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The Kiai's Strategy for Internalising Religious Moderation through Kitab Kuning Learning at Pondok Pesantren Anwarul Ulum Jambi: A Qualitative Case Study of an Implicit Curriculum

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ABSTRACT

Pesantren are widely credited with cultivating religious moderation, yet the mechanism by which classical texts produce moderate dispositions is rarely examined at the level of teaching practice. This study analyses the strategy pursued by the kiai of Pondok Pesantren Anwarul Ulum Jambi in internalising the values of wasathiyyah through the study of kitab kuning. A qualitative case study design was adopted, generating data through in-depth interviews with twelve informants comprising the kiai, five teachers of classical texts, and six resident santri, through a seven-hour participatory observation covering the afternoon and evening cycle of instruction, and through documentation. Analysis proceeded thematically with cross-source matrix displays. Sixteen themes were developed under four conclusions. First, the strategy is systematic in intention but implicit in delivery: no policy document, dedicated subject, or visual material bearing the name of moderation was found, and observation recorded neither an opening nor a closing in which the value was named, so that transmission depends on the personal example of teachers and on the accumulated habits of communal life. Second, the principal strategic act is curation of the canon, since the texts selected display the disagreement of scholars on the page and thereby supply the evidence for tolerance before tolerance is asserted. Third, one teacher advanced a substantially more critical account than the others, arguing that what matters most in the classical corpus is not tolerance but the intellectual culture of scholarly dialogue, and that this culture is frequently lost in transmission when only juridical conclusions are conveyed. Fourth, a gap was found between the method the teachers regard as most effective for moderation and the method that predominates in practice, and all six santri independently identified the same deficiency, namely insufficient discussion of contemporary religious issues and of the material they encounter on social media.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The pesantren is routinely described as a reservoir of religious moderation in Indonesia (Burga & Damopolii, 2022; Falah & Haqiqi, 2023; Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2019; Mujahid, 2021; Subchi et al., 2022), and the description is usually supported by reference to the corpus of classical works known as kitab kuning (Z. F. M. Daud, 2021; Widodo et al., 2023). The reasoning is plausible. These works record the disagreement of qualified scholars, set out competing arguments with their evidences, and were composed within a tradition that treated such disagreement as ordinary rather than scandalous (Al-Hafizh et al., 2021; Ikhsan, 2016). A student who reads them attentively encounters, without editorial mediation, the fact that authorities of comparable standing reached different conclusions from the same sources (Z. F. M. Daud, 2021; Widodo et al., 2023).

The inference from this to the disposition of students, however, is not automatic, and it conceals a question that is pedagogical rather than textual. A classical work contains both the conclusions of scholars and the reasoning by which they arrived at them, and it is possible to teach the first without the second. Where that occurs, a student may emerge from years of study with a confident command of rulings and no acquaintance at all with the deliberative culture that produced them. Whether the corpus generates moderation therefore depends on how it is taught, not merely on what it contains, and this is a matter for empirical description rather than assumption.

The question has acquired urgency from a source outside the pesantren. Santri now inhabit two learning environments simultaneously (Nisa, 2018; Saputra et al., 2021). In one, understanding is built slowly, through a graded sequence of texts, under a teacher, over months. In the other, religious conclusions arrive as fragments of video lasting a minute, detached from the reasoning that produced them and frequently sharpened for effect. The second environment is faster, more emotionally engaging, and available at all hours (Hew, 2018; Slama, 2017; Zaid et al., 2022). The displacement of trained scholars by digitally native preachers is documented across the Indonesian field (Zaid et al., 2022). A pesantren that transmits conclusions without deliberative habits equips its students poorly for that competition, since it trains them in exactly the mode of religious knowing that the fragment exploits.

Within the pesantren the figure of the kiai is decisive for how this is resolved (Aisyah et al., 2022; Machali et al., 2021). Recent studies of pesantren leadership converge on the same conclusion, describing the kiai's authority as simultaneously charismatic, managerial, and exemplary (Aisyah et al., 2022; Akrim & Umiarso, 2023; Al-Ghifari et al., 2024; Muali et al., 2021). The kiai determines which texts are taught, directs the teaching staff, frequently teaches, and is observed continuously by santri in circumstances where his conduct towards difference is visible. Any strategy for internalising moderation therefore passes through his leadership, whether it is formalised in policy or carried entirely by practice. This makes the kiai's strategy the appropriate unit of analysis, and it makes the relation between what he intends, what teachers do, and what santri receive the appropriate object of examination.

Pondok Pesantren Anwarul Ulum Jambi presents an instructive case for three reasons. It teaches an established canon of Shafi'i and Ash'ari works selected explicitly for their conformity to the Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah tradition (Kanafi et al., 2021; Machali et al., 2021), so that curation of the corpus is a deliberate act rather than an inheritance. Its teaching staff is young in service, most having taught for two to four years, and most formed at a single feeder institution, which raises the question of how a shared understanding is produced and maintained. And, as the findings below establish, it possesses no document, subject, or visual material bearing the name of moderation, so that the value must be traced through practice or not at all.

Moderation is understood here through the Qur'anic principle of wasathiyyah, grounded in the description of the community as *ummatan wasatan* in Q. 2:143 and elaborated in contemporary thought

as balance that rejects both excess and deficiency (Bakir & Othman, 2017; Kamali, 2015; Shihab, 2019). Indonesian policy renders the principle as four operational values, including *tawassuth*, *tasamuh*, *tawazun*, and *i'tidal*, and these organise the analysis of values reported below (Kanafi et al., 2021; Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2019). The study's second organising concept is the implicit or hidden curriculum: the set of institutional arrangements, relationships, and routines through which values are transmitted without ever being stated as curriculum (Alsubaie, 2015; Apple, 2019). Its operation in pesantren is well attested, where exemplary conduct, dormitory life, and habituated adab do work that no syllabus records (Akmansyah & Nurnazli, 2024; Muali et al., 2021). Social learning theory supplies the mechanism by which such transmission occurs, namely observation of a model rather than verbal instruction (Schunk, 2020), while situated learning theory locates the acquisition of disposition in participation within a community of practice (Farnsworth et al., 2016). Research on trustworthy qualitative accounts of such processes further requires that the researcher's own position be made explicit rather than bracketed away (Berger, 2015). Three subsidiary questions structure the inquiry. First, what strategies does the kiai design and apply? Second, which values of moderation are actually instilled through this teaching? Third, what factors support and what factors obstruct the process?

