



Educational Transformation of Pesantren Values in a Multicultural Society

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ABSTRACT

This The increasing diversity within higher education institutions raises important questions about how students from traditional Islamic educational backgrounds negotiate their values in multicultural environments. However, limited studies have examined the transformation of pesantren values when individuals experience minority positions in pluralistic academic settings. This study aims to analyze the transformation of pesantren values within a multicultural higher education context. Using a qualitative case study approach, the research focuses on a student with a pesantren background studying at a multicultural university where he occupies a minority religious position. Data were collected through in-depth informal conversations to explore academic and social experiences. The findings indicate that core pesantren values discipline, responsibility, tolerance, social ethics, and religious commitment remain resilient while undergoing contextual adaptation. The subject maintains a strong religious identity while developing openness, empathy, and adaptive communication. Notably, the minority experience encourages reflective understanding and constructive reinterpretation of religious values. This study highlights the dynamic transformation of pesantren values from a minority perspective and demonstrates their role in fostering intercultural resilience and inclusive attitudes.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The issue of religious moderation has become a current issue that has not become obsolete (absolutism) due to the plurality that exists in Indonesia¹. Indonesia is the most pluralistic country in the Asian region², and even in the world with its various ethnicities, religions, and cultures³. The issue of religious moderation must be addressed by all parties, including Islamic education in Indonesia as the vanguard of the problems of social life in society⁴. In the context of Islamic education, religious moderation education has been promoted massively⁵ through existing Islamic educational institutions. One Islamic educational institution that has great potential to become a basis for implementing religious moderation education⁶ in Indonesia is the Islamic boarding school (pesantren). Pesantren, as the oldest Islamic educational institution in Indonesia, continues to make important contributions in the socio-religious field⁷. In the pesantren environment, students live in intensive interactions that emphasize discipline, cooperation, tolerance, and the direct practice of religious values⁸. This structured and religiously homogeneous environment provides a strong educational experience in shaping the students' religious and social identities.

The diversity that exists in Indonesia is a manifestation of aspects and facts of cultural diversity that are responded to and addressed normatively⁹. Likewise, a student leaving an Islamic boarding school and entering a multicultural environment is often faced with challenges in interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds¹⁰. Like universities that have religious and cultural diversity, he faces complex adaptation challenges. In this case, students must balance their religious identity with the need to establish harmonious relationships with their diverse classmates. This phenomenon shows that the values acquired in Islamic boarding schools cannot always be immediately applied without a process of adaptation, reinterpretation, and transformation in different social contexts. The process of intercultural adaptation is an interactive process that develops through communication activities of individual newcomers with their new socio-cultural environment.¹¹ Value transformation is a necessity, because it affects how individuals interact with others, respond to

¹ Syihabudin Syihabudin and Najmudin Najmudin, "Education from the Perspective of the Al-Qur'an and Al-Sunnah: Study of the Terms Tarbiyah, Taklim, Tadris, Ta'dib and Tazkiyah," *TARBAWY: Indonesian Journal of Islamic Education* 6, no. 2 (2019): 193–209.

² H Nasaruddin Umar, *Islam Nusantara: The Long Road of Religious Moderation in Indonesia* (Elex Media Komputindo, 2021).

³ Husna Nashihin et al., "Construction of Islamic Boarding School Education Based on Sufism-Ecospiritualism," *Islamic Education: Journal of Islamic Education* 11, no. 01 (2022).

⁴ Husna Nashihin, "Humanization of Fiqh in the Phenomenon of 'Tolerant Call to Prayer' in the Temanggung Farming Community. *Jurnal Islam Nusantara*, 3 (1), 1," 2019.

⁵ Muhammad Ali Rusdi Bedong et al., *Mainstreaming Religious Moderation in National Dynamics* (IAIN Parepare Nusantara Press, 2020).

⁶ Agus Akhmadi, "Religious Moderation in Indonesia's Diversity," *Journal of Religious Education and Training* 13, no. 2 (2019): 45–55.

⁷ Muhammad Idris Usman, "Pesantren as an Islamic Educational Institution (History of Birth, Education System, and Current Development)," *Al-Hikmah Journal for Religious Studies* 14, no. 1 (2013): 127–46.

⁸ I Siregar, *Character Education in Islamic Boarding School Environment* (Medan: USU Press, 2019).

⁹ Erika Feri Susanto and Anisia Kumala, "Interethnic Tolerance Attitudes," *Tazkiya Journal of Psychology* 7, no. 2 (2019): 105–11.

