

Dynamics of Pluralism in Santri Education: Perspectives and Practices in Modern Islamic Boarding Schools

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Pluralism;
Santri Education;
Modern Islamic Boarding School

Article history:

Received 2024-08-14
Revised 2024-10-12
Accepted 2024-12-08

ABSTRACT

One of the main foundations in maintaining diversity and harmony in Indonesia's multicultural society is pluralism. Islamic boarding schools as Islamic educational institutions have an important role in instilling pluralism values in students, especially in the era of modern Islamic boarding schools that are more open to social dynamics. However, the application of the principle of pluralism in Islamic boarding schools still faces various challenges, especially in maintaining a balance between strict religious teachings and acceptance of diverse values. This study examines the dynamics of the application of pluralism in student education in modern Islamic boarding schools, focusing on the perspectives and practices applied. The method used in this study is a literature study, where various literature that discusses pluralism education, student character, and educational models in modern Islamic boarding schools are comprehensively analyzed. The results of the study show that modern Islamic boarding schools have implemented several strategies to integrate pluralism values into the curriculum and educational activities. This is done through an inclusive learning approach, interfaith dialogue, and the formation of an attitude of tolerance among students. However, there are still challenges in the implementation of pluralism, especially related to the resistance of some conservative groups and limited resources. This study concludes that despite facing various obstacles, pluralism education in modern Islamic boarding schools has significant potential in forming the character of students who are tolerant and open to differences.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Pluralism is one of the main pillars in maintaining harmony and diversity in Indonesia, which is a challenge in the context of Islamic education, especially in the pesantren environment. As a country with the largest Muslim population in the world, Indonesia faces a dilemma between maintaining strict

religious traditions and adapting to increasingly inclusive social dynamics. Islamic boarding schools, as the oldest Islamic educational institution that has a significant influence, play an important role in shaping the character of the younger generation of Muslims (Siswanto & Muhammad, 2024). Therefore, the application of pluralism values in student education is very important. Islamic boarding schools are not only tasked with teaching Islamic religious teachings in depth, but also to equip students with an understanding of social, religious, and cultural diversity. In this era of increasingly connected globalization, pesantren that are able to teach pluralism can produce a generation that is more tolerant, inclusive, and ready to face the challenges of diverse lives.

However, the application of pluralism in Islamic boarding schools often causes adverse incidents. One of the main issues that is being debated is how pesantren can balance strict religious teachings with acceptance of social and cultural diversity in Indonesia (Nilan, 2009). Some parties argue that the practice of pluralism can threaten the purity of Islamic teachings, because it is considered contrary to conservative values that are upheld in Islamic boarding schools. On the other hand, there are also those who see pluralism as an important step to create a more tolerant and inclusive Muslim society, which is able to coexist with the diversity of religions and cultures in Indonesia (Miles, 2009). This debate reflects a major challenge for pesantren in maintaining a balance between religious traditions and the need to adapt to evolving social dynamics.

Empirical data shows an increase in the application of pluralism values in Islamic boarding schools, especially modern Islamic boarding schools. Based on the report of the Ministry of Religion in Nafis' book, the number of Islamic boarding schools that adopted pluralism-based implementation increased compared to the previous year (Nafis, 2017). This fact shows that awareness of the importance of instilling pluralism values among Islamic boarding schools is increasing. However, this implementation is inseparable from various obstacles. Resistance from conservatives is still quite strong, with the view that pluralism can reduce the purity of Islamic teachings. A survey by the Indonesian Survey Institute (LSI) in 2022 showed that 42% of respondents from Islamic boarding schools considered pluralism values to be contrary to the Islamic teachings they adhered to (LSI, 2022).