Three bodies of work bear on the question. The first describes the pesantren as an institution and the kitab kuning as its curriculum, establishing the canon, the pedagogies of *sorogan* and *bandongan*, and the position of the kiai within them (Albab et al., 2022; Machali et al., 2021; Nurhayati & Nurhidayah, 2019; Widodo et al., 2023). The second examines religious moderation as an educational objective, mapping its values, its policy vehicles, and its measurement (Ekawati et al., 2019; Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2019; Nasir & Rijal, 2021; Subchi et al., 2022) and, in the pesantren specifically, reporting that moderate dispositions are cultivated through culture and exemplarity as much as through instruction (Akmansyah & Nurnazli, 2024; Burga & Damopolii, 2022; Mujahid, 2021). The third analyses pesantren leadership, converging on the kiai's exemplary conduct as the operative channel of formation (Aisyah et al., 2022; Akrim & Umiarso, 2023; Al-Ghifari et al., 2024; Muali et al., 2021). What these literatures do not supply is an account, grounded in observation as well as report, of the pedagogical operations by which a corpus of classical texts is converted into a disposition and, in particular, of the points at which that conversion fails. Studies of the pesantren canon have moreover tended to treat its moderating tendency as given rather than as contested, although the corpus demonstrably contains material that can be read against it (Z. F. M. Daud, 2021). The present study addresses these gaps by examining strategy, values, and obstructing factors together, and by treating divergence between accounts and observed practice as evidence in its own right.

The contribution is threefold. Empirically, the study documents a strategy that is systematic in intention and implicit in delivery, and identifies curation of the canon as its principal instrument. Analytically, it reports two divergences that a consensus account would have concealed: one between the method teachers judge most effective for moderation and the method that predominates in practice, and one between the confident accounts given in interview and the absence of explicit reinforcement recorded in observation. It also foregrounds a dissenting teacher whose account, that the intellectual culture of the corpus is frequently lost in transmission, constitutes the sharpest analytic proposition in the corpus. Practically, it reports a criticism on which every santri independently converged.

2. METHODS

This qualitative study adopted a case study design to examine the internalisation of *wasathiyyah* values at Pondok Pesantren Anwarul Ulum Jambi. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation. Triangulation by source and technique was embedded to uncover both corroboration and divergences across datasets.

Twelve informants were selected purposively based on their institutional positions: The Kiai / *pengasuh* (1), Teachers of classical texts (*kitab kuning*) (5), and *santri* (6). Most teachers had 2–4 years of teaching experience, with four having been formed at the same feeder institution.

Data collection comprised three main techniques: 1) In-depth Interviews: This technique using structured schedules to explore strategy, pedagogical methods, lived experience, and challenges. 2) Participatory Observation: A single seven-hour session conducted covering the daily cycle of *sorogan* and *bandongan* instruction. The instrument evaluated 23 indicators across instructional context, teacher strategy, and santri conduct. 3) Documentation: Analysis of the curated corpus of texts, physical environment, visual materials, and photographic records.

Data analysis followed Braun & Clarke's (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Byrne, 2022; Nowell et al., 2017) six-phase reflexive thematic analysis, supported by a cross-source matrix to map themes against informant categories and techniques. Trustworthiness was established through credibility (triangulation and multi-observer field presence), transferability (thick description of the pesantren setting), dependability (a clear audit trail), and confirmability. Researcher positionality was made explicit. Ethical approvals and informed consent were secured, ensuring voluntary participation and full anonymity.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis produced sixteen themes distributed across the three research questions, together with two cross-cutting themes arising from divergence between techniques. Table 4 summarises them with their supporting sources and an assessment of strength. Themes supported by interview, observation, and documentation together are reported as strong; those resting on a single informant are marked as such and are treated as propositions rather than established findings.

Table 4. ***Thematic Map, Supporting Sources, and Strength of Evidence***

Question	Theme	Supporting sources	Strength
RQ1	1. A strategy systematic in intention, implicit in delivery	K1, OB-1, documentation	Strong
RQ1	2. Curation of the canon as the principal strategic act	K1, U3, U4, U5, texts in use	Strong
RQ1	3. The kiai as teacher as well as director	K1, S1, S2	Moderate
RQ1	4. Exemplarity as the unwritten curriculum	K1, U1, U2, U3, S1, S4, OB-1	Strong
RQ1	5. Alignment forums and the limits of alignment	K1, U1, U2, U3, U5	Strong
RQ1	6. Persuasion rather than confrontation in correction	K1, U1, U2	Moderate
RQ2	7. The named values and their ordering	K1, U3, U4, U5, S1-S6	Strong
RQ2	8. Ikhtilaf as the vehicle: evidence before moral	K1, U1, U3, U4, U5, S1, S3, OB-1	Strong
RQ2	9. Intellectual culture as the deeper value	U1	Single informant
RQ2	10. Passages liable to misreading and the contextual remedy	U1, U2	Moderate

RQ2	11. Santri uptake: a consistent but thin vocabulary	S1-S6	Strong
RQ3	12. The pesantren as a congruent environment	K1, U3, U4, U5, S1-S6, OB-1	Strong
RQ3	13. Social media as a parallel curriculum	K1, U1, U3, S1, S4	Strong
RQ3	14. Heterogeneity of intake and the distance of the text	K1, U2, U3, U4	Strong
RQ3	15. Obedience culture as a constraint on questioning	U1	Single informant
RQ3	16. Evaluation by conduct, without an instrument	K1, U1, U2, U3, U4, U5	Strong
Cross	17. The gap between stated and practised method	U1, U3, U5 against OB-1	Strong
Cross	18. The convergent santri critique	S1-S6	Strong

A. The Strategy of the Kiai

A strategy systematic in intention, implicit in delivery

Asked whether his strategy had been designed deliberately or had developed organically, the kiai was unambiguous, describing it as systematically designed while continuously adjusted to the developing needs of the santri, and identifying himself, the teaching staff, and the pesantren administrators as its authors. His account of the strategy itself is equally clear: explaining the content of the text in depth, supplying concrete examples, and connecting the material to the daily life of the santri. He located the origin of the underlying vision at the founding of the institution, describing it as intended to form santri capable of meeting a changing age without losing the values of their religion.

