

## THE ROLE OF ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOLS IN PREVENTING RADICALISM

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### ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of radicalism in Indonesia is a serious challenge to the integrity of the nation. Traditional Islamic educational institutions such as Islamic Boarding Schools have a strategic role in counteracting the spread of radicalism. This study aims to examine the role of Islamic Boarding Schools in preventing radicalism through a descriptive qualitative approach. The results of the study show that Islamic Boarding Schools with an Islamic moderation-based curriculum, exemplary kiai, as well as cultural and spiritual approaches are able to become effective ideological fortresses. The role of Islamic Boarding Schools is not only as educational institutions, but also as agents of peace and guardians of national values. This study recommends strengthening the synergy between the government and Islamic Boarding Schools in building a peaceful and inclusive Islamic narrative.

**Keywords:** *Islamic Boarding Schools, Radicalism, Religious Moderation.*

### Introduction

Religious radicalism is a social phenomenon that continues to emerge in Indonesia's religious landscape. Its development is marked by the emergence of groups that promote an exclusive interpretation of religion and reject diversity as part of *sunnatullah*. In many cases, radicalism leads to acts of violence and rejection of the democratic system and national values. This phenomenon poses a serious challenge to maintaining social cohesion in a diverse society (Wahid, 2018).

In this context, Islamic education has a strategic responsibility in shaping the character of students to be moderate, tolerant, and nationalistic. One Islamic educational institution that has a significant historical and social role is the Islamic Boarding Schools. Islamic Boarding Schools are not only institutions for the transmission of Islamic knowledge but also institutions for moral, social, and ideological development. This role makes Islamic Boarding Schools a potential bulwark against the spread of radical ideology at the grassroots level.

Islamic Boarding Schools have a unique educational approach through a combination of religious teaching, instilling moral values, and character building based on the Islamic traditions of the Indonesian archipelago. The intellectual and spiritual traditions instilled in Islamic Boarding Schools produce a generation of students who are not only knowledgeable in religious studies but also behave politely and are open to diversity. Collective life in dormitories also reinforces the values of solidarity, discipline, and tolerance among individuals. These aspects are the strength of Islamic boarding schools in forming an ideological stronghold against radicalism (Baharun, 2018).

Despite their great potential, Islamic Boarding Schools also face challenges in developing systematic and structured strategies for deradicalisation. These challenges arise in the form of radical ideology infiltration through digital media, limitations in anti-radicalism curricula, and a lack of training for educators in religious moderation. Therefore, it is important to thoroughly examine how Islamic Boarding Schools carry out their role in preventing radicalism, including the strategies, challenges, and solutions implemented. This study is expected to strengthen the role of Islamic Boarding Schools as agents of peace education and social harmony in Indonesia.

## **Method**

This research uses a qualitative-descriptive approach with literature study and field study methods. Through literature analysis and direct observation of educational practices in Islamic boarding schools, this study aims to describe the strategies and challenges faced by Islamic boarding schools in preventing the spread of radicalism. It is hoped that the results of this study can contribute to the development of Islamic education policies oriented towards moderation and peace.

## **Results**

### **The Concepts of Radicalism and Religious Moderation**

#### **1. Definition and Characteristics of Radicalism**

Radicalism is a term derived from the Latin word *radix*, meaning 'root.' In a social and political context, radicalism refers to an ideology or movement that seeks drastic

fundamental change to the existing order, often using extreme methods, even violence. In a religious context, radicalism typically refers to a narrow, textualist understanding of religion that is intolerant of diverse interpretations and religious practices (Arifin, 2020). Religious radicalism not only threatens interfaith harmony but also endangers the social and political stability of a country.

