



KYAI'S LEADERSHIP IN BUILDING RELIGIOUS MODERATION IN PESANTREN-BASED UNIVERSITIES : A MULTICULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: The purpose of this research was to shed light on the leadership dynamics within Islamic boarding schools-based universities, mainly focusing on the role of Kyai in promoting religious moderation. By understanding the strategies and approaches employed by Kyai, this study aimed to contribute to the discourse on religious leadership and multicultural education within the Islamic context. Through a qualitative approach utilizing a case study methodology, the research delved into the nuanced practices of Kyai within selected institutions. Findings illuminated Kyai's multifaceted contributions: firstly, as a revered role model embodying moderation, tolerance, and inclusivity; secondly, as a religious facilitator providing guidance and interpretation promoting interfaith understanding; and finally, as architects of a conducive learning environment where diverse perspectives are respected and dialogue flourishes. This research underscored Kyai's significance in nurturing religious moderation and advancing multiculturalism within Islamic educational contexts, offering valuable insights into effective leadership strategies for fostering tolerance and understanding in higher education settings.

INTRODUCTION

Pesantren-based universities have an important role in shaping character, religious education, and social understanding for students (Stachowiak et al., 2020; Krein et al., 2021; Machingura et al., 2021). In the midst of the challenges of globalization and the complexity of religious and cultural plurality, kyai leadership in higher education is in the main spotlight in the context of building religious moderation (Barth & Tsemach, 2021; Selamat, 2023; Rusdi et al., 2022). The strong Islamic tradition in *pesantren* carries a long history in religious education and spirituality (Diana, 2023; Rohman, 2022). However, to remain relevant in the modern era filled with cultural and religious differences, kyai's leadership must be able to strengthen the values of multiculturalism in the approach to education and student development (Suharso et al., 2020; Wijaya & Khoir, 2022; Chuanchen & Zaini, 2023).

The perspective of multiculturalism emphasizes respect for diversity as wealth and a source of strength for society (Latif & Hafid, 2021; Baihaqi, 2021;

Malović & Vujica, 2021). Thus, kyai's leadership in pesantren-based universities needs to be able to play a more effective role in creating an inclusive educational environment (Irfana et al., 2023). Tolerance, respect, and interreligious dialogue should be the main foundation in efforts to build religious moderation (Sihombing et al., 2020). Pesantren-based universities in Indonesia are not only places of religious education, but also spiritual and intellectual centers that play an important role in shaping the character and worldview of society. Behind its strong walls, pesantren become a place for the growth of spirituality and guardians of rich local wisdom (Rachmadhani et al., 2023).

However, in an era of globalization and increasingly complex cultural diversification, *pesantren* or *ma'had* are faced with various challenges that require adaptation and innovation (Fandir, 2024). One of the most pressing challenges is religious moderation (Subchi et al., 2022). With the increasing plurality of religions and cultures, as well as the emergence of issues of intolerance and interreligious conflict, the need to promote dialogue, tolerance, and inclusion has become increasingly important (Rapanta et al., 2021; Rapanta et al., 2021; Hayat & Sajad, 2022).

In this context, Kyai's leadership role in building religious moderation in pesantren-based universities becomes very relevant. Kyai, as an authoritative and spiritual figure, has great potential to shape the attitudes and behavior of *pesantren* communities towards religious and cultural differences (Bashri, 2021; Arifin et al., 2024). However, in the face of contemporary challenges, Kyai's leadership role and strategy in facilitating religious moderation still requires a deeper understanding. Kyai's leadership in building religious moderation in pesantren-based universities such as Ma'had Al-Jamiah Al-Aly is a necessity based on existing facts and reality. Amid increasingly complex social dynamics, the challenge of religious and cultural plurality has become an inevitable reality (Stewart et al., 2020). In this context, the role of kyai as a spiritual and intellectual leader becomes very important in guiding students in facing various differences (Misdah, 2020; Ihsan & Umar, 2020; Fajri & Munir, 2022).