Observation records something different, and the difference is the pivot of this study. Across a seven-hour observation spanning sorogan, bandongan, and halaqah, no opening or closing was recorded in which the value of moderation was named or explicitly reinforced. The instrument notes, against the indicator concerning the opening of instruction, that this occurred only rarely and only where the material itself required it; against the indicator concerning particular emphasis on a specific value of moderation, that this was not explained clearly; and against the indicator concerning the closing, that it was not consistent and depended on circumstances. Examination of the physical environment found no poster, symbol, or slogan bearing on moderation anywhere in the pesantren; the wall texts encountered carried general encouragement to study and exemplary conduct for teachers and students alike.

The observers' own interpretation of this is worth reporting, since it was reached independently of the interviews and anticipates the analysis offered here. Their reflection concludes that internalisation proceeds through the practice of instruction and the culture of the institution rather than through explicit delivery, that the values appear interwoven in the ordinary course of teaching rather than as a subject in their own right, and that the process is consequently dependent on the personal example of individual teachers and on habits formed over time rather than supported by a deliberately planned strategy of reinforcement.

The two accounts are not in contradiction, and the resolution is analytically productive. What the kiai describes as systematic is the architecture: the selection of texts, the direction given to teachers, the regularity of the forums in which understanding is aligned, the integration of the value into worship, discipline, and communal life. What observation establishes is that this architecture is not accompanied by explicit signalling at the level of the individual lesson. The strategy is systematic at the level of the institution and implicit at the level of the classroom. Both propositions are true, and the second identifies precisely where the arrangement is vulnerable: a value that is never named cannot be deliberately reinforced, cannot be evaluated against a stated standard, and depends for its transmission on the disposition of whoever happens to be teaching.

Curation of the canon as the principal strategic act

If the strategy is not delivered through explicit instruction, it must be delivered through something else, and the interviews identify what. Asked what considerations governed his selection of texts, the kiai described choosing works conforming to the creed of Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah and teaching character, balance, and respect for difference, naming *Ta'lim al-muta'allim*, *Riyad al-salihin*, *Ihya' 'ulum al-din*, *Fath al-qarib*, and *Tafsir al-Jalalayn*. Asked whether any text was excluded, he answered in terms of positive selection:

> *"We prefer texts that have been recognised by the scholars of Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah, so that we do not use texts liable to give rise to deviant understanding." (K1)*

The selection is therefore an act of strategy rather than an inheritance, and it does the work that explicit instruction does not. Teachers described the corpus as carrying the value in different registers according to genre. One observed that works of jurisprudence teach tolerance through the difference of scholarly opinion, works of character teach mutual respect, and works of exegesis and hadith supply foundations of compassion and justice (U3). Another distinguished emphasis rather than presence, noting that texts on creed strengthen conviction, those on jurisprudence display the breadth of Islamic law, and those on character instil regard for others (U5). A third located the value in specific chapters, citing the discussion of conduct towards teachers and fellow students in Ta'lim al-Muta'allim, the chapters on brotherhood, compassion, and the prohibition of mutual hatred in Riyadh al-Salihin, and the presentation of differing juridical opinions in Fath al-Qarib (U4).

Table 5. ***The Curated Corpus and the Values Attributed to It***

Text	Genre	Value attributed by informants
Ta'lim al-Muta'allim	Conduct of learning	Humility; conduct towards teachers and fellow students; restraint in judgement
Riyadh al-Salihin	Hadith collection	Brotherhood, compassion, prohibition of mutual hatred
Ihya' Ulum al-Din	Ethics and spirituality	Balance; interior disposition alongside outward observance
Fath al-Qarib	Shafi'i jurisprudence	Legitimacy of juridical disagreement; breadth of the law
Tafsir al-Jalalayn	Qur'anic exegesis	Justice and tolerance in the interpretation of scripture
Safinat al-Naja, Sullam al-Najah	Elementary jurisprudence	Graded foundations on which later disagreement can be understood
Akhlaq lil-Banin	Character formation	Everyday courtesy and regard for others

The elementary jurisprudential texts named elsewhere in the corpus, *Safinat al-naja* and the character primer *Al-akhlaq lil-banin*, occupy the graded foundation on which the later encounter with disagreement rests (Albab et al., 2022). A distinction drawn by two teachers refines this. Values may be present explicitly, stated as an injunction or a prohibition, or implicitly, carried by the manner in which a scholar reasons. One expressed the second as the more important: implicit value is discerned in the way scholars explain a ruling with full deliberation, without haste in faulting others, and while leaving room for the existence of differing opinion (U4). Another located it in the method of reasoning itself, in which the scholar weighs the evidence, the condition of society, and the purposes of the law before arriving at a judgement (U5). What both describe is a value carried by form rather than by content, and a value of that kind cannot be extracted from a text by a student reading alone. It requires a teacher who draws attention to the reasoning as reasoning, which is why theme nine below matters as much as it does.

The kiai as teacher as well as director

The kiai does not confine himself to direction. He reported teaching regularly, principally works of character, exegesis, and hadith according to the pesantren timetable, alongside giving guidance to teachers and supervising instruction for consistency with the institutional vision. Asked how he inserts the value into the sessions he leads, he described giving balanced explanation, supplying examples from real life, and inviting santri to respect difference. He also described extending the value beyond instruction into communal worship, the habituation of conduct, discipline, and daily life, and named deliberation, community service, preaching, and social activity as activities outside the classroom deliberately intended to strengthen it.

Santri accounts confirm the reach of this. One reported that the kiai was highly influential because he did not only teach theory but supplied an example in daily life, and that his friendliness towards everyone conveyed that Islam teaches compassion and respect (S1). The same informant recalled a specific statement:

> *"The kiai once said that a person who genuinely understands religion will not readily declare others unbelievers or hate them merely because of a difference of opinion." (S1)*

That a santri recalls a particular formulation from the kiai, unprompted and in his own words, is evidence of a kind that interviews with teachers cannot supply. It indicates that the kiai's direct teaching reaches santri as memorable content and not only as institutional atmosphere.

Exemplarity as the unwritten curriculum

Every informant category identified personal example as the principal channel. The kiai described attempting to model justice, regard for others, and the resolution of difference by good means, and gave as a concrete instance his practice, when disagreement arises, of inviting calm discussion without assigning blame. Teachers reported that his example shaped their own teaching, one observing that his courtesy and openness towards difference furnish a concrete example more readily grasped by santri than theoretical explanation (U3), another that his guidance arrives through routine teaching, the teachers' deliberative forum, and above all through direct example in daily interaction with santri and the surrounding community (U2).