Radicalism in the context of Islam often stems from exclusive and fanatical religious interpretations that claim absolute truth over one interpretation and deny other views. This ideology is also often accompanied by takfiri (excommunication) of other groups, as well as calls for jihad in the form of violence against those considered ‘enemies.’ This phenomenon manifests in various forms, ranging from hate speech, incitement to violence, to acts of terrorism. Another characteristic of radicalism is the presence of a black-and-white doctrine in perceiving reality, as well as rejection of democratic systems, state laws, and national values (Baidhawiy, 2017).

Radicalism is also inseparable from complex causal factors. These include ideological factors (deviant religious understanding), psychological factors (the need for identity or escape from social alienation), political factors (dissatisfaction with the government system), and socio-economic factors (poverty, inequality, and injustice). In the context of globalisation, the spread of radical ideas is also reinforced by social media and international networks that can spread narratives of hatred quickly and massively (Subhan, 2019). Therefore, preventing radicalism requires a multidimensional approach involving educational, social, political, and cultural aspects.

In Islamic education, radicalism is a serious challenge because it can undermine the main mission of education, which is to shape individuals with noble character, tolerance, and the ability to live peacefully alongside others. When educational institutions fail to instil values of moderation and respect for diversity, students become vulnerable to radical indoctrination. Therefore, it is important for educational institutions, including Islamic boarding schools, to understand the characteristics and early signs of radical ideology in order to take appropriate preventive measures (Sudrajat, 2021).

Efforts to identify and counter radicalism must begin with a deep understanding of its definition and characteristics. Radicalism is not merely a strong expression of religion, but

a mindset and attitude that leads to dehumanisation and violence in the name of ideology. Therefore, strengthening moderate, inclusive, and contextual religious literacy is very important, especially among the younger generation. Islamic education that emphasises the principles of rahmatan lil 'alamin, dialogue, and critical thinking is key to creating a strong defence against the dangers of radicalism in the future.

## **2. The Concept of Religious Moderation in Islam**

Religious moderation, or wasathiyah, is a central concept in Islamic teachings that emphasises balance, justice, and the middle path in religious practice. The term wasath in the Qur'an etymologically means middle, balanced, and just. In Surah Al-Baqarah verse 143, Muslims are referred to as ummatan wasathan, meaning a just and balanced community, serving as witnesses to the behaviour of humanity. This verse indicates that a moderate stance is an essential identity of Muslims, entrusted by Allah as guardians of harmony and peace in the world (Sulaiman, 2021).

Moderation in Islam is not a compromise of religious principles, but rather the wise, contextual, and welfare-oriented application of those principles. In classical Islamic tradition, scholars such as Al-Ghazali, Al-Farabi, and Ibn Miskawayh have emphasised the importance of tawazun (balance) in thinking, worship, and social interaction. Moderation also involves avoiding ifrath (excess) and tafriṭ (neglect), both of which are considered deviations from the middle ground advocated by religion (Zarkasyi, 2019).

In the contemporary context, religious moderation has become highly relevant as a response to the rise of religious extremism, which tends to simplify Islamic teachings into a rigid halal-haram dichotomy. Such extremism often disregards universal Islamic values such as compassion (rahmah), tolerance (tasamuh), and justice ('adl). Therefore, moderation serves to reaffirm the essence of Islam as a religion that brings mercy to the entire universe (rahmatan lil 'alamin).

One of the key pillars of religious moderation is openness to differences and appreciation of diversity. Islam acknowledges plurality as an inevitable sunnatullah, as emphasised in Surah Al-Hujurat verse 13 and Surah Al-Maidah verse 48. These verses indicate that differences in ethnicity, religion, and culture are part of the divine plan that must be managed with mutual understanding and respect. Within this framework,

moderation is not merely a personal attitude but also a social and political stance in national life (Nasaruddin, 2020).

The thoughts of Indonesian Islamic figures such as KH. Abdurrahman Wahid, Nurcholish Madjid, and Quraish Shihab have also reinforced the idea of moderation by emphasising the principles of inclusivity, public civility, and the values of Pancasila as an integral part of Islamic expression in Indonesia. They believe that Islam and nationality are not two conflicting entities, but rather complement each other in forming a just, prosperous, and civilised society. This thinking has become an important foundation for the development of Islamic education oriented towards peace and tolerance (Effendy, 2021).