Within Indonesia's Islamic higher education landscape, institutions like Ma'had Al-Jamiah, nestled within the Maulana Malik Ibrahim Islamic State University, serve as crucial hubs for cultivating religious knowledge and academic excellence. These institutions, deeply rooted in Islamic boarding schools or *pesantren* tradition, embody a unique blend of religious teachings and modern educational practices. This paper delved into the significant role of Kyai leadership within such institutions, focusing on their pivotal contribution to fostering religious moderation. Through a multicultural lens, this study explored how Kyai, as a respected religious leader, navigated the complex dynamics of Islamic boarding school-based higher education to promote moderation, tolerance, and inclusivity among students and faculty members. By examining the case of Ma'had Al-Jamiah Al-Aly and similar institutions, we uncovered the intricate interplay between traditional Islamic values, academic pursuits, and the broader goal of nurturing a diverse and tolerant society. Through this exploration, we aimed to shed light on effective strategies employed by Kyai in

building religious moderation within the context of Islamic higher education, offering insights into the broader discourse on multiculturalism and religious leadership.

The perspective of multiculturalism becomes increasingly relevant in this context, given the recognition of the importance of diversity as a wealth for society. Kyai's leadership that was able to utilize these principles will play a more effective role in creating an inclusive and harmonious educational environment. In addition, this research is not only important to face the internal challenges of pesantren, but also to contribute in strengthening the harmony between inclusive Islamic values and the social dynamics of modern society. Through a deep understanding of reality, the kyai's leadership can become agents of change who build a more tolerant and peacefully coexisting society, in keeping with the enlightening spirit of Islamic moderation.

Previous research has revealed various aspects of the kyai's leadership role in the context of building religious moderation in pesantren-based universities. In a study by Pratama et al. (2023), they highlight how kyai leadership in modern pesantren can be agents of change in promoting inclusivity and tolerance between religious communities. Their findings showed that the strategy of an open and dialogical approach from kyai is able to form a harmonious environment in pesantren. This was also added from research by Rohmah et al. (2023) exploring the implementation of multiculturalism values in the pesantren education curriculum. In her research, she found that the integration of multicultural concepts in the curriculum helped shape inclusive attitudes among students, which in turn strengthened religious moderation.

In addition, a study by Futaqi & Mashuri. (2022) highlights the role of kyai as a mediator in managing interreligious conflicts in pesantren. The results of his research showed that kyai who have good communication skills and managerial skills are able to reduce inter-religious tensions and build deeper understanding between them. This was also supported by research conducted by Hanafi et al. (2023) exploring students' perceptions of the role of kyai in shaping religious moderation. In the study, it was found that students are more likely to follow the example and direction of kyai which emphasizes tolerance and respect for differences. In addition, research by Afwadzi & Miski. (2021) also provided valuable insights into the concept of religious moderation in the context of Islam in Southeast Asia. Research findings showed that leaders often promote religious moderation through inclusive approaches, interfaith dialogue, and an emphasis on contextual and pragmatic understanding of religious teachings.

The novelty of this research lied in the emphasis on the role of pesantren leaders as key stakeholders in facing contemporary challenges. Along with changing social, economic, and political dynamics, pesantren leaders play an important role in shaping people's views and attitudes towards religious and cultural differences. This research needed to be done because a deeper understanding of the role of pesantren leaders in the context of multiculturalism can provide valuable guidance for the development of effective religious

moderation strategies. By highlighting the need for inclusion, dialogue, and tolerance in pesantren leadership, this research can also help strengthen the basis of social harmony and inter-religious harmony.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research used a qualitative approach with a type of case study research to explore the practice of religious moderation in pesantren-based universities (Thompson Burdine et al., 2021). Through in-depth interviews with Kyai, teaching staff, students, and the community around the pesantren by Ma'had Al-Jamiah Al-Aly, as well as participatory observation and document analysis, this study aims to thoroughly understand the concept of religious moderation in the context of pesantren, as well as the role played by Kyai's leadership in promoting interreligious harmony. Thus, this research was expected to provide deep insight into how the practice of religious moderation can be applied and strengthened in pesantren-based universities.

Data collection techniques to be used in this study include in-depth interviews and participatory observation (Rutakumwa et al., 2020). Through in-depth interviews with Kyai, faculty, students, and the community surrounding the pesantren, researchers explored the practice of religious moderation and their perceptions of Kyai's role in promoting interreligious harmony. These interviews allowed researchers to gain deep insights and diverse perspectives on the topic. In addition, participatory observations will be conducted to directly observe daily interactions and activities in pesantren, including concrete efforts made by Kyai and the pesantren community in building religious moderation. With the combination of these two techniques, researchers can obtain comprehensive and contextual data about the phenomenon under study.

