structural and cultural support of Islamic boarding schools also play a crucial role. Interviews revealed that all educational activities, both formal and informal, are directed toward strengthening the values of balance and tolerance. For example, in student organizations, collective leadership and the principle of deliberation are part of democratic learning that fosters respect for the opinions of others. Support from religious teachers who align with the kyai's vision also strengthens the sustainability of development. Thus, fostering religious moderation does not rely solely on the kyai's figure but also becomes part of the systematic and integrated institutional culture of the Islamic boarding school.

However, this study also identified several obstacles to fostering religious moderation. The main challenge stems from the influence of digital media, which has not been fully filtered. Some Islamic students have extensive access to religious information from various online sources, including those that are extreme and inconsistent with the principles of moderation. Interviews revealed that several students reported encountering preaching content that rejects the Aswaja tradition or narrowly views differences in schools of thought. This situation demonstrates the need for moderation-based digital literacy to enable students to select and critique religious information wisely. These findings align with Fauzi's assertion that one of the challenges of modern Islamic education is equipping students with the skills to navigate the rapid and diverse flow of information (Fauzi, 2023).

Besides the influence of digital media, the heterogeneous backgrounds of the students also pose a challenge. Students come from various regions with varying cultures, religious traditions, and educational levels, so their understanding of the value of religious moderation varies. Observations indicate that some students from areas with conservative religious backgrounds initially tend to have more difficulty accepting inclusive views. However, through

patient guidance and a personal approach, the kyai (Islamic religious leader) gradually shifts their perspectives to become more open. This approach aligns with the theory of persuasive interpersonal communication, which emphasizes the importance of adapting messages to the recipient's characteristics (M. Arifin, 2021). Thus, the heterogeneity of the students, initially a challenge, can actually become an opportunity for real tolerance learning within the Islamic boarding school environment.

results show that the Kiai Gading Mranggen Demak Islamic Boarding School has implemented an integrative model of religious moderation, based on transformative communication, and oriented towards spiritual role models. This success is supported by the strong Aswaja culture, the emotional closeness between kyai and santri, and a learning system contextualized to social dynamics. Meanwhile, challenges such as the influence of digital media and the heterogeneity of santri actually present opportunities for the Islamic boarding school to develop adaptive and critical religious literacy. Therefore, the kyai communication model at this Islamic boarding school can serve as a reference for other Islamic educational institutions in developing development strategies that balance spirituality, rationality, and humanity as the core of religious moderation in the modern era.

Conclusion

1. Formulate Intrapersonal communication is reflected in exemplary behavior through disciplined worship, emotional control, patience, and the habit of reflecting before acting. His calm and wise attitude when facing differences makes it easy for students to emulate moderate behavior. Kyai also always ensures that advice and decisions are based on sincere intentions, balance, and introspection. Interpersonal communication is realized through open dialogue, personal guidance, and a gentle and persuasive bi al-hikmah approach, building empathetic relationships by giving students space to ask questions and discuss, both in formal activities such as religious studies and informal activities such as eating together.
2. The implementation of moderate religious values, such as *tawasuth* (middlemanship), *tasamuh* (tolerance), *tawazun* (balance), and *ta'addul* (justice), is effective in various Islamic boarding school activities, including religious study, social activities, and the students' daily interactions. These values are not only taught but also practiced through the exemplary behavior of the kyai (Islamic scholars) and the Aswaja-based learning system. Islamic boarding schools serve as laboratories for moderate Islamic education, shaping the character of students, enabling them to be just, tolerant, and adaptive to social and cultural diversity.
3. The success of fostering religious moderation in this Islamic boarding school is supported by a strong Aswaja culture, a harmonious emotional bond between kyai and students, and conducive structural support within the boarding school. Meanwhile, the main challenges include the unfiltered influence of digital media and the heterogeneity of the students' backgrounds. Nevertheless, the kyai are able to overcome these obstacles through adaptive communication strategies, moderation-based digital literacy, and collaborative work with the ustadz and boarding school administrators. Therefore, the kyai communication model at the Kiai Gading Mranggen Islamic Boarding School can serve as a reference for the development of moderate Islamic education in the modern and digital era.

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