

Nationalism and Social Responsibility Values in Pesantren Life, Challenges of Wasathiyah Islam Among Multi Ethnic Student

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to find out the policies, challenges, and factors that support the implementation of nationalism and social responsibility values in *pesantren* life. The research was conducted in Salatiga city, Indonesia, which is famous for its multiculturalism, races, ethnics, and religions. It took place in a *pesantren*, namely *Madrasah Aliyah Tahfidz al Qur'an* (MATIQ) As-Surkati. This is a descriptive, qualitative field study employing a qualitative approach. Interviews, observations, and documentation were employed to gain the relevant data. The research results show that MATIQ As-Surkati educates students in the discourse of wasathiyah Islam, emphasizing nationalism and social responsibility values, through a hidden curriculum that is daily practiced and successfully implemented in *pesantren* policies, both within and around the *pesantren* environment.

Keywords: *nationalism; social responsibility; wasathiyah Islam.*

Introduction

The role between religion and education have emerged as a main point of discussion in Indonesia, a country known with rich slices of cultural and religious diversity. Nowadays, this

country is fragile with the challenges posed by extremist ideologies. There are two major challenges that come from within Islam itself; First, challenges that stem from among Muslims who are extreme, strict, and intolerant to other teachings in understanding religious verses and always try to impose their views on society, other Muslims, and even often use violence in the doctrine. Second, the challenges arise from people who are lax or unstrict, as if directionless in their religious beliefs, and follow negative thoughts that stem from the culture and civilization of other religions (Habibie et al., 2021). Nowadays, there is moderate Islam that has recently been emphasized as the mainstream of Islam in Indonesia. The main idea, besides being a solution to answer various problems of global religion and civilization, is also the right time for the moderate generation to take more aggressive steps. Moderate Islam is used to define a balance; moreover, the reference to the word balance itself implies something fair, and an action taken is not contrary to the common good. This can be achieved by planning with careful handling (Sari et al., 2023).

Moreover, Safei (2021) describes moderate (*wasathiyah*) Islam as a tolerant, contemporary, and democratic orientation that is secular in outlook and firmly rejects violence in both religious practice and socio-political life. *Wasathiyah* Islam holds significant importance in Indonesia's socio-cultural landscape and also education, acting as a fundamental element of its identity as a diverse society. Grounded in the values of tolerance and mutual respect, it presents a balanced interpretation of religious teachings, fostering peace and harmony among diverse ethnic and religious groups. This principle of moderation is especially critical in education, where embedding religious moderation into the curriculum promotes understanding and cooperation among students from diverse backgrounds. Research indicates that the government has taken steps to incorporate religious moderation into educational systems, underscoring the need for a curriculum that upholds the values of *wasathiyah*, as reflected in the Quran and hadith (Latif et al., 2023).

The historical development of Islamic education in Indonesia reflects a complex interplay between tradition and modernity, significantly shaping contemporary pedagogical practices. Rooted in the archipelago's early Islamic networks, schooling primarily occurred within *pesantren*, which emphasized religious teachings and moral values. Over time, these institutions evolved, becoming hubs for community development and social cohesion. As Indonesia transitioned into a densely populated and diverse society, the need for education that promotes tolerance and understanding became evident. This shift was further reinforced by the rise of ideologies

surrounding religious moderation, with *pesantren* playing a pivotal role in fostering moderate Muslim values and advocating for democratic beliefs and diplomatic engagement among diverse religious communities (Gunawan et al., 2021)

The historical progression of Islamic educational institutions, particularly the *madrasah*, has significantly shaped the landscape of moderate Islamic values in Indonesia. Over time, *madrasahs* have developed from traditional religious institutions into more structured schools that integrate general education and modern pedagogical approaches while retaining their Islamic identity (Syar'i et al., 2020). In this context, *madrasah* increasingly emphasize critical, contextual engagement with Islamic teachings as a basis for actualizing moderate Islamic values in students' character and daily life (Syihabuddin & Nafiuddin, 2023).

Recent studies also show that *Akidah Akhlak* is a strategic subject for embedding religious moderation. Susilo et al. (2022) found that in SDIT Al Falaah Boyolali, moderate Islamic values such as *al-'adl* (justice), *al-tawāzun* (balance), and *al-tasāmuḥ* (tolerance) are systematically integrated into *Akidah Akhlak* learning through curriculum design, teacher creativity in lesson planning, and learning activities such as discussion, group work, and simulations, so that students not only understand the moderation conceptually but also practice it in daily behavior. Furthermore, Huda et al. (Huda et al., 2023) and Rehayati et al. (2023) confirm that religious moderation in the Islamic education curriculum is pursued by incorporating moderation content into relevant topics, optimizing learning approaches, and organizing reflective programs, thereby enabling students to develop tolerant, peaceful, and responsible religious attitudes.