¹⁰ Retno Ayu Lestari and Meyniar Albina, "Cultural Adaptation in a Multicultural Society," *Journal of Islamic and Socio-Religious Studies* 2, no. 3 (2025): 496–501.

¹¹ Lusia Savitri Setyo Utami, "Theories of Intercultural Adaptation," *Journal of Communication* 7, no. 2 (2015): 180–97.

differences, and form a self-identity that remains authentic amid diversity,¹² especially for students who are religious minorities in a new environment, this experience can be a real test of their ability to maintain religious values while respecting differences. Previous research has focused more on character formation and religious moderation in Islamic boarding school environments, so not much has discussed the experiences of students in a multicultural context.

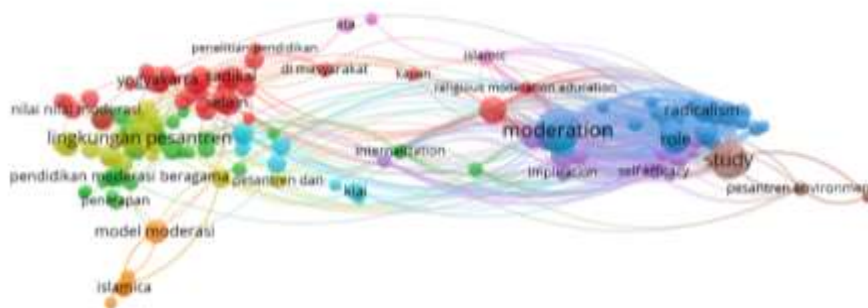


Figure 1. Visualization map of the keyword network for Islamic boarding school-based religious moderation research using VOSviewer.

In addition, the multicultural environment of higher education provides opportunities for Muslim students to broaden their social horizons, engage in interfaith interactions, and develop tolerance and empathy. However, this condition also presents significant challenges, particularly for students from pesantren backgrounds who must negotiate their religious values within minority settings. Despite the growing discourse on religious moderation and multicultural education, existing studies have largely focused on institutional or general perspectives, with limited attention to the lived experiences of individuals in minority positions. This gap highlights the need to examine how pesantren values are transformed at the individual level when confronted with diverse religious, cultural, and social norms. The case of a student who is the only Muslim in a university class represents a unique and underexplored context, as it illustrates the dynamic process of value negotiation and adaptation in everyday interactions. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the transformation of pesantren values in a multicultural higher education setting from the perspective of a minority experience. This research contributes to the literature by offering a micro-level analysis of value transformation, emphasizing how religious identity is maintained while being adaptively reinterpreted in pluralistic environments.

2. METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study type of research. Qualitative research is a humanistic research model, where humans in this study are placed as the main subjects in a social event¹³. The qualitative approach was chosen because this research aims to understand in depth the experiences, meanings, and processes of transformation of Islamic boarding school values experienced by individuals in the context of multicultural life. Case studies are open to assessment of the context that plays a role¹⁴. Case studies are used because this research focuses on individual

¹² Jamal Ghofir, "Transformation Of Religious Education Values In The Millennial Generation," *Tadris : Journal of Islamic Educational Research and Thought* 14, no. 1 (June 2020): 92 – 111, <https://doi.org/10.51675/jt.v14i1.74>.

¹³ Rizal Safarudin et al., "Qualitative Research," *Innovative: Journal of Social Science Research* 3, no. 2 (2023): 9680–94.

¹⁴ Mudjia Rahardjo, "Case Studies in Qualitative Research: Concepts and Procedures," 2017.

experiences, namely the experience of a student from an Islamic boarding school background who continues his education at a university with religious diversity, where the subject is a religious minority in his class. This approach allows researchers to explore phenomena contextually and holistically according to the real conditions experienced by the research subject¹⁵.