Religious moderation has also become a strategic framework in national religious policy. The Indonesian Ministry of Religion has made religious moderation the mainstream in religious development, particularly in the educational environment. In the context of Islamic boarding schools, religious moderation is not only taught theoretically through the study of classical Islamic texts, but also practised in the lives of students through the values of simplicity, tolerance, and respect for teachers and fellow students from various backgrounds. This shows that Islamic boarding schools have a strategic role in strengthening a moderate Islamic culture amid the threat of radicalism.

### **3. The Role of Education in Shaping Ideology and Values**

Education plays a very important role in the process of shaping the ideology and value systems of individuals and society. From a sociological perspective, education is not merely a process of transferring knowledge but also a process of internalising values, norms, and ideologies that form the foundation of an individual's behaviour in their social life. Through education, an individual is shaped to understand reality, distinguish between good and evil, and have a life direction aligned with the values collectively believed in (Tilaar, 2012).

Ideology, from a pedagogical perspective, is not formed instantly but through habit formation, value reinforcement, and the cultivation of understanding over the long term. Therefore, education serves as a hegemonic tool that can shape collective societal awareness of certain values. In the context of a nation-state like Indonesia, education has

an ideological mission to instil a spirit of nationalism, patriotism, and appreciation for diversity (Suwito, 2019). Without the role of education, it is difficult to effectively instil a moderate, democratic, and pluralistic state ideology in the younger generation.

In Islamic education, the formation of values and ideology is closely tied to the main objective of education itself, namely to produce perfect human beings who are not only intellectually intelligent but also have moral and spiritual integrity. Islamic teachings emphasise the importance of moral education and human values as the foundation for shaping the personality of Muslims who are moderate, tolerant, and responsible towards social life. This concept is reflected in the principles of Islamic education, which address cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions in a holistic manner.

In the face of radicalism, education serves as the frontline with strategic capacity to stem the spread of extremist ideologies. Schools and other educational institutions, including Islamic boarding schools, play a key role in instilling peaceful and humanistic Islamic values. A curriculum designed with a moderate approach, contextual learning, and character building can be an effective instrument in preventing the growth of intolerant and radical ideas among students (Saifudin, 2020).

Furthermore, Paulo Freire's critical education theory states that education should be able to free students from structural and ideological oppression. Within this framework, teachers are no longer the sole authority but facilitators who encourage students to think critically, reflectively, and identify social inequalities. Thus, education is not merely a tool for state ideological control but also a space for dialectical values open to freedom of thought and social responsibility (Freire, 2005).

Thus, education is an effective means of shaping an inclusive, tolerant, and peaceful ideology and value system in society. When educational institutions are able to internalise the values of moderation, students will grow into agents of peace who reject all forms of violence in the name of ideology or religion. This strategic role makes education a key instrument in building a harmonious and civilised social order.

## **History and Characteristics of Islamic Boarding Schools**

### **1. The Origins and Development of Islamic Boarding Schools in Indonesia**

Islamic boarding schools are the oldest Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia and have played a significant role in the history of the spread and strengthening of Islamic teachings. The origins of Islamic boarding schools are inseparable from the process of Islamisation that began in the 13th century, when saints and scholars began to introduce Islam through a contextual approach to culture, education and da'wah (proselytising). Early Islamic boarding schools were rooted in informal halaqah-based teaching models that developed in mosques and gradually became institutionalised into a more structured form.