A relevant idea and ideology of an establishment that aims to embed Islamic and national values to students is *Madrasah Aliyah Tahfidz al-Qur'an* (later mentioned as MATIQ.) *As-Surkati Salatiga*, an Islamic school under the auspices of the As-Surkati foundation. This school emphasizes nationalism and social responsibility values. MATIQ As-Surkati Salatiga integrates moderate Islamic values into the curriculum. Through the application of these values, MATIQ As-Surkati helps students develop an identity that balances their Islamic beliefs with their responsibilities as the future generation of Indonesia.

By focusing on this institution, this study aims to investigate the implementation of the *wasathiyah* Islamic value in the context of social responsibility and nationalism, including

supporting factors and the challenges encountered in implementing these values, to provide useful insights for similar educational institutions.

Discussion

Implementation of Wasathiyah Islam at MATIQ As-Surkati Salatiga

The findings show that MATIQ As-Surkati has a strong and conscious commitment to implementing the values of wasathiyah Islam. The school leadership and teachers demonstrate a clear understanding of wasathiyah Islam as a middle-path approach that avoids both extreme conservatism and excessive liberalism. One respondent, the principal (R1), explained that wasathiyah Islam is understood as Islam that “places itself neither on the extreme right nor on the liberal or secular left,” but instead promotes love, compassion, peace, and harmonious relations with others. This understanding is shared by the vice principals (R2, R3), who see wasathiyah Islam as a form of Islam well-suited to Indonesian society, emphasizing softness, balance, and the rejection of sectarian claims to absolute truth.

Institutionally, this moderation is visible in the school’s policy of not affiliating itself with any single Islamic organization while maintaining good relations with major organizations such as *Nahdlatul Ulama* and *Muhammadiyah*. The school accepts students from a wide range of organizational and regional backgrounds and treats these differences as a strength rather than a problem. Students come from various provinces in Java, Sumatra, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Bali, Nusa Tenggara Barat, and Nusa Tenggara Timur, creating a multicultural student body. This diversity supports the internalization of wasathiyah values such as mutual respect, tolerance, and unity in diversity. Observations during the research indicate that students interact respectfully, support one another, and build friendships across regional and organizational lines. Remarkably, both students and school leaders emphasized that bullying is strongly prohibited and does not occur in daily interactions, whether in the classroom or the dormitory.

The curriculum also reflects this balanced approach. According to the Vice Principal for Curriculum (R3), the school integrates modern scientific subjects with traditional Islamic learning through the *mulazamah* method. Students study advanced subjects, such as physics, chemistry, and biology, alongside the Qur’an, Hadith, and classical Islamic texts (kutub al-turath). The *mulazamah* method emphasizes in-depth, sustained engagement with classical texts, focusing on mastering

basic sciences as tools to unlock more complex knowledge (Anwar & Fathimah, 2023; Sahidin, 2021). Teachers intentionally connect scientific concepts with religious values, for example, by using biology lessons to deepen students' appreciation of the signs of God's creation. This integrated curriculum helps students develop both intellectual competence and religious depth, forming a generation that is confident in modern knowledge while firmly rooted in Islamic identity and ethics.

Although school leaders initially stated that there were no significant challenges in implementing *wasathiyah* values, observations suggest that some issues remain. One challenge is the need for continuous teacher training so that all teachers share the same depth of understanding and commitment to *wasathiyah* Islam. Effective implementation requires teachers not only to understand the concept intellectually but also to embody it in their teaching, classroom management, and daily interactions with students. Another challenge relates to assessment: measuring the internalization of *wasathiyah* values in students' attitudes and behavior is more complex than assessing cognitive achievement. Developing appropriate and reliable instruments to evaluate moderation, tolerance, and respect for diversity requires careful design.

Several solutions can support the strengthening of *wasathiyah* implementation. First, inviting external experts in *wasathiyah* Islam to provide training can enrich teachers' understanding and offer practical strategies for classroom application. Second, peer learning among teachers, where those who have already internalized these values mentor their colleagues, can foster a sustainable and collaborative culture of improvement. Third, regular professional development sessions focused specifically on *wasathiyah* can provide a structured space for reflection, discussion of cases, and refinement of pedagogical approaches. By combining these strategies, the school can gradually build a more systematic framework to both implement and evaluate *wasathiyah* values in a consistent way.

Implementation of Nationalism Values

The study also reveals that nationalism is an important and consciously nurtured value at MATIQ As-Surkati. The principal and vice principals describe nationalism as pride in one's nation, love for the homeland, and loyalty expressed through respect for national symbols, history, and culture. One respondent (R3) emphasized that nationalism involves appreciating a nation's

achievements, values, and heritage, as well as building a strong sense of belonging to the country. This perspective is not limited to formal symbols but is translated into concrete practices in school life.

One of the main ways nationalism is implemented is through environmental stewardship. Teachers with science backgrounds (R2, R3) link their disciplines to environmental care as a way to express their love for Indonesia. They encourage students to maintain a clean school environment, plant trees, and manage waste by separating organic and inorganic garbage. Observations reveal that the school area features green spaces, plants, and gazebos that foster outdoor learning and create a pleasant atmosphere. Environmental responsibility is framed as part of national responsibility, based on the idea that caring for the environment is a tangible form of loving and protecting the homeland.