On the other hand, another study conducted by the Wahid Foundation stated that the level of intolerance in the community is still high, which is 49.8%. Therefore, the internalization of the values of tolerance in the dynamics of pluralism, especially in Islamic boarding schools, is very important (Foundation, 2019). However, concerns that the pluralism approach can reduce students' understanding of traditional Islamic teachings have not been resolved. This research is very important to understand the dynamics of the application of pluralism in student education in modern Islamic boarding schools. This research aims to identify the perspectives and practices applied in integrating pluralism values and evaluate the effectiveness of strategies used by pesantren in creating an inclusive and tolerant educational environment. In addition, this research also aims to identify the obstacles faced, both from the internal pesantren and external influences. By understanding these dynamics, it is hoped that the right solution can be found to overcome various challenges and contribute to the development of a pesantren education model that is able to produce students with a tolerant character and open to differences. This research is also expected to be a guide for policymakers in designing a more inclusive Islamic boarding school curriculum that is in line with the needs of the times.

Similar research has been conducted by several researchers before. As research conducted by Asror, the results of his research show that through pesantren education with a multicultural perspective, attitudes and thoughts will become more open in understanding and appreciating diversity and can instill thoughts in students to be able to maintain and respect the diversity of ethnicities, religions, races, and international groups (Asror, 2022). Another research was conducted by Muhajir at the Gontor Islamic Boarding School. The study states that pluralism in Islamic boarding schools is reflected in educational policies that respect cultural diversity and encourage students to think critically (Muhajir, 2022). Further research was conducted by Zainullah and Sayyi, who found that multicultural values in pesantren partly come from local wisdom which then persists as the character of pesantren (Zainullah & Sayyi, 2019). From several previous studies, it can be seen that there are similarities and differences with this study.

The teachings on pluralism and multiculturalism are similar, while the difference lies in the object of research. This research focuses more on student education in modern Islamic boarding schools.

2. METHODS

This study uses a literature study method to explore the dynamics of the application of pluralism in student education in modern Islamic boarding schools. The research begins by collecting data from relevant literature sources, such as books, journal articles, and research reports that discuss aspects of pluralism in pesantren education. Furthermore, the collected data was analyzed to identify the main themes, including the application of pluralism, emerging challenges, and their impact on the development of students' characters. The analysis is carried out by grouping information based on the themes that have been identified, comparing various perspectives, and evaluating how the pluralism model is applied in modern Islamic boarding schools. This process aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the application of pluralism education, the challenges faced, and its influence on the character of students in the context of Islamic boarding schools. Through this approach, it is hoped that deep insights can be found on how pesantren can play a role in shaping a generation that has an attitude of tolerance and respect for diversity in society.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. *Pluralism in Islamic boarding schools*

Pluralism in Islamic boarding schools refers to the acceptance and appreciation of diversity in Islamic education (Muhajir, 2022). In Indonesia, pluralism involves religious, cultural, ethnic, and social differences. In the context of pesantren, pluralism means integrating the values of diversity in the curriculum and daily interactions between students (Fox & Gay, 1995). This is very relevant considering that Indonesia is a country with a very pluralistic society, which has various religions, ethnicities, languages, and cultures. Pesantren as an Islamic educational institution has an important role in shaping the character and worldview of students, so the application of pluralism in pesantren is very important to equip them with the ability to live in harmony in the midst of diversity.

However, the application of pluralism in Islamic boarding schools is not always easy. Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia have a very strong religious tradition, where more conservative Islamic values are often the main cornerstone of education. This can pose a challenge when pesantren are faced with the need to open themselves to pluralism values. However, some Islamic boarding schools have tried to adopt the value of pluralism through more inclusive approaches. One of these approaches is interfaith dialogue that provides space for students to discuss and understand the beliefs of other religions directly, without reducing respect for their own religion.

In addition, several Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia have also included teaching programs that introduce the history of various religions and cultures as part of their curriculum (Rumainur, 2022). By studying the history and culture of various groups, students are expected to understand and appreciate the differences that exist. This kind of program not only teaches academic knowledge, but also shapes the character of students to be more open and tolerant of differences. In the long term, this can help create a younger generation that is better prepared to face the challenges of an increasingly global and multicultural society.

Instilling the value of pluralism in Islamic boarding schools can also increase tolerance and inclusive attitudes among students. Research shows that a pluralistic approach to education can strengthen mutual respect and build more harmonious relationships in society (Walad et al., 2024). Therefore, pluralism in Islamic boarding schools is not only an issue of education, but also part of efforts to strengthen social cohesion in an increasingly diverse society. By prioritizing the principles of pluralism, pesantren can play a role as an institution that not only produces religiously devout individuals, but also individuals who have a broad understanding of the importance of coexistence with others, regardless of existing differences.