The fullest statement came from the dissenting teacher, and it is analytically sharper than the others because it specifies a mechanism and a failure condition:

> *"In my view the kiai is far more influential through conduct than through sermons. Santri see how he receives guests from various organisations, how he responds to political difference, and how he speaks about other groups. If the kiai teaches tolerance but behaves otherwise, the santri will follow the behaviour. That is why I believe exemplarity is a curriculum that is unwritten but most effective." (U1)*

The formulation identifies the specific occasions on which the value is transmitted, and they are not pedagogical occasions at all: the reception of visitors from differing organisations, the handling of political difference, the manner of speaking about other groups. It also states the failure condition

explicitly, that where conduct and instruction diverge the conduct prevails precisely the prediction of social learning theory, in which the modelled behaviour rather than the stated rule is what is acquired (Schunk, 2020), and of the hidden-curriculum literature, in which institutional practice overrides declared curriculum (Alsubaie, 2015; Apple, 2019; Muali et al., 2021). Read alongside the observation finding that explicit reinforcement is largely absent, this establishes exemplarity not as one channel among several but as the load-bearing element of the entire arrangement.

Alignment forums and the limits of alignment

The kiai described regular meetings with teachers to align understanding and evaluate instruction, and confirmed the existence of dedicated meetings and discussions for that purpose, adding that he ensures consistency with the institutional vision through direction, discussion, and periodic evaluation. Teachers corroborated this with more specificity, one naming a *bahtsul masail* forum, the tradition of collective juridical deliberation characteristic of this stream of pesantren (Abubakar et al., 2023; Dardiri, 2023; F. K. Daud & Hambali, 2022; Moqsith, 2017), together with monthly evaluation meetings and regular study sessions addressing how the value should be integrated into the teaching of the texts (U2). Two described the latitude they are given, one reporting considerable freedom to develop their own methods provided these remain within the values the kiai has set (U2), another that freedom extends as far as the institutional vision and the Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah tradition allow (U3). Collaboration across subjects was reported by two teachers as a means of ensuring that the value is conveyed consistently across different texts.

The reason such forums are necessary was supplied by the dissenting teacher, and it is not a reason the others offered:

> *"No. In my view this is also a reality that needs to be acknowledged. Differences of educational background, organisational experience, and ways of understanding the text make each teacher's approach different. That is why the forum of teachers' deliberation becomes important, so that the message the santri receive remains consistent." (U1)*

The admission that teachers do not share a single understanding of moderation reframes the forums entirely. In the accounts of the other teachers they appear as instruments of coordination among people who already agree; in this account they are the mechanism by which a genuine divergence is prevented from reaching santri as inconsistency. The second reading is the more demanding, since it makes the frequency and seriousness of the forums a condition of the strategy rather than an administrative convenience. It also finds indirect support in the institution's staffing profile, where four of five teachers share a common formation: the one teacher formed elsewhere, at this pesantren itself, is precisely the one who reports the divergence.

Persuasion rather than confrontation in correction

Asked how he responds to a santri or teacher displaying an insufficiently moderate understanding, the kiai described a persuasive approach through dialogue, counsel, and guidance, and stated the rationale directly, that the approach is persuasive so that the person understands without feeling blamed. He supplied a case without identifying details, describing a santri who was quick to fault the opinions of others and who was guided through discussion and explanation from the texts until he became more open.

One teacher described the classroom equivalent, and identified the boundary at which he intervenes:

> *"What concerns me is not the difference of opinion, but when santri begin to attack persons or to consider other groups deviant without scholarly basis. In such a situation I stop the debate and invite them to look again at how the classical scholars conducted dialogue. Often the santri are startled, because it turns out the leading imams differed far more sharply than the difference they are now arguing about, yet they continued to respect one another." (U1)*

The technique is worth noting for its economy. The correction is administered not by the teacher's authority but by the historical record, and it works by contrast: the santri's sense of the magnitude of their disagreement is recalibrated against a tradition in which greater disagreement coexisted with mutual regard. Another teacher reported a comparable approach with santri from environments of rigid understanding, using a personal approach and gradual dialogue (U2). Both accounts locate the intervention at the point where disagreement becomes personal or exclusionary rather than at the point of disagreement itself.

B. The Values Instilled

The named values and their ordering

Asked which values he most emphasises for graduates, the kiai named tawassuth, tasamuh, tawazun, justice, and respect for difference, and justified the priority in social terms, that these are needed so that santri may live in peace and become exemplars in society. Teachers named a wider set. One listed tawassuth, tasamuh, tawazun, i'tidal, deliberation, brotherhood, respect for scholars, respect for differing opinion, and the avoidance of readiness to fault others (U3). Another named justice in decision, respect for teachers and peers, restraint in blaming others, the priority of deliberation, the preservation of Islamic brotherhood, and the habit of reasoning on the basis of knowledge (U5). A third named respect for teachers, respect for differing opinion, the priority of deliberation, refusal to declare others unbelievers, the preservation of brotherhood, and justice in resolving disputes (U4).

Two observations follow from the aggregation. The four canonical terms are present throughout, but they are consistently accompanied in the teachers' accounts by two further items that are not part of the standard formulation: musyawarah, the practice of collective deliberation, and ukhuwah, the bond of brotherhood. Both are procedural and relational rather than doctrinal, and both describe how a community handles difference rather than what a believer should think about it. The teachers' working vocabulary is thus somewhat broader than the policy vocabulary, and broader in a direction that reflects the residential setting in which they work. The second observation concerns adab towards teachers, which appears in three of the five accounts as a value of moderation. Its inclusion is not obvious, and it sits in tension with theme fifteen below, where the same value is identified as a constraint on the questioning that moderation requires.