The early development of Islamic Boarding Schools was influenced by two main factors: first, the Islamic educational traditions of the Middle East, particularly the madrasah system in Persia and Egypt; second, local culture, which allowed for flexibility in teaching methods. The first Islamic Boarding Schools is believed to have been established in the 15th century in Java, including the Pondok Islamic Boarding Schools Tegalsari and the Islamic Boarding Schools founded by Sunan Ampel. In this context, Islamic Boarding Schools were not only places of religious learning but also centres for character development and the struggle against colonialism.

Characteristic features of early Islamic Boarding Schools included classical teaching methods such as sorogan and wetonan, the centralisation of activities around the kyai as the central figure, and the boarding school lifestyle of the santri. This system was non-classical, without formal educational levels as in modern schools, yet it effectively transferred Islamic knowledge, such as fiqh, tauhid, tafsir, and tasawuf through classical Arabic texts (kitab kuning).

Over time, especially after independence, Islamic Boarding Schools underwent modernisation to meet the needs of the times. Islamic Boarding Schools not only taught religious knowledge but also began to incorporate general and formal curricula like public schools. Two types of Islamic Boarding Schools emerged: traditional Islamic Boarding Schools that retained traditional methods and modern Islamic Boarding Schools that adopted the national formal education system and educational technology.

The role of Islamic Boarding Schools has become increasingly crucial in national

development. In addition to being religious institutions, Islamic Boarding Schools have also become agents of social transformation. Students are not only trained to become religious scholars but also intellectuals, community leaders, and economic actors. This is reinforced by the emergence of many national figures from the Islamic Boarding Schools environment, such as KH Hasyim Asy'ari and KH Wahid Hasyim, who played significant roles in independence and national education development.

The transformation of Islamic Boarding Schools is also influenced by state policies. The Islamic Boarding Schools certification programme, curriculum integration, and formal legal recognition through the Islamic Boarding Schools Law No. 18 of 2019 mark key milestones in the institutionalisation of Islamic Boarding Schools in Indonesia. This provides Islamic Boarding Schools with both legitimacy and challenges in preserving traditional values while adapting to global changes (Syah and Iswantir 2023).

Overall, Islamic Boarding Schools have evolved from traditional educational institutions based on kyai and the 'kitab kuning' into a diverse and dynamic Islamic education system. The contribution of Islamic Boarding Schools in the fields of education, social affairs, and culture makes them an integral part of Indonesia's national educational identity, as well as an important heritage in maintaining the integrity of inclusive Islamic values rooted in local wisdom (Syah and Iswantir 2023).

## **2. Educational Structure, Curriculum, and Social Relations in Islamic Boarding Schools**

Islamic boarding schools are unique Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia, with a distinctive educational structure characterised by tradition. The educational structure in Islamic boarding schools generally revolves around the figure of the kiai as the highest spiritual and academic leader. The kiai is not only a teacher but also a moral example and social role model for the students. The leadership structure in Islamic Boarding Schools is charismatic and patriarchal, where the kiai's scholarly and spiritual authority greatly determines the direction of education and the overall life of the santri (Dhofier, 2011).

In general, the educational structure of Islamic Boarding Schools is divided into several components, namely the kiai, ustaz/ustazah (teachers), senior santri, and santri. Teaching and learning activities do not only take place in classrooms but also through



regular recitations, halaqah, book discussions, and informal religious guidance. The relationship between the kiai and santri is direct, even in daily life, resulting in a strong affective educational process through role modelling and intensive interaction (Azra, 2013).

In terms of curriculum, Islamic Boarding Schools have two main approaches. First, the traditional curriculum focuses on the study of classical texts (kutub al-turats) written by classical scholars, covering fields such as tafsir (Qur'anic exegesis), fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), akhlak (ethics), Arabic grammar (nahwu and sharaf), and tasawuf (Sufism). Second, the modern curriculum, which has begun to be adopted by Islamic Boarding Schools that have transformed into modern or integrated Islamic Boarding Schools, incorporating general subjects such as mathematics, science, English, and information technology into their teaching (Muhaimin, 2010).