3.2. Dynamics of Pluralism Implementation

The application of pluralism in modern Islamic boarding schools faces various complex challenges. One of the main and most striking challenges is the resistance of conservative Islamic boarding school community groups. Many conservative groups feel that the principle of pluralism, which emphasizes acceptance and respect for diversity, can undermine the purity of Islamic teachings (Legenhausen, 1999). They are worried that integrating pluralistic values could change the character of Islamic teachings, which they believe must retain their authenticity.

According to Azyumardi (Azra, 2013), changes in the Islamic education curriculum to accommodate pluralism often face resistance because they are contrary to traditional doctrines in Islamic boarding schools. Azra noted that most traditional pesantren maintain a more exclusive approach to education, focusing on strict religious teachings and practices, making it difficult to accommodate the principle of pluralism without sacrificing certain aspects of traditional teachings (Azra, 2013). This rejection often stems from concerns about the declining quality and authenticity of religious education, which is one of the main reasons why some Islamic boarding schools are still reluctant to adopt a pluralistic curriculum.

Pluralism education in modern Islamic boarding schools is designed to form the character of students who are more tolerant and open to differences. By incorporating the principles of pluralism in the curriculum, pesantren aims to teach students the importance of appreciating and respecting social differences, including religious, cultural, and ethnic differences. Methods used in pluralism education include interfaith discussions, cultural diversity studies, and activities that promote interfaith understanding (Jackson, 2018). Through this approach, students are expected to develop a more inclusive attitude and understand that differences are part of diversity that must be celebrated, not avoided or fought against (Hidayat, 2022).

Research by Yusuf dan Hasyim (Yusuf & Hasyim, 2020), provides concrete evidence regarding the positive effects of pluralistic education on student character. The authors found that students who participated in pluralism education programs showed a higher level of tolerance than those who did not receive this education. They also showed better abilities in interacting with individuals from different backgrounds (Yusuf & Hasyim, 2020). These findings are consistent with other studies, which show that education that integrates the principles of pluralism can improve tolerance attitudes and interpersonal skills, as well as reduce prejudice and conflict (Supriatin & Nasution, 2017).

In addition, the impact of pluralism education on students' character can be seen from changes in their attitudes and behaviors in daily life. Students who are exposed to the values of pluralism tend to be more open, empathetic, and able to resolve conflicts with a more peaceful and constructive approach (Moh. Yusuf, 2023). This is not only beneficial for students' interpersonal relationships but also has a positive impact on their wider social environment. By equipping students with tolerance and good interpersonal skills, pluralism education helps to form individuals who are not only ready to live in a multicultural society but can also contribute to social harmony (Zubaidi, 2024).

3.3. Pluralism Education Model in Islamic Boarding Schools

Several models of pluralism education can be applied in modern Islamic boarding schools to face challenges in integrating pluralism values. One of the models that can be applied is the inclusive model, which focuses on integrating pluralism values into all aspects of the curriculum and activities in Islamic boarding schools. The inclusivism model aims to ensure that the principles of pluralism are taught separately and are part of a comprehensive educational process. As Sulton (Sulton, 2015) explains, this model includes teaching that emphasizes interfaith dialogue, the study of cultural diversity, and the establishment of mutual respect. With this approach, pesantren can create a learning environment that supports openness and understanding of differences (Sulton, 2015). It helps students to develop critical social skills in interacting with individuals from different backgrounds.

Another important model is the dialogical model, which focuses more on establishing a dialogue forum between students from various backgrounds to discuss the issue of pluralism openly. The

dialogical model allows students to engage in direct conversations about their views and experiences, which can broaden their horizons about diversity. Through this dialogue forum, students can explore and discuss various perspectives constructively, increasing understanding and tolerance for differences (Walad et al., 2024). This approach encourages productive interfaith and intercultural interaction and helps overcome prejudice among students.