Ikhtilaf as the vehicle: evidence before moral

The mechanism by which the value reaches santri is consistent across every source. Scholarly disagreement is presented openly, with the reasoning and evidence of each position, and the moral is drawn from that presentation rather than asserted in advance. One teacher described conveying ikhtilaf openly by explaining the evidence and the reasoning of each opinion without disparaging the position of another school (U2), and explained that difference arises from differing methods of legal reasoning and differing social contexts, so that it should be regarded as a richness of the scholarly heritage rather than a source of division. He added that he presents at least two or three differing opinions with their evidences even though the text under study inclines to the Shafi'i school. Another described teaching the history of the schools and the methods of legal derivation used by the founding imams, emphasising that all pursued the same object, namely truth on the basis of evidence (U3).

Observation confirms this occurs, and also delimits it. The instrument records that the teacher conveyed the differences among scholars, with the accompanying note that this happened depending on the material to be delivered, and the narrative field note records that where the text touched on disagreement the teacher explained it proportionately without excessive partiality to any one position. The delimitation matters: the treatment of ikhtilaf is occasioned by the text rather than sought out, so its frequency is governed by what the syllabus happens to contain rather than by a decision to teach the value.

Santri accounts show the mechanism working. One reported that the most memorable moment was when the teacher explained that difference of opinion among scholars is ordinary, from which he

learned not to fault others readily merely for differing (S1). The same informant described a shift in his own position:

> *"Before entering the pesantren I thought every difference had to be contested. After studying the classical texts I understood that many differences are the outcome of scholarly reasoning and must still be respected." (S1)*

He also reported that the terminology is not what carries the value, observing that teachers do not usually use the word moderation but speak instead of tawassuth, tasamuh, i'tidal, or good character. The point is worth registering, since it means the institution transmits the disposition in the vocabulary of the tradition rather than the vocabulary of policy, which is another reason an external search for the policy term would fail here.

Intellectual culture as the deeper value

One teacher advanced a position that no other informant approached, and it constitutes the most demanding proposition in the corpus. Asked which value is most prominent in the classical texts, he declined the expected answer:

> *"In my view what is most prominent is not merely tolerance. What matters most is intellectual culture. The classical texts teach that the truth arrived at by scholarly reasoning is not always single. The scholars differed, yet they continued to respect one another. Unfortunately this culture is sometimes lost when the text is taught. What is passed on is only the juridical conclusion, while the process of scholarly dialogue is not explained. As a result santri may understand jurisprudence in black and white." (U1)*

The argument distinguishes two things ordinarily conflated. Tolerance is a disposition towards those who differ; intellectual culture is a conception of how knowledge is produced, in the sense in which the science of *usul al-fiqh* treats plurality of conclusion as an ordinary product of legitimate reasoning (Al-Hafizh et al., 2021; Ikhsan, 2016), in which plurality of conclusion is a normal outcome of legitimate reasoning rather than a defect to be explained away. On this account the second generates the first, and generates it more durably, because a santri who understands why qualified scholars differ has no need to be persuaded separately that they should be respected.

The proposition also identifies the point of failure with precision, and locates it in transmission rather than in the source. The corpus contains both conclusion and reasoning; teaching may convey only the first; and where it does, the resulting understanding is described as black and white, which is to say that the santri acquires the outputs of a deliberative tradition without acquiring the deliberation. He returned to this when asked what he would change:

> *"I would want the teaching of the texts to emphasise the process of the scholars' reasoning rather than merely their juridical outcomes. Santri need to learn how the scholars exercised legal reasoning, why they differed, and how they respected one another." (U1)*

The theme rests on a single informant and cannot be reported as an established finding about the institution. It is nonetheless the analytic key to the study, because it supplies a testable explanation for a pattern that is independently documented: the santri accounts reported in theme eleven display exactly the profile his argument predicts.

Passages liable to misreading and the contextual remedy

Two teachers addressed a question that the pesantren literature has raised only rarely, namely whether the corpus contains material that can be read against the value it is credited with transmitting. Where the question has been posed, it has been posed of madhhab exclusivism rather than of the classical canon in classroom use (Z. F. M. Daud, 2021; Idrus et al., 2022), and the dominant framing continues to treat the canon's moderating tendency as given (Burga & Damopolii, 2022; Mujahid, 2021). One answered directly that it does, naming the discussion of jihad, relations with non-Muslims, the law of innovation in religion, and loyalty to particular Islamic groupings are the categories whose contextual reading has long been treated in the literature as a condition of their responsible transmission (Al-Hafizh et al., 2021; Ikhsan, 2016), and specifying the condition under which misreading occurs, namely reading without regard to the historical circumstances, the purposes of the

law, and the social conditions in which the text was composed (U1). He drew the pedagogical conclusion that understanding a text is not sufficient at the level of language and requires knowledge of the history of Islamic thought.

He also addressed whether a teacher may criticise the text he is teaching:

"Yes. In my view criticising does not mean disparaging the text. On the contrary, to honour a text is to read it scientifically. Some discussions were indeed produced in the social context of the medieval period. I explain to the santri that not every aspect is universal. What is universal is the principle of the law, while the form of its application can change with the changing of the age." (U1)

A second teacher identified the difficulty in the character of the corpus rather than in particular passages, describing classical Arabic and the social and cultural context of composition as sufficiently distant from the present that santri struggle to grasp the relevance of the text without supplementary explanation (U2). Between them the two accounts specify a requirement that the strategy as described elsewhere does not explicitly provide for: the historical and contextual competence of the teacher is a condition of the corpus functioning as a resource for moderation rather than against it. Where that competence is absent, the same passages remain in the syllabus and are read without it.

Santri uptake: a consistent but thin vocabulary

The six santri produced accounts that are strikingly consistent with one another and with the values their teachers describe. Moderation is running the teaching of religion in balance, without excess, holding to the law while respecting difference and preserving harmony (S1). The moderate attitude understands religion wisely and does not force opinion upon others, whereas the extreme attitude feels itself uniquely correct, receives difference with difficulty, and readily faults others (S1). Tawassuth is taking the middle path, avoiding excess in worship and in the handling of disagreement (S1). Tasamuh is regard for others without surrendering one's own conviction (S1). Every santri interviewed produced formulations within this range.

Reported practice is equally consistent: respecting friends, maintaining courtesy, not readily faulting the opinions of others, resolving difference through deliberation (S1); remaining on good terms with a friend of differing religious view, discussing courteously, and not forcing one's own opinion (S1). One reported a concrete episode in which a difference over a practice of worship was resolved by discussing it with a teacher, from which the santri learned that each position had a firm basis. Another described becoming more patient, slower to judge, and more open to opinions possessing a scholarly foundation.