The yellow books, as the core of the traditional curriculum, hold strategic value in fostering a deep and comprehensive understanding of Islam. Clerics teach these books using a contextual, interpretative, and wisdom-filled approach. This allows students to understand the diversity of Islamic schools of thought and the social dynamics within Islamic history. The study of classical Islamic texts encourages students to think critically, be open-minded, and respect differences, thereby serving as a strong ideological bulwark against the infiltration of radical ideologies (Ma'arif, 2019).

On the other hand, modern Islamic boarding schools have developed a more formal education system with graded classes, structured curricula, and systematic learning evaluations. In this system, Islamic Boarding Schools not only educate santri to become religious scholars but also prepare them to become productive citizens who are adaptable to the developments of the times. The national curriculum and the Islamic Boarding Schools curriculum are integrated to produce santri who have broad knowledge, national values, and high academic competitiveness (Fauzi, 2020).

Social relations within Islamic Boarding Schools are highly egalitarian and foster strong familial bonds. Collective life in dormitories and shared routines cultivate a culture of solidarity and mutual respect. Values such as Islamic brotherhood, cooperation, discipline, and responsibility are not taught through lectures alone but are practised in the

daily lives of students. This intensive interaction creates a social environment conducive to character development and the internalisation of Islamic values in an applied manner (Baharun, 2018).

Additionally, the relationship between the kiai and santri is built within a strong framework of ta'dzim (respect). Santri not only learn knowledge from the kiai but also absorb their lifestyle, leadership style, and social ethics, both directly and indirectly. This interaction based on exemplary behaviour makes the Islamic Boarding Schools an educational institution for character development rooted in Islamic tradition and spirituality. The emotional closeness between santri and kiai also strengthens loyalty to values and reinforces a moderate Islamic identity (Hidayatullah, 2019).

With a flexible yet robust structure, Islamic Boarding Schools are able to maintain the originality of Islamic education while adapting to the needs of the times. The combination of classical and modern curricula, as well as social relations that are dialogical and participatory, makes Islamic Boarding Schools effective educational institutions in producing generations with good character, knowledge, and high social awareness. This is what makes Islamic Boarding Schools a great potential as the ideological stronghold of the nation.

### **3. Distinctive Values of Islamic Boarding Schools: Sincerity, Simplicity, Brotherhood, and Tolerance**

Islamic boarding schools, as traditional Islamic educational institutions, not only serve as centres for the transmission of Islamic knowledge but also as institutions for moral and character development. One of the strengths of Islamic boarding schools lies in the instilling of noble values that have been passed down from generation to generation, namely sincerity, simplicity, brotherhood, and tolerance. These values are not only taught through formal education but are also internalised through daily practices within the boarding school environment.

Sincerity is a fundamental value in Islamic Boarding Schools tradition, reflected in the attitudes of students and teachers in their academic and religious activities. Teachers typically teach without expecting financial compensation, and students learn with a spirit of dedication. This relationship pattern indicates that education in Islamic Boarding

Schools prioritises sincerity and spirituality as the foundation for the blessings of knowledge. Sincerity becomes the moral energy that maintains the sincerity of intention in learning, teaching, and serving the community (Masruri, 2017).

Simplicity is also a characteristic of Islamic Boarding Schools life, both in material aspects and lifestyle. Students are trained to live with minimal facilities, avoid a consumerist lifestyle, and appreciate every form of sustenance and effort. This value fosters the attitudes of qana'ah (contentment) and tawadhu' (humility), which become important assets for students as they navigate the challenges of social life. Simplicity in the Islamic Boarding Schools is not a matter of necessity but a manifestation of Islamic teachings on asceticism and personal piety (Baharun, 2018).