The research involved a single participant, selected through purposive sampling based on specific criteria: (1) having a pesantren (Islamic boarding school) background, (2) currently studying at a multicultural university, and (3) experiencing a minority religious position within the academic environment. The focus on a single participant was intended to provide an in-depth and contextualized understanding of individual experiences as an information-rich case. The object of the study concerns the transformation of pesantren values, encompassing religious, social, and cultural dimensions, as well as the processes through which these values are negotiated and adapted in interfaith social interactions within academic settings. The research was conducted at the participant's university during the 2025 academic year. Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews, allowing flexibility in exploring the participant's lived experiences in multicultural academic life. The interviews were designed to capture narratives related to value adaptation, identity negotiation, and intercultural engagement. This approach enabled a deeper exploration of the meanings and processes underlying the transformation of pesantren values in a pluralistic context.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The research results show that subjects with Islamic boarding school backgrounds and currently studying at a multicultural university experienced a process of value transformation in their social and academic lives. As the only Muslim student in the class, the subjects were a religious minority, requiring high levels of adaptability, both in daily religious practice and in social interactions. This value transformation emerged as a combination of values inherited from the Islamic boarding school and new experiences in a diverse environment.

Values of discipline and responsibility

Based on the interview results, Islamic boarding school values, such as responsibility and discipline, were still strongly evident in the subjects' behavior. These values were evident in the way they participated effectively in class, completed assignments on time, attended classes early, and maintained academic ethics. The subjects stated:

"I was used to living in an orderly manner at the Islamic boarding school, so I carried that habit with me to college."

This shows that the values of discipline and responsibility applied in Islamic boarding schools still function as the basis for time management for the subjects.

Values of tolerance and social interaction

The values of tolerance and social interaction are evident in the subjects' attitudes toward religious and cultural differences, particularly during group work or class discussions. Subjects adapt their communication and interaction methods to maintain harmony in a multicultural environment.

"At the beginning of college, I was afraid of being considered strange because I was different, but with my open attitude, everything became normal, and they were also very accepting."

¹⁵ Robert K Yin, *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2018).

This demonstrates that the subjects can build good relationships with classmates, empathize with opinions, and participate in class and group discussions. Islamic boarding school education fosters a strong foundation of social values, which can be realized in a multicultural environment through adaptive experiences.

Expression of religious identity

Researchers also found adjustments in how subjects expressed their religious identity. Subjects tended to consider the situation and context when expressing their religious beliefs in public spaces. However, this did not diminish the value of religion, but rather served as a form of adaptation to maintain positive interactions in diverse environments. This is evident in the following statement from the subject:

"I still wear the hijab because I realize it's an obligation. Especially when it comes to prayer, which of course must still be done. Although I have to adapt my prayer method, because not everything needs to be displayed in public."

Without reducing religious values, the subject demonstrates the ability to maintain self-identity while maintaining social relationships.

Adaptation process and psychological challenges

The subject also experienced psychological challenges in the early stages of college, particularly related to awkwardness and concerns about social acceptance. However, over time, the subject was able to develop positive relationships with his classmates through polite communication, an open attitude, and the ability to navigate various social situations. The subject's statement regarding this:

"At the beginning, I felt scared, I felt very alone, everything felt different, I didn't have any friends of the same religion as me, but as time went by, I got close to them and I realized that this was also part of a learning process for me."

Subjects adapt, build positive relationships, and use experiences as social learning. The adaptation process demonstrates development built through experiences in Islamic boarding schools and real-life situations in diverse environments.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the subjects' Islamic boarding school values are not static, but rather undergo transformation when confronted with the multicultural context of higher education. This transformation occurs, particularly when the subjects are in a religious minority, through adaptation and reinterpretation. This situation requires them to balance building harmonious relationships in a multicultural environment with maintaining their religious identity. This phenomenon aligns with the view ¹⁶that religious values can be dynamic and contextual, depending on the social situation an individual faces. The values of discipline and responsibility acquired by the subjects during their education at the Islamic boarding school remain the primary foundation for academic compliance. Commitment to academic compliance, time discipline, and adherence to rules demonstrate that the outcomes of education at the Islamic boarding school serve as sustainable character capital. These findings support research¹⁷, that suggests that Islamic boarding schools play a

¹⁶ Najwa Awaliah et al., "Challenges and the Role of Religious Moderation in Building Social Harmony in Islamic Boarding School Environments," *Nusa Bangsa Harmony Journal* 2, no. 1 (2024): 99–109.

¹⁷ Ria Gumilang and Asep Nurcholis, "The Role of Islamic Boarding Schools in the Formation of Student Character," *Comm-Edu (Community Education Journal)* 1, no. 3 (2018): 42–53.

strategic role in shaping the strong and consistent character of their students. Thus, Islamic boarding schools not only produce religious individuals but also foster attitudes relevant to higher education.