The consistency is a genuine achievement and should be recorded as such. It is also, read against theme nine, thin in a specific and predictable way. The santri accounts are rich in disposition and sparse in mechanism: they report that scholars differed and that difference must be respected, but they do not describe why scholars differed, what methods of reasoning produced the divergence, or how a position is assessed. The one santri who approaches the mechanism does so in general terms, referring to differences arising from scholarly reasoning. This is precisely the profile the dissenting teacher predicts for teaching that transmits conclusions along with the injunction to respect them, while leaving the deliberative process implicit. The convergence between his diagnosis and the independently collected santri accounts is the strongest analytic result of this study, and it holds even though his account rests on a single interview, because what corroborates it is not another teacher's opinion but the pattern of the santri data.

C. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

The pesantren as a congruent environment

The kiai identified the principal support as the commitment of the kiai and teachers, the curriculum, and an environment conducive to the formation of character, and specified the internal strength as a pesantren culture of discipline, familial relation, and the study of the classical texts. He also named external supports, citing parents, alumni, and the surrounding community. Teachers

described the same congruence, one observing that a culture that holds conduct and personal example in high regard strongly supports the instilling of the value, since santri learn not only from the text but from interaction and shared living (U2), and another that daily life is filled with communal worship, deliberation, cooperative work, and mutual respect towards teachers and fellow santri (U3).

Observation supports this at the level of conduct rather than instruction, which is consistent with the overall pattern of the findings. All seven indicators concerning santri conduct were recorded as present: attentive listening, active questioning during sorogan, evident regard for differing opinion, courteous and reasoned argument in discussion, note-taking, openness to differing views, and interaction among santri displaying tolerance and mutual respect. The narrative field note records santri seated in a circle facing the teacher, and interprets the arrangement as expressing closeness between teacher and santri as well as serving a practical purpose. The value is thus visible in the conduct of the room even where it is absent from the framing of the lesson.

Social media as a parallel curriculum

Every informant category identified the external information environment as the principal obstacle, and the kiai named it as the most significant challenge he faces. His account distinguishes the medium from its use, noting that social media can convey both correct and incorrect information so that santri require guidance in filtering it. The dissenting teacher's formulation is considerably sharper and locates the difficulty as a competition between two modes of learning:

> *"Today the santri live in two worlds. In the pesantren they study the texts by stages. But on social media they receive fragments of sermons lasting one minute which are often highly provocative. Not a few santri place more trust in a short video than in the explanation of a text studied over months. This has become a very serious challenge." (U1)*

He also reported the outcome that most concerns him, describing santri who appear to accept every explanation in class but whose thinking becomes markedly exclusive after returning home or becoming active on social media, and drawing from it the conclusion that education is not only a matter of delivering material because the social environment exerts very great influence. Asked whether he had ever felt he had failed to instil the value, he answered that he had, and that every teacher must have experienced it.

Santri accounts confirm both the exposure and a degree of resistance to it. One reported encountering a sermon on social media that readily faulted other groups, and responded by declining to believe it immediately and asking a teacher for explanation instead (S1). The same informant attributed the capacity to the corpus itself, explaining that the classical texts teach the importance of understanding evidence in full and consulting the opinions of scholars, so that he is not easily influenced by provocative material. That a santri can articulate the defensive function of his own training is a meaningful indicator, though it should be read alongside the teacher's report that the classroom impression and the subsequent conduct do not always correspond.

Heterogeneity of intake and the distance of the text

The kiai identified the internal obstacle as differences in the capacity to understand the texts and in the character of individual santri. Teachers elaborated in two directions. One described obstacles ranging from the differing backgrounds of santri to the characteristics of the corpus itself, which is difficult to understand without supplementary explanation, and identified santri from environments of rigid understanding as those who receive the value with most difficulty, addressed through a personal approach and gradual dialogue (U2). Another named differing backgrounds, the influence of social media, limited instructional time, and religious understandings acquired outside the pesantren that do not accord with what is taught within it (U3).

The two obstacles compound one another in a way none of the informants stated but the data support. A corpus distant in language and in social context requires substantial explanation before its content can be discussed; santri arrive with widely differing capacities to receive that explanation; and

instructional time is finite. The teacher who must render a medieval text intelligible to a heterogeneous group within a fixed period has correspondingly less occasion to draw attention to the reasoning as reasoning, which is the operation theme nine identifies as decisive. The structural constraint and the pedagogical loss are connected.

Obedience culture as a constraint on questioning

Asked whether the culture of the pesantren always supports moderation, four teachers answered in the affirmative. One did not:

> *"Not always. I think we must also be honest in looking at the reality. There are pesantren cultures that are very open to dialogue. But there are also pesantren that still place too much emphasis on obedience, so that the space for asking becomes limited. In my view the two need to be balanced. Santri must continue to respect their teachers, but they must also be given space to ask critically. If not, they will look for answers on social media, which cannot necessarily be relied upon." (U1)*

The argument connects two findings that would otherwise stand apart. Where the space for questioning is narrow, the questions do not disappear; they migrate to the environment identified in theme thirteen as the principal threat. On this account the obedience culture and the social media problem are not independent obstacles but linked: the first supplies the demand that the second meets. The proposition is advanced as a general observation about pesantren rather than as a description of this institution specifically, and it rests on one informant; but it is directly testable, and it bears on the value of adab towards teachers that three teachers listed among the values of moderation. Whether adab and critical questioning are complementary or in tension is not resolved by the present data, and the two accounts within the corpus point in opposite directions.

Evaluation by conduct, without an instrument

On evaluation the informants are unanimous in a way they are on no other question, and unanimous in rejecting the obvious instrument. The kiai evaluates through observation of santri conduct, reports from teachers, and formation activities, and identified as indicators good character, the capacity to respect difference, and balanced practice of the religion. Teachers concurred. One stated that written examination is not sufficient and must be accompanied by direct observation of conduct in daily life at the pesantren, naming as indicators the capacity to respect differing opinion, restraint in faulting others, and courtesy in discussion (U2). Another evaluates through observation of conduct, manner of discussion, treatment of peers, and respect towards teachers, alongside a test of comprehension (U3). The dissenting teacher was the most explicit:

> *"I do not believe that moderation can be measured merely by examination marks. What I look at is the change in the santri's way of thinking and behaving. For instance, whether when they differ they are still able to respect the person they are discussing with. Whether they readily spread information that is not yet clear. Whether they are able to acknowledge that another's opinion may be correct." (U1)*

Reported change is corroborated across sources: santri becoming more open in discussion and less readily provoked by divisive issues (U2), and more open to differing opinion, more courteous in discussion, more respectful of peers, and able to resolve conflict through deliberation (U3). The kiai reported adjusting methods where evaluation indicated the need.