The value of ukhuwah or brotherhood is the soul of collective life in the Islamic Boarding Schools. The santri live together in a dormitory environment that requires cooperation, empathy, and high solidarity. In this situation, a culture of mutual assistance, mutual advice in goodness, and mutual help in difficulties is formed. This harmonious social relationship forms the basis for the development of santri character that is tolerant and open to differences. The value of ukhuwah that grows in Islamic Boarding Schools becomes a model of inclusive and humanistic Islamic social relations (Sulaiman, 2021).

Tolerance in Islamic Boarding Schools is not merely a slogan but is cultivated through interactions among santri from diverse backgrounds, regions, ethnicities, and Islamic organisations. Although santri have different schools of thought, views, or local cultures, they are taught to respect each other and not impose their will. In fact, large Islamic Boarding Schools in Indonesia have proven capable of maintaining harmonious relations between religious communities in their surrounding areas. The value of tolerance, which is cultivated from an early age, is an important bulwark against the seeds of radicalism and exclusivity in religion.

## **Islamic Boarding Schools Strategies in Preventing Radicalism**

### **1. Moderate Islam-Based Curriculum**

The educational curriculum in Islamic Boarding Schools plays a vital role in shaping the mindset, religious attitudes, and social behaviour of santri. In an effort to prevent the

growth of radicalism, many Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia have developed a moderate Islamic-based curriculum (*wasathiyah*), which is an approach to Islamic education that emphasises balance between text and context, as well as between doctrine and social reality. This curriculum is designed to internalise values of tolerance, justice, respect for diversity, and commitment to the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia and the values of Pancasila.

The moderate Islamic-based curriculum generally integrates the study of classical texts with national and universal human values. Classical texts that form the foundation of Islamic Boarding Schools education, such as *Tafsir al-Jalalain*, *Fath al-Mu'in*, *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*, and *Ihya Ulum al-Din*, are understood not merely textually but through a contextual and inclusive hermeneutic approach. This has shaped a Islamic Boarding Schools intellectual tradition that is anti-extremist because it presents an understanding of Islam that is friendly, peaceful, and adaptive to changing times (Ma'arif, 2019).

One important strategy in shaping a moderate Islamic curriculum in Islamic Boarding Schools is to include material on citizenship, national awareness, and multicultural education. In some Islamic Boarding Schools, these subjects are taught alongside *fiqh*, *tauhid*, and *akhlak* to reinforce the awareness that being a Muslim does not mean having to oppose national principles. Islam is understood as a religion that supports peace, equality, and social justice, as reflected in the teaching of *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (Rohmana, 2020).

The implementation of a moderate Islamic curriculum is also demonstrated in dialogical and participatory learning methods. Students are encouraged to discuss, argue healthily, and understand differences of opinion within the framework of scientific etiquette. This trains them to be open-minded and avoids blind fanaticism, which is one of the characteristics of radicalism. *Kiai* and *ustaz* in Islamic Boarding Schools play an important role as role models in delivering material wisely and contextually (Baharun, 2018).

Furthermore, Islamic Boarding Schools also strive to develop curricula that are responsive to current issues such as interfaith tolerance, anti-violence, and social media ethics. This is important given the prevalence of intolerant and radical narratives spreading

through digital media. By equipping students with digital literacy skills and a healthy understanding of Islam, Islamic boarding schools have contributed to producing a young Muslim generation that is moderate and wise in dealing with differences (Suyadi et al., 2021).

Therefore, the moderate Islamic-based curriculum in Islamic boarding schools is not only a tool for religious education but also an instrument for social transformation. This curriculum shapes the character of students who are not only ritualistically devout but also committed to peace, tolerance, and diversity. Amid the rising tide of global radicalism, such an educational approach positions Islamic boarding schools as a bastion of civilisation capable of preserving the integrity of the Indonesian nation and the values of Islam as a source of mercy for all creation.

## **2. Strengthening the Character of Students Through Habituation**

Islamic Boarding Schools have a unique advantage in shaping the character of their students through a consistent and continuous approach to habit formation. The character of students is not only shaped through the learning process in the classroom, but also through daily routines that are rich in moral and spiritual values. This habit formation includes religious activities, time discipline, social responsibility, and the development of a tolerant attitude, which serve as a foundation in preventing the growth of radical and intolerant attitudes.