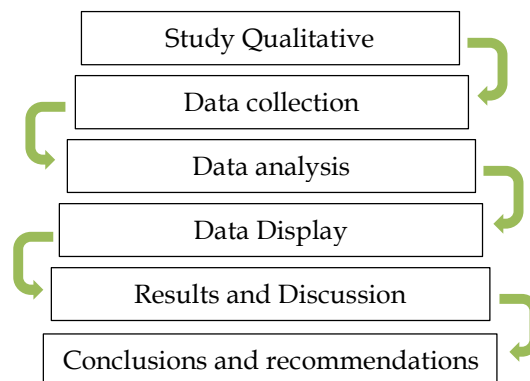


Figure 1: qualitative approach flow

In this study, data analysis techniques followed the framework proposed by Miles and Huberman (Hamdana et al., 2021), which involved three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. First, in the data reduction phase, researchers will simplify the collected data through thematic coding and categorization to identify emerging patterns. Furthermore, in the data display stage, the encoded information will be presented visually, such as through tables, matrices, or diagrams, to facilitate more in-depth

analysis. Finally, in the conclusion drawing/verification stage, researchers will draw conclusions from the findings found through the analysis process, verify the interpretation of the data with relevant literature and theory, and ensure the reliability and validity of the findings through continuous reflection and discussion with fellow researchers. By adopting this data analysis framework, this research will result in a deep and detailed understanding of Kyai's leadership role in building religious moderation in pesantren-based universities.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A *pesantren* is a traditional Islamic boarding school found predominantly in Indonesia. It serves as a center for Islamic education and cultural preservation (Anita et al., 2023; Supriandi et al., 2023). *Pesantren* typically provide a holistic education that encompasses religious studies, academic subjects, and practical skills. Within it, *pesantren* have elements that cannot be separated, including; *pondok*, mosque, *santri*, the tradition of reading the traditional Islamic "*kitab kuning*", and the figure of the Kyai are all five core aspects of Islamic boarding school (Umam, 2020). The leadership role of the Kyai in *pesantren* is paramount, serving as the spiritual guide, mentor, and educator for students and the wider community. As a revered Islamic scholar and teacher, the Kyai embodies the values and teachings of Islam, providing guidance and inspiration to students on their spiritual journey (Adawiyah, 2020; Sari & Pratama, 2023). With a deep understanding of religious texts and traditions, the Kyai imparts knowledge and wisdom, nurturing a love for learning and a commitment to moral and ethical conduct. Beyond religious instruction, the Kyai plays a central role in shaping the character and identity of students, instilling virtues such as humility, compassion, and integrity through personal example and mentorship. Furthermore, the Kyai serves as a unifying figure within the *pesantren* community, fostering a sense of belonging and solidarity among students, teachers, and alumni (Ilyasin & Ridho, 2021; Latif & Hafid, 2021). Through their leadership, the Kyai ensured the continuity and vitality of *pesantren* as centers of Islamic education, cultural preservation, and community development.

The Kyai's leadership extended beyond the academic realm to encompass various aspects of daily life within the *pesantren*. They oversee the management of the *pondok* (boarding quarters), ensuring the well-being and discipline of the *santri* (students) (Mukhlisin et al., 2022). The Kyai also led religious rituals and ceremonies in the mosque, guiding the spiritual practices of the community (Faisal et al., 2022). Through their profound knowledge, wisdom, and personal charisma, the Kyai commanded respect and admiration, inspiring a deep sense of reverence and loyalty among the *pesantren*'s inhabitants. As custodians of Islamic tradition and guardians of moral integrity, the Kyai play a crucial role in preserving the cultural heritage and spiritual legacy of Indonesia's *pesantren* (Hipni, 2023). Their leadership ensured the continuity and resilience of these venerable institutions, which remain steadfast in their commitment to Islamic education, cultural enrichment, and community service. Kyai serve as agents of unity and cohesion within the *pesantren* community, fostering a sense of

belonging and solidarity among students of diverse backgrounds. Through their leadership, Kyai exemplified the principles of religious moderation, guiding students on a path of spiritual growth and moral integrity while nurturing a culture of tolerance, inclusivity, and respect for others (Idris, 2022; Rahmadi & Hamdan, 2023). In this way, *pesantren* under the guidance of Kyai contribute to the promotion of religious moderation within Indonesian society, cultivating a generation of Muslims who embrace the values of peace, coexistence, and social harmony (Nubowo, 2023). At the Ma'had Al-Jamiah Al-Aly, the Kyai had a very strong influence on the students and the community around him, the Kyai has strong charisma, has a big influence on his followers, and has a vision, mission and ideals in his leadership.