What the institution does not possess is any instrument for recording the judgements on which this consensus depends. The difficulty is generic to the affective domain, where the objects of assessment are dispositions rather than recallable propositions (Schunk, 2020), and it is compounded where the value is never named in instruction (Alsubaie, 2015; Apple, 2019). Evaluation of conduct is conducted by observation, reported through teachers, and retained as impression. The consequence is a system in which the agreed criterion of success is precisely the one that generates no record, so that the institution cannot demonstrate to itself or to anyone else what it believes it achieves, cannot identify which santri are not progressing, and cannot detect the pattern the dissenting teacher describes, in

which classroom reception and subsequent conduct diverge. The absence follows directly from theme one: a value never named in the lesson is unlikely to be documented in its assessment.

D. Two Gaps Between Account and Practice

The gap between stated and practised method

Teachers were asked whether *bandongan*, *sorogan*, and *halaqah* differ in effectiveness for instilling moderation, a comparison the pesantren literature has framed largely in terms of comprehension rather than disposition (Albab et al., 2022; Widodo et al., 2023), and their answers converge on a clear ranking. One judged halaqah the most effective for cultivating regard for the opinions of others, because santri can discuss directly, while bandongan is effective for delivering material comprehensively and sorogan assists individual formation (U3). Another gave the same ordering, holding that bandongan supports understanding of the text as a whole, sorogan trains individual responsibility, and halaqah supplies the space for discussion in which santri learn to accept differing views (U5). The dissenting teacher went further and named a fourth activity as decisive:

> *"In my view the method most important for building moderation is in fact musyawarah. In deliberation santri learn that a single question may carry many arguments. They are compelled to listen before objecting. A culture of that kind is far more difficult to build than simply memorising the text." (U1)*

He was equally candid about the limitation of the dominant method, acknowledging that bandongan is effective for conveying the content of the text to many santri at once but is sufficiently teacher-centred that the space for santri to think critically remains limited.

Observation records the opposite distribution. Against the indicator concerning halaqah or group discussion, the instrument notes that it is present but that sorogan predominates, and the narrative field note records that halaqah is not as dominant as either sorogan or bandongan and tends to be used as a variation within the process rather than as a standard component. The method the teachers identify as most effective for the value under examination is thus the least practised, while the method one of them describes as constraining critical thought is among the most frequent.

The gap is not evidence of insincerity, and it admits a straightforward structural explanation. Bandongan and sorogan are fixed points in the daily cycle, the first following the Isha prayer and the second following the formal school day, and both accommodate the number of santri present, approximately fifty on the day observed. Halaqah and musyawarah require smaller groups, more preparation, and a teacher able to manage disagreement in real time, and they occupy no protected place in the timetable. The result is that the activity carrying the greatest value for moderation is the one most easily displaced. This is the single most actionable finding in the study, since it identifies a remedy that requires a scheduling decision rather than a change of conviction.

The convergent santri critique

The santri were asked what the teaching they receive lacks, and their answers converge to a degree unmatched anywhere else in the corpus. The first reported that the explanations are easy to understand and always connected to real life, but that discussion of contemporary religious issues and of social media still needs to be increased so that santri are better prepared for a changing age (S1). The second reported that instruction proceeds by stages and is therefore easy to follow, but that time for discussion is sometimes limited so that not all santri can express their views (S2). The third reported that explanations are clear and accompanied by concrete examples, but that instruction is sometimes dominated by exposition so that opportunities for discussion are not yet numerous (S3). The fourth reported a conducive atmosphere and comprehensible explanation, but that treatment of contemporary religious questions still needs to be increased (S4). The fifth reported a conducive atmosphere and a close relation between teachers and santri, but that instruction on religious issues developing in society still needs to be added (S5). The sixth reported that instruction is thorough and supported by reference to a range of texts, but that discussion of religious issues circulating on social media needs to be undertaken more often (S6).

Six santri, interviewed separately, at two levels of study, from five regions of origin, identified the same deficiency in two related forms: insufficient engagement with contemporary religious questions, and insufficient space for discussion. Their stated hopes follow the same line, one asking for more forums, seminars, or study sessions addressing the challenges of moderation in the digital era so that its application in modern life can be understood.

The convergence of this critique with the two preceding findings is what gives it weight. The santri ask for more discussion; the teachers identify discussion-based methods as the most effective for the value and report them as least practised; and the dissenting teacher independently proposes that digital literacy be brought into the teaching of the texts, a remedy consistent with research on how young Muslims evaluate religious content encountered online (Nisa, 2018; Zaid et al., 2022) so that santri can compare the religious information they receive on social media with the scholarly tradition. Three sources, questioned separately and with different instruments, arrive at the same prescription. Table 6 sets out the correspondence.

Table 6. ***Convergence Across Sources on the Principal Deficiency***

Source	What was said	Implication
Santri (S1-S6)	Contemporary issues and social media are insufficiently discussed; time for discussion is limited and exposition predominates	Demand exists among the recipients of instruction
Teachers (U1, U3, U5)	Halaqah and musyawarah are the methods most effective for moderation; bandongan is teacher-centred and limits critical thought	The professional judgement of teachers agrees with the demand
Observation (OB-1)	Halaqah present but not dominant; sorogan and bandongan predominate; no explicit framing of the value	Practice does not reflect the judgement
Dissenting teacher (U1)	Digital literacy should enter the teaching of the texts so santri can compare social media content with the scholarly tradition	A specific remedy is already articulated within the institution