The habit formation of values in Islamic boarding schools is carried out through a boarding school system that allows for intensive supervision and guidance of students' behaviour 24 hours a day. Activities such as praying five times a day in congregation, reciting the Qur'an, evening prayers, and studying classical Islamic texts are part of the routine that not only builds spiritual discipline but also fosters a love of knowledge and emulation of the kiai (Zaini, 2019). These values are instilled not through formal instruction but through repetition that shapes religious habits.

Character traits such as honesty, responsibility, cooperation, and social awareness are developed through collective activities, such as cleaning duty, mutual assistance, student meetings, and community service activities. Such activities aim to shape santri who are not selfish, are ready to cooperate, and have empathy for others. These social values are the

main support against the growth of radicalism, which usually stems from exclusive and intolerant attitudes (Sulaiman, 2021).

The educational process in Islamic Boarding Schools places great emphasis on the exemplary behaviour or *uswah hasanah* of the *kiai* and *ustaz*. This exemplary behaviour is not only in terms of worship and knowledge, but also in social life and national attitudes. Students learn to respect differences, listen to others' opinions, and act wisely in dealing with conflicts. These attitudes are important assets in shaping the character of *santri* to be moderate and avoid violence in their thoughts and actions (Baharun, 2018).

The instilling of values is also reinforced through *halaqah*, *ta'lim*, and open discussions that encourage *santri* to think critically and contextually in understanding religious texts. This process prevents textual and rigid interpretations of religion, which can be the seeds of radical thinking. Students are taught that differences of opinion are part of the intellectual richness of Islam and should not be treated with hostility (Ma'arif, 2020).

In the context of national character building, Islamic boarding schools play a role in internalising national values and Pancasila. Through activities such as flag ceremonies, national holiday celebrations, and national discussions, *santri* are introduced to the importance of maintaining unity and diversity as part of their Islamic commitment. The integration of Islamic and national values prevents *santri* from being trapped in narratives that oppose the state or separate religion from national commitment.

The character of *santri* is also shaped through the hierarchical system and respect within Islamic Boarding Schools, which fosters an attitude of *ta'dzim* towards teachers and parents. This attitude trains *santri* to uphold ethical values in their interactions and to respect scientific authority. In the long term, this attitude of respect teaches the importance of avoiding arrogance and coercion, which are characteristic of radical groups.

Thus, strengthening *santri* character through habit formation is a highly effective cultural strategy in preventing radicalism. This approach is not indoctrinating, but grows naturally from an environment rich in values and positive habits. The success of Islamic boarding schools in shaping students who are tolerant, disciplined, and peace-loving proves that value-based education can be a strong ideological bulwark amid the tide of globalisation and religious extremism.

### **3. Interfaith Dialogue and Openness in Islamic Boarding Schools**

Islamic boarding schools, as traditional Islamic educational institutions, have undergone a transformation in their role from being mere centres of religious teaching to becoming active social agents in fostering harmony and diversity. Amidst the growing challenges of radicalism and religious intolerance, the openness of Islamic boarding schools to interfaith dialogue has become an important strategy in internalising moderate values and strengthening social cohesion. This dialogue not only serves as a tool for interfaith communication but also as a concrete manifestation of the practice of Islam as a source of mercy for all creation.

The openness of Islamic Boarding Schools to religious pluralism is a manifestation of an inclusive understanding of Islam, which views differences not as threats but as social realities that must be managed wisely. Many Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia, especially those with a moderate orientation, have made interfaith dialogue part of their non-formal education programmes. Activities such as interfaith discussions, inter-community visits, and cultural forums are concrete examples of Islamic boarding schools' involvement in fostering interfaith harmony.