Experiential models can also be applied, which involve hands-on student experience in the context of diversity. This model includes visits to different communities, participation in cross-cultural events, and collaborative projects with groups from different backgrounds. According to Yusuf and Hasyim (A. Yusuf & Hasyim, 2020), the experiential model allows students to experience firsthand the dynamics of diversity, which can deepen their understanding of the values of pluralism. Students can build stronger, more empathetic relationships and develop a deeper inclusive attitude in their daily lives by being directly involved in activities that involve interaction with other groups. This model provides practical experience that can reinforce the concept of pluralism taught in the curriculum.

Discussion

Pluralism from the Perspective of Modern Islamic Boarding Schools

In modern Islamic boarding schools, pluralism is defined as an attempt to integrate the values of diversity in an education system that is often dominated by solid religious traditions. Modern Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia, such as the Al-Hikmah Islamic Boarding School in Rembang (Fatah et al., 2023) and the Assalaam Islamic Boarding School in Surakarta (Sugianto et al., 2024), face challenges in aligning traditional religious teachings with the need to understand and appreciate diversity. These two pesantren apply an inclusivism model, which incorporates the value of pluralism in their curriculum. Programs such as interfaith dialogue and applied cultural studies aim to enrich the educational experience of students while still maintaining the essence of Islamic teachings. Through this approach, pesantren not only teaches Islam in depth, but also provides space for students to appreciate and understand cultural and religious differences. Thus, these pesantren strive to create a generation that not only understands the teachings of Islam well, but can also coexist and contribute to an increasingly diverse society.

However, a significant challenge in implementing pluralism is the rejection of conservative groups who feel that the principle of pluralism can undermine the purity of Islamic teachings. Al-Qudwah Islamic Boarding School in Kediri shows a different approach by applying a dialogical model (M. Q. Huda et al., 2023), where students engage in an open dialogue forum to discuss issues of pluralism and share their views. The forum creates a space for students to have an open dialogue about diversity, which helps them develop a better understanding of different perspectives. Research by Walad (Walad et al., 2024) reveals that this dialogical approach is effective in increasing tolerance, reducing prejudice among students, and broadening their horizons about diversity. By interacting in open discussions, students can learn to overcome differences and see the positive values of diversity, which ultimately forms a more inclusive attitude and respect differences. This approach has proven to be one of the effective ways to create a generation that is not only strong in religious teachings, but also able to adapt and coexist in an increasingly pluralistic society.

Experiential models also play an important role in learning pluralism in Islamic boarding schools. For example, the Darul Ulum Islamic Boarding School in Jombang applies this approach through visits to various communities and participation in cross-cultural events (S. A. A. Huda & Ariffaturakhman, 2021). This experiential model allows students to interact directly with various community groups, which deepens their understanding of pluralism. Research shows that these activities help students develop better empathy and interpersonal skills, as well as prepare them to adapt and contribute to a multicultural society. By engaging in cross-cultural activities, students not only gain theoretical understanding, but also hands-on experience that enriches their perspective on diversity. This is very important in forming an attitude of tolerance and respect for differences among students, as well as

equipping them with the ability to live in harmony in an increasingly diverse society. This experiential model approach has proven to be effective in teaching pluralism practically, having a positive impact on the development of students' character and social attitudes.

Overall, the application of pluralism in modern Islamic boarding schools shows that education can be a vital tool to integrate diversity values without sacrificing religious teachings. Through an inclusive, dialogical, and experiential approach, this pesantren seeks to form students who understand Islamic teachings well and are able to contribute to an increasingly diverse society. An inclusive approach allows pesantren to accept a wide range of differences without putting aside essential Islamic teaching principles, while a dialogical approach opens up space for discussion and understanding between different groups. Through the experiential model, students not only learn theory, but also directly interact with various communities that enrich their insights. The success of pesantren in implementing pluralism reflects how education can increase tolerance and understanding between cultures, while still respecting and maintaining the essence of religious teachings. Thus, pesantren play an important role in creating a generation that is not only religious, but also able to coexist in a plural society.