E. Synthesis: An Implicit Curriculum and Its Vulnerabilities

Relation to previous research

Read against the existing literature, three of the four conclusions corroborate prior work and one extends it. That moderation is carried by exemplarity and institutional culture rather than by named instruction agrees with studies of pesantren leadership and of moderation in pesantren more broadly (Aisyah et al., 2022; Akmansyah & Nurnazli, 2024; Akrim & Umiarso, 2023; Burga & Damopolii, 2022; Muali et al., 2021; Mujahid, 2021), and it is what the hidden-curriculum and social-learning frameworks predict (Alsubaie, 2015; Apple, 2019; Farnsworth et al., 2016; Schunk, 2020). That the open presentation of *ikhtilaf* is the vehicle of the value is consistent with accounts of the canon as a record of scholarly disagreement (Z. F. M. Daud, 2021; Ikhsan, 2016; Widodo et al., 2023). That social media constitutes a competing curriculum matches the documented fragmentation of religious authority among Indonesian Muslim youth (Nisa, 2018; Saputra et al., 2021; Slama, 2017; Zaid et al., 2022). The extension lies in the dissenting teacher's proposition, which reframes the object of transmission from a disposition towards difference to an epistemology of how juridical knowledge is produced. That reframing is

available in the *usul al-fiqh* literature (Al-Hafizh et al., 2021; Idrus et al., 2022) but is seldom brought to bear on the pedagogy of the pesantren classroom, and the santri data reported here supply the first empirical indication, in this setting, of what its absence produces.

Taken together the findings describe a coherent arrangement that is nowhere written down. The kiai curates a corpus in which the disagreement of scholars is visible; teachers present that disagreement with its reasoning as the material occasions it; santri encounter difference as an ordinary feature of the tradition before they are told to respect it; and the residential setting supplies continuous opportunity to practise what has been encountered. The whole is held together by personal example, which every informant category identifies as the principal channel and which one teacher names precisely as a curriculum that is unwritten but most effective.

The arrangement has real strengths. It transmits the value in the vocabulary of the tradition rather than of policy, which means santri receive it as part of their religion rather than as an external programme. It supplies evidence before moral, which produces conviction rather than compliance. And it is corroborated by outcomes: six santri interviewed separately produced consistent accounts of the value and of their own practice of it, and observation recorded every indicator of santri conduct as present.

It also carries three vulnerabilities that follow from its implicitness rather than from any failure of intention. The first is dependence on persons. Where the value is carried by example and by the manner in which individual teachers handle their material, the quality of transmission varies with the teacher and is not recoverable if a particular teacher leaves. This is sharpened by the staffing profile, in which tenure ranges from two to four years. The second is the absence of evaluation. The institution agrees that success consists in changed conduct and possesses no means of recording it, so the arrangement cannot demonstrate its own effect or detect its own failures. The third is the displacement of the discursive. Because discussion-based activity occupies no protected place in the timetable, the component that teachers judge most effective is the one most readily lost to the fixed daily cycle, and the santri notice the loss and name it.

The dissenting teacher's proposition, that what the corpus most valuably contains is an intellectual culture and that this culture is frequently lost when only conclusions are transmitted, unifies these vulnerabilities. Each of the three is a mechanism by which reasoning is dropped and conclusion retained: dependence on persons means the reasoning is conveyed only by those disposed to convey it; the absence of evaluation means its loss is undetected; and the displacement of discussion removes the occasion on which reasoning is practised rather than merely witnessed. The santri accounts, consistent in disposition and sparse in mechanism, are what that combination would be expected to produce.

4. CONCLUSION

This study examined the strategy of the kiai of Pondok Pesantren Anwarul Ulum Jambi for internalising the values of religious moderation through the teaching of kitab kuning, drawing on interviews with twelve informants, a seven-hour participatory observation of the daily cycle of instruction, and documentation including the physical environment of the institution. Its central conclusion is that the strategy is systematic at the level of the institution and implicit at the level of the lesson, and that its principal instrument is not instruction about moderation but curation of a corpus in which the grounds for moderation are encountered directly.

In relation to the first research question, the kiai describes a deliberately designed strategy comprising in-depth explanation of the texts, concrete example, and connection to the lives of santri, extended beyond the classroom into worship, discipline, deliberation, community service, and communal life. Observation found no explicit framing of the value at the opening or closing of instruction and no visual material bearing on it anywhere in the pesantren. Both accounts are accurate, and together they establish that the architecture is planned while the signalling is not. Within that architecture four instruments were identified: curation of a canon conforming to the Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah tradition; the kiai's own regular teaching of works of character, exegesis, and hadith; forums of

alignment among teachers, whose necessity one teacher grounded in the admission that teachers do not share a single understanding; and correction administered persuasively and, in one teacher's practice, by recourse to the historical record of scholarly disagreement rather than to the teacher's authority. Above all, personal example emerged as the load-bearing channel, transmitted on occasions that are not pedagogical at all, and failing where conduct and instruction diverge.

In relation to the second question, the values instilled comprise the four canonical terms together with two further items that recur in teachers' accounts and are procedural rather than doctrinal, namely deliberation and brotherhood. The vehicle is the open presentation of juridical disagreement with the reasoning of each position, so that santri encounter evidence before they receive a moral, and the terminology used is that of the tradition rather than of policy. One teacher argued that the deeper value is not tolerance but the intellectual culture of the classical tradition, and that this culture is frequently lost in transmission when only juridical conclusions are conveyed, leaving santri with a black and white understanding. His account rests on a single interview, but the santri data corroborate its prediction: their accounts are consistent in disposition and notably sparse in mechanism, reporting that scholars differed and must be respected without describing why they differed or how a position is assessed.

In relation to the third question, the principal support is the congruence of the residential setting, where instruction, worship, discipline, and daily interaction reinforce one another, supplemented externally by parents, alumni, and the surrounding community. Four obstacles operate against it: an external information environment in which fragmentary and provocative religious content competes directly with graded study, and which one teacher reported as sometimes prevailing after santri leave the classroom; heterogeneity of intake compounded by the linguistic and contextual distance of the corpus, which together consume the time in which reasoning would be made explicit; a culture of obedience that, on one teacher's account, narrows the space for questioning and thereby drives the questions towards the very environment that constitutes the principal threat; and the absence of any instrument for recording the evaluation on which all informants agree.

Two gaps between account and practice were identified. Teachers judge halaqah and musyawarah the most effective methods for instilling the value and bandongan the most constraining of critical thought, while observation records the reverse distribution. And all six santri, interviewed separately and from five regions of origin, identified the same deficiency: insufficient discussion of contemporary religious questions and of the material they encounter on social media, and insufficient space for discussion generally. Teachers' professional judgement, santri demand, observed practice, and a remedy already articulated within the institution converge on a single point.

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