In Islamic intellectual tradition, dialogue is a classical method used to resolve differences of opinion in a scientific and civilised manner. The concept of *al-hiwar* (dialogue) in the Qur'an was practised by the Prophet Muhammad SAW in his interactions with various religious groups, such as Jews, Christians, and even polytheists. This spirit of dialogue is inherited in the Islamic Boarding Schools tradition through methods such as *musyawarah* (consultation), *bahtsul masail* (discussion of religious issues), and open discussions, which train students to approach differences rationally and courteously (Syamsuddin, 2003).

The openness of Islamic Boarding Schools is also evident in the flexibility of the education system, which adapts to changes in the times. Many Islamic Boarding Schools now accept students from various religious organisational backgrounds, even from non-Muslim environments in special interfaith study programmes. This demonstrates that Islamic Boarding Schools are not exclusive in their religious understanding but strive to build bridges of dialogue to strengthen tolerance and mutual understanding among people

of different faiths.

One concrete example of Islamic Boarding Schools involvement in interfaith dialogue can be seen in the Islamic Boarding Schools for Peace programme, which involves students in training on conflict resolution, religious tolerance, and interfaith social cooperation. This programme aims to equip students with communication and empathy skills so that they can become agents of peace in a pluralistic society (Mubarak, 2021). This also shows that Islamic Boarding Schools are not only moral strongholds but also strategic actors in religion-based social diplomacy.

The success of Islamic Boarding Schools in practising openness is also influenced by the role of kiai as central figures. Kiai who are open-minded and uphold human values will encourage an educational climate that is friendly to diversity. The kiai's exemplary role in fostering good relations with interfaith leaders in the surrounding community also strengthens the moderate and inclusive character of the santri. Thus, the exemplary approach in dialogue becomes an effective strategy in anti-radicalism education.

However, Islamic Boarding Schools openness to interfaith dialogue does not always run smoothly. There are still challenges from groups that view dialogue as a form of compromise on religious beliefs. Therefore, it is important for Islamic Boarding Schools to strengthen the theological and methodological foundations of dialogue in Islam to avoid misunderstandings within their communities. Critical and contextual education on verses of tolerance and diversity in the Qur'an must be part of the curriculum to build a comprehensive understanding.

The dialogue strategies developed by Islamic Boarding Schools also need to be supported by policies from the government and civil society organisations. This collaboration is necessary to expand cooperation networks and strengthen the capacity of Islamic Boarding Schools in tolerance education programmes, dialogue facilitator training, and the provision of relevant learning modules. The involvement of Islamic Boarding Schools in this interfaith network will further strengthen their role as the frontline in countering religious-based radicalism.

By prioritising dialogue and openness, Islamic Boarding Schools can create an educational environment that upholds the values of humanity, togetherness, and peace.



This strategy not only prevents the emergence of radical attitudes among santri, but also strengthens an Islamic identity that is in harmony with Indonesia's diverse social reality. Through interfaith dialogue, Islamic Boarding Schools are not merely religious institutions, but also guardians of social harmony and agents of cultural transformation relevant to the challenges of the times.

## Conclusion

Islamic Boarding Schools play a strategic role in preventing radicalism in Indonesia. Through an educational approach that emphasises moderate Islamic values, Islamic Boarding Schools serve as an effective ideological bulwark against the spread of extremist ideology. Character education, a curriculum based on classical texts, and openness to interfaith dialogue are important assets that Islamic Boarding Schools possess in nurturing Indonesian and Islamic identity in a harmonious manner.

As a recommendation, it is necessary to expand the network of Islamic boarding schools that promote moderate values and provide policy support from the state. This includes strengthening human resource capacity, providing digital infrastructure, and integrating Islamic boarding schools into national programmes for the prevention of radicalism. In this way, Islamic boarding schools can continue to play their role as guardians of national morality and pioneers of Islam that is a blessing for all.

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