Kyai as a Role Model

Kyai act as role models who provide examples of moderate and inclusive religious practices by demonstrating attitudes and behavior that reflect these values in everyday life (Futaqi & Mashuri, 2022). Kyai do not only convey religious teachings through words, but also through real actions that can be used as examples by his followers. This included an attitude of tolerance towards differences in beliefs, respect for cultural and religious diversity, and the ability to communicate well and empathize with individuals from different backgrounds. Mr. Kholil, as an Islamic boarding school administrator, stated that Kyai leadership has a very important role in building religious moderation. As a Kyai, he is not only a spiritual leader, but also an example for the students in moderate and inclusive religious practices. He is a living example of the values of religious moderation.

A Kyai's moderate and inclusive religious practices may include an open attitude in accepting and understanding different religious views, respecting diversity in religious worship and practice, and promoting constructive interreligious dialogue and respecting differences of opinion. Apart from that, Kyai can also show generosity and concern for the wider community, regardless of their religion or culture (Arifi & Fathurrohman, 2023; Naim & Qomar, 2021). As respected spiritual leaders, Kyai are often involved in charity and social service activities aimed at helping those in need, regardless of their religious or cultural background. They can open aid programs for the poor, provide shelter for disaster victims, or get involved in development projects that improve the welfare of society as a whole. In this way, Kyai not only become spiritual leaders in Islamic boarding schools, but also become active agents of change in promoting human values, solidarity and unity amidst the diversity of society (Dian, 2023; Syarifah et al., 2023; Wahono et al., 2023). This reflects their commitment to implementing the principles of religious moderation in real action, bringing benefits to the entire community.

Kyai, as central figures in the Islamic boarding school environment, have a very important role as role models in building religious moderation. They are not only spiritual leaders but also living examples for the students of moderate and inclusive religious practices. With an open attitude and acceptance of

different religious views, Kyai shows the students how important it is to respect diversity and promote constructive interfaith dialogue. Through an attitude of generosity and concern for the wider community, regardless of their religion or culture, Kyai shows that religious moderation is not just a theoretical concept, but a principle that must be realized in real action. In this way, Kyai not only become spiritual leaders in Islamic boarding schools, but also become role models for the entire community in practicing religious moderation and building harmony between religious believers in everyday life.

Kyai utilized various platforms, such as sermons, lectures and religious teachings, to convey messages of religious moderation to congregations and students. In Friday sermons and regular lectures, they persistently emphasize the importance of respecting differences in beliefs and the urgency of building cooperation between religious communities. Through wise and inspiring words, Kyai brings an understanding of how important tolerance and mutual respect are in maintaining social harmony. In teaching religion at Islamic boarding schools, Kyai not only conveys the essential aspects of religious teachings, but also highlights the values of moderation in daily religious practices (Faisal et al., 2022). They teach students to understand that religion is not a tool to separate, but should be a bridge that connects individuals from various religious backgrounds (Billingsley et al., 2020; Ferguson et al., 2021). Kyai's use of sermons, lectures and religious teachings as a platform to convey messages of religious moderation is an effective strategy in building a deep understanding of the importance of tolerance, respect and cooperation between religious believers in society. In this way, Kyai creates a learning environment that promotes understanding and harmony between religious communities.

By becoming a role model like this, Kyai provides inspiration and encouragement for his followers to adopt the same attitude in living their daily lives. Kyai play an important role in establishing a culture that respects diversity and promotes societal tolerance within the Ma'had Al-Jamiah Al-Aly Islamic Boarding School, as well as helping to create an inclusive and harmonious environment for all individuals, regardless of their religious and cultural background.

Kyai as Religious Facilitator

Kyai plays a very important role in facilitating santri in understanding and implementing religious moderation in *pesantren* based universities (Ni'am, 2023; Royani, 2021). They act as spiritual mentors who provide guidance and direction to the students in exploring the concepts of religious moderation and how to apply them in everyday life. With the depth of religious knowledge and spiritual experience he has, Kyai is able to explain the concepts of religious moderation comprehensively and provide concrete examples of how these concepts can be applied in everyday religious practice.