In addition to discipline and responsibility, the subjects' tolerance and openness also reflect the values of Islamic boarding schools. In a diverse classroom environment, the subjects were able to establish positive social interactions with peers of different faiths. This demonstrates that the values of tolerance instilled in Islamic boarding schools can be applied contextually in multicultural life. This is in line with ¹⁸the claim that Islamic education in Indonesia, including Islamic boarding schools, has great potential to shape moderate attitudes in a diverse society.

Subjects' adjustment in expressing religious identity is one of the most important forms of value transformation. Subjects continue to engage in religious activities, but with more contextual and reflective expression strategies. This is done to avoid creating social distance from their surroundings. In this context, value transformation is not a form of negative compromise, but rather a constructive strategy to maintain core values in a diverse social space. The subject's experience of becoming a religious minority can also be understood through the concept of acculturation, namely the process of an individual adapting to a new culture while maintaining their original identity. ¹⁹Subjects demonstrate the ability to adapt socially and psychologically, as reflected in increased self-confidence and active involvement in academic interactions. This process demonstrates that Islamic boarding school values do not hinder social adaptation, but rather strengthen individual resilience in facing multicultural challenges.

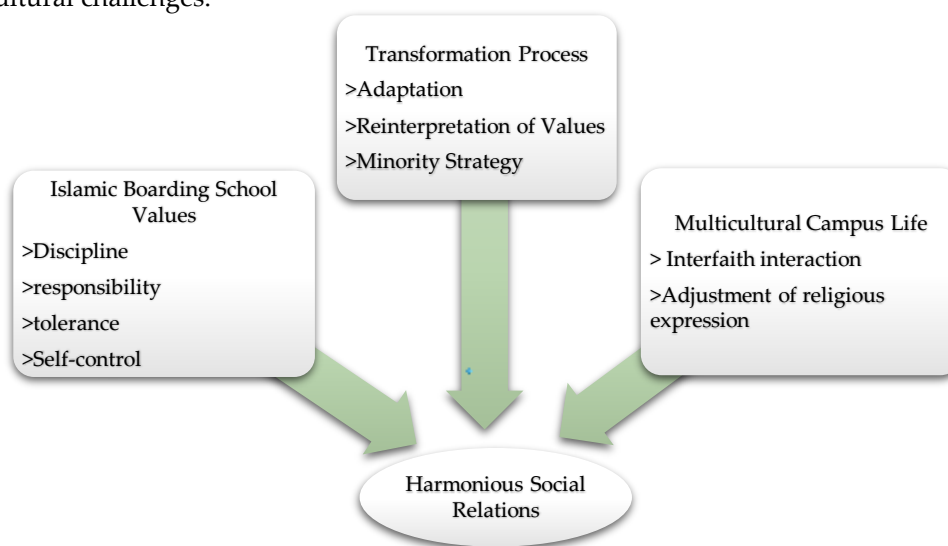


Figure 2. Model of Transformation of Islamic Boarding School Values in Multicultural Life

These findings also have implications for Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) and higher education. For Islamic boarding schools, the results of this study demonstrate that the values instilled have long-term relevance and can serve as preparation for facing a pluralistic society. For universities, these results emphasize the importance of creating an inclusive academic environment so that students can interact equally and respect each other, regardless of their religious backgrounds. A multicultural environment presents not only challenges but also opportunities for social learning for students.

¹⁸ Gumilang and Nurcholis.

¹⁹ Rangga Firmansyah S Sn and Interior Design Study Program, "Basic Concepts of Assimilation & Acculturation in Cultural Learning," Accessed from <https://Scholar. Google. Co. Id/Scholar> , 2016.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that pesantren values are not diminished in multicultural higher education environments but instead undergo processes of adaptation and reinterpretation. Core values such as discipline, responsibility, tolerance, social ethics, and religious commitment remain foundational while being contextually expressed in diverse social interactions. The experience of being a religious minority encourages reflective understanding, enabling individuals to maintain their religious identity while developing openness, empathy, and adaptive communication. The main contribution of this study lies in highlighting the reinterpretation of pesantren values from a minority perspective, showing that adaptation does not imply compromise but rather a dynamic process of contextual engagement. This finding extends existing literature by providing a micro-level analysis of value transformation in lived multicultural experiences. Theoretically, this study reinforces the relevance of pesantren education in fostering character formation and intercultural resilience. Practically, it suggests that higher education institutions should support inclusive environments that facilitate intercultural dialogue and value negotiation. Future research is recommended to involve multiple participants and diverse institutional contexts to further examine the broader patterns of pesantren value transformation in multicultural settings.

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