Implementation of pluralism in student education

The practice of dynamic pluralism in student education in modern Islamic boarding schools involves various strategies and approaches designed to integrate the value of diversity in the daily lives of students. One of the main practices is the implementation of a curriculum that includes material on pluralism and diversity. At Al-Hikmah Islamic Boarding School in Rembang, for example, their curriculum involves the study of the history and culture of various religions as well as the implementation of regular interfaith dialogue (Fatah et al., 2023). This program aims to help students understand different views and backgrounds, as well as develop mutual respect. In addition, pesantren also encourages students to be involved in activities that involve interaction between cultures and religions, such as celebrations of other religious holidays, as part of direct learning about pluralism. With this approach, pesantren hopes to form a generation that not only *maal-qudsters* religious teachings, but is also able to live in a plural and multicultural society with an inclusive attitude.

In addition to the curriculum, modern Islamic boarding schools also apply a dialogical model to discuss issues of pluralism. Al-Qudwah Islamic Boarding School Kediri, for example, provides a dialogue forum that allows students to openly discuss various topics related to pluralism and diversity (M. Q. Huda et al., 2023). This forum serves as a forum for students to exchange views and learn from the experiences of others. Yusuf and Hasyim's research in Ngalah boarding school Pasuruan, shows that these kinds of discussions help students overcome prejudice and broaden their understanding of diversity, which contributes to increased tolerance (A. Yusuf & Hasyim, 2020). With open dialogue, students can not only understand the concept of pluralism in theory, but also experience firsthand the interaction between different groups, which in turn can strengthen their inclusive attitude. This shows that through a dialogical approach, pesantren can play an important role in forming a generation that is more tolerant and ready to face diversity in society.

The experiential model is also an important part of the practice of pluralism in Islamic boarding schools. For example, the Darul Ulum Islamic Boarding School in Jombang organizes visits to various communities and cross-cultural events. This activity allows students to interact directly with various community groups, which deepens their understanding of pluralism. According to Walad (Walad et al., 2024), direct involvement in cross-cultural activities helps students develop empathy, interpersonal skills, and a better understanding of diversity. Through this direct experience, students not only learn about the theory of pluralism, but also feel the dynamics of diversity in daily life. This allows them to see diversity as a positive thing and enrich their life experiences, thus forming a tolerant and inclusive attitude. Thus, this experiential model is an effective approach in building a generation that is more aware of the importance of coexistence in diversity.

In daily practice, modern Islamic boarding schools often face challenges in implementing pluralism, especially due to rejection from conservative groups who are worried that pluralistic values

may affect the purity of religious teachings. However, this pesantren tries to strike a balance between maintaining religious traditions and integrating pluralism values. Using an inclusivist, dialogical, and experiential approach, they create an educational environment that supports the development of an attitude of tolerance and respect for diversity without sacrificing the basic principles of Islamic teachings. The inclusive approach allows pesantren to accept diversity within the confines of Islam's universal values, while dialogical opens up space for open discussion about pluralism. Through the experiential model, students can engage directly with various community groups, deepening their understanding of diversity. In this way, pesantren can form a generation that is not only strong in faith and religious science, but also ready to coexist with various differences in society.

4. CONCLUSION

Pluralism in modern Islamic boarding school education in Indonesia describes an effort to incorporate the value of diversity into an education system that usually adheres to strong religious traditions. Modern Islamic boarding schools face significant challenges in combining traditional religious teachings with the need to understand and appreciate diversity. By applying a model of inclusivism, dialogue, and experience, Islamic boarding schools such as Al-Hikmah Islamic Boarding School, Al-Qudwah Islamic Boarding School, and Darul Ulum Islamic Boarding School try to develop curricula and activities that support pluralism without sacrificing the basic principles of Islamic teachings. This approach helps students overcome prejudice, broaden their understanding of diversity, and develop a better attitude of tolerance.

Strengthening the implementation of pluralism in Islamic boarding schools can be applied by continuing to develop a deeply integrated curriculum that includes pluralism values. In addition, it is crucial to provide more dialogue forums and experiential activities that allow students to interact directly with various communities. This approach will broaden students' horizons, improve their social skills, and prepare them to play a role in a multicultural society. Involving the entire educational community in this effort will ensure that the value of pluralism is widely accepted and implemented in the daily life of the pesantren.

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