Apart from that, Kyai also creates discussion spaces and forums for students to share thoughts, experiences and questions related to religious moderation. Through these dialogues, students are given the opportunity to

deepen their understanding of religious moderation, as well as discuss challenges and ways to implement these moderation values in campus life and outside of college. Kyai also facilitate practical activities, such as social skills training, inter-religious cooperation, and community service projects aimed at encouraging the practice of religious moderation among santri. By actively involving the students in these activities, Kyai helps them to internalize the values of religious moderation more deeply and apply them in various life contexts.

By holding discussion forums, "*Kitab Kuning*" recitations, and social activities involving santri/students from various traditional and cultural backgrounds, Kyai not only creates space for the exchange of ideas and experiences, but also strengthens tolerance and respect for diversity (Fajrussalam, 2020). Through this activity, Kyai facilitates constructive inter-religious and cultural dialogue, where students can listen to each other, learn and understand different perspectives. Discussion forums and recitation of the "*Kitab Kuning*" often become platforms for explaining the values of religious moderation, as well as highlighting the importance of maintaining harmony between religious believers in a multicultural society. In these forums, Kyai provide direction and in-depth understanding of the concepts of religious moderation, while also opening space for students to discuss and ask questions about issues relevant to their religious and cultural context.

The content of moderate teaching values has been studied by students through the "*Kitab Kuning*" which is an integral part of the educational curriculum at Islamic boarding schools. Some of these values can be found in commonly studied literature, such as the book *Tijān ad-Darāri*, the book *al-Sanūsiyah* by Sheikh Ibrahim *al-Bājūri*, *al-Jawāhir al-Kalāmiyah fī Idāhi al-Aqīdah al-Islāmiyyah* by al-Jazairi, *Safīnah al-Najā* by Sheikh Sālim bin Sāmīr al-Haḍrami, *Fath al-Qarīb al-Mujīb 'Ala al-Taqrīb* by Ibn Qasim al-Gazi, *Tafsir Jalālain* by al-Mahalli and al-Suyūṭi, as well as many other books taught at the boarding school boarding school. Through learning from this literature, students not only gain in-depth religious knowledge, but are also fostered with a moderate, tolerant attitude and respect for diversity in social life.

Apart from that, social activities involving students from various traditional and cultural backgrounds, such as mutual cooperation activities, community service, or arts and cultural activities, are also a means of strengthening harmony between religious communities. In *Ma'had Al-Jamiah Al-Aly* activity, students learn to work together, support each other, and appreciate the contributions brought by each individual, regardless of religious or cultural differences. All of these activities not only strengthen the bonds between the students, but also strengthen their understanding of the importance of tolerance, respect for diversity, and cooperation between religious communities. By being part of discussion forums, seminars and social activities led by Kyai, students become more aware of the importance of maintaining inter-religious harmony in a multicultural society.

Through these efforts, Kyai do not only created an inclusive and harmonious learning environment in Islamic boarding school-based universities, but also helps shape attitudes and values that strengthen tolerance, respect for diversity, and inter-religious cooperation among students. In this way, Kyai become agents of change who play an important role in building a more peaceful and harmonious society amidst religious and cultural diversity.

Creation of a Conducive Learning Environment

Creating a conducive learning environment is a crucial step in building religious moderation in Islamic boarding schools (Arif, 2021). A conducive learning environment creates an atmosphere that supports the spiritual and intellectual growth of students, as well as promoting the values of moderation and harmony between religious communities. First, it is important to create an inclusive and open atmosphere where every student feels accepted and valued, regardless of their religious or cultural background. In such an environment, students feel comfortable sharing their views and experiences about religion, thereby allowing for constructive interfaith dialogue.

Second, facilities and infrastructure that support comprehensive and interactive religious learning need to be provided. It includes a well-stocked library with a variety of religious literature, comfortable classrooms, and facilities for discussion and seminar activities (Atuase & Filson, 2024). In addition, extracurricular activities such as discussion forums, recitations, and social activities that involve the active participation of students from various religious and cultural backgrounds can help deepen understanding of religious moderation and strengthen harmony between religious communities. Finally, the role of mentors and teachers, including Kyai, is very important in creating a conducive learning environment. They not only act as spiritual mentors, but also serve as role models who demonstrate moderation, tolerance and respect for diversity.

The learning environment at the Ma'had Al-Jamiah Al-Aly Islamic Boarding School was designed to create an atmosphere that is conducive to the spiritual, intellectual and social growth of the students. The following was a general description of the learning environment at Ma'had Al-Jamiah Al-Aly: First, Inclusive Atmosphere: Ma'had Al-Jamiah Al-Aly promoted an inclusive atmosphere, where students from various religious and cultural backgrounds feel welcome and valued. There was no discrimination based on religion or ethnicity, and all students are encouraged to respect each other. Second, Learning Facilities: This Islamic boarding school was equipped with adequate learning facilities, including a complete library with various religious literature and other educational resources. Classrooms were equipped with comfortable and adequate facilities to support an effective learning process. Third, Comprehensive Learning Program: Ma'had Al-Jamiah Al-Aly offers a comprehensive religious learning program, including the study of the "*Kitab Kuning*" and classical Islamic literature, as well as religious lessons that are integrated with the formal school curriculum. Fourth, Extracurricular Activities:

Apart from formal learning activities, this Islamic boarding school also organizes various extracurricular activities such as discussion forums, seminars, religious studies, and social activities. This helps students to deepen their understanding of religion and strengthen their social skills. Fifth, Role of Mentors and Teachers: The Kyai and teachers at the Ma'had Al-Jamiah Al-Aly act as spiritual and intellectual mentors for the students. They not only provide religious teachings, but also become examples of moderation, tolerance and respect for diversity.

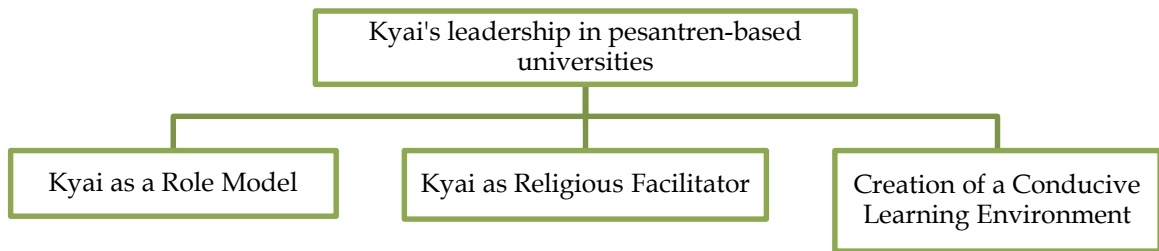


Chart 1: Results of Kyai's Leadership Research

At the Ma'had Al-Jamiah Al-Aly, various educational and scientific support units had an important role in efforts to strengthen religious moderation. The students were invited to study Islamic teachings comprehensively while combining them with general knowledge, so that they not only have a strong understanding of religion, but also understand the importance of tolerance, harmony and respect for differences. Scientific supporting institutions, such as the Center for Research and Community Service (P3M), also play a role in strengthening religious moderation by developing knowledge through research and community service. Through this activity, knowledge about religious moderation can be deepened and disseminated to the wider community, thereby strengthening the understanding and practice of religious moderation at the local and national levels. Thus, through various existing educational and scientific support units, the Ma'had Al-Jamiah Al-Aly actively strived to strengthen religious moderation among its students and the surrounding community, with the hope of creating a harmonious, tolerant and inclusive environment.

CONCLUSION

The role of the Ma'had Al-Jamiah Al-Aly Islamic Boarding School in building religious moderation was very significant. Kyai leadership in this Islamic boarding school covers various aspects which include Kyai as role models, religious facilitators, and creators of a conducive learning environment. First, Kyai at the Ma'had Al-Jamiah Al-Aly not only act as spiritual leaders, but also as real examples in the practice of religious moderation. With their attitudes and actions, Kyai became role models for students in carrying out religious teachings with an attitude of tolerance, inclusion and respect for diversity. Second, the role of Kyai as religious facilitators was very important in strengthening religious moderation in Islamic boarding schools. Through sermons, lectures, religious teachings, and various other religious activities, Kyai

provides direction, understanding, and inspiration to students to practice the values of moderation in everyday life.

Lastly, the Ma'had Al-Jamiah Al-Aly Islamic Boarding School created a learning environment that is conducive to the spiritual and intellectual growth of its students. An inclusive atmosphere, adequate learning facilities, comprehensive learning programs, and support from mentors and teachers create an environment that supports the development of attitudes of religious moderation. Overall, the Ma'had Al-Jamiah Al-Aly has succeeded in building religious moderation through various efforts involving the important role of Kyai as role models, religious facilitators, and creators of a conducive learning environment. In this way, this Islamic boarding school is an inspiring example in strengthening tolerance, harmony and respect for diversity in society.

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