Nationalism is also cultivated through regular commemoration of national days. During flag ceremonies and national day events, teachers and students not only perform formal rituals but also watch films about national heroes and their heroic struggles. These activities are followed by guided discussions, in which students share their reflections, feelings, and lessons learned. Teachers sometimes use role-play, art, and group projects to help students internalize the values of sacrifice, courage, unity, and love for the country depicted in the films. This combination of symbolic rituals, emotional engagement, and reflective discussion helps deepen the meaning of nationalism beyond mere slogans.

The school's efforts to nurture future national leaders further strengthen the implementation of nationalism values. Students are encouraged to join student organizations, where they can develop essential skills such as leadership, management, critical thinking, and problem-solving. Nationalism is thus linked to active participation and responsibility, not just emotional attachment. Physical training through traditional martial arts, such as pencak silat also plays a role. Pencak silat is widely recognized as a traditional martial art originating from Indonesia and has been passed down across generations as part of the nation's cultural and philosophical heritage, combining self-defense, sport, art, and character education (Anifah et al., 2024; Ediyono et al., 2022). Pencak Silat is used not only for physical fitness and discipline but also to foster pride in local culture and identity. Practicing this art helps students appreciate their cultural heritage and strengthens their sense of national belonging.

A supportive factor in implementing nationalism is the multicultural composition of the student body, as well as the fact that students live together in a dormitory. Daily interaction among students from diverse ethnic, regional, and cultural backgrounds provides a natural context for learning unity in diversity. Living together requires them to practice tolerance, empathy, and cooperation, reinforcing the idea that nationalism in Indonesia is built on plurality. Extracurricular activities such as the Scout movement (*Pramuka*) also enhance this process. Through scouting, students learn about national history, symbols, and traditions while engaging in community service and leadership training. This helps them develop a sense of responsibility toward the community and the nation.

However, the implementation of nationalism values does not occur in a vacuum. One respondent (R2) noted that the broader political climate in Indonesia can influence how nationalism is interpreted and practiced. In times of political polarization, the concept of nationalism can be co-opted by certain groups to justify exclusion or hostility toward others. This creates a challenge for schools that want to promote an inclusive and balanced nationalism. To address this, the school strives to maintain a neutral stance in its everyday educational practices, not aligning itself with any political party or ideology. Instead, teachers focus on universal values such as unity, mutual respect, civic responsibility, and adherence to democratic principles. Students are encouraged to discuss political and social issues critically and objectively, with exposure to multiple perspectives. This approach aims to equip students with the skills to form informed opinions and participate in public life in a responsible and thoughtful manner.

Implementation of Social Responsibility

In the context of education, social responsibility can be understood as students' perception of their ethical care and obligations toward others, their communities, and their country, which underlies their willingness to engage in social and civic activities (Fenghua & Noordin, 2024). Interviews with students reveal that they already view themselves as future members of society who will assume religious and social responsibilities. One student (R4) explained that helping friends with Qur'an memorization is seen as part of their responsibility, as they are preparing to serve the wider Muslim community in the future.

The school supports this awareness through structured activities. Students regularly participate in community service within the school and dormitory environments, such as cleaning shared areas and maintaining the campus's cleanliness. Once a month, teachers accompany students to join communal service activities with the surrounding community. These activities include cleaning village areas and places of worship, especially mosques. According to the principal (R1), the school also often receives requests from local communities for students to lead prayers, give short religious talks, teach Qur'an recitation, and, in some cases, deliver Friday sermons. These experiences provide students with direct opportunities to apply their knowledge and skills in real social settings, reinforcing their sense of responsibility and usefulness to the community.

Teachers play a key role in building students' social awareness. Through classroom discussions on current social issues, collaborative learning, and projects that address community needs, students develop an understanding of the social dynamics around them and cultivate empathy. Living together in a dormitory further strengthens this process. Close daily interaction creates a strong sense of brotherhood, where students support one another academically, emotionally, and socially. This brotherhood becomes a practical training ground for cooperation, care, and conflict resolution—essential elements of social responsibility.

The main challenge identified in implementing social responsibility at MATIQ As-Surkati is the relatively distant location of some surrounding communities. This distance requires extra time and logistical effort to involve students in community activities outside the school. Nevertheless, this constraint has not reduced students' enthusiasm for engaging with society. Instead, it encourages the school to be more deliberate and organized in planning community-based programs. One possible enhancement is to systematically evaluate the impact of these activities on both the community and the students themselves. By reflecting on what works well and what needs improvement, teachers and school leaders can refine future programs to make them more effective and sustainable.

Conclusion

The findings indicate that MATIQ As-Surkati has developed a coherent and mutually reinforcing approach to implementing wasathiyah Islam, nationalism, and social responsibility. These three value domains are not treated as separate themes; instead, they intersect in everyday

practice. Wasathiyah Islam provides the theological and ethical foundation for moderation, respect for diversity, and peaceful coexistence. Nationalism translates this religious moderation into love for the country, commitment to unity, and pride in national culture and heritage. Social responsibility operationalizes both wasathiyah and nationalism into concrete actions that benefit the community and prepare students to become constructive members of society.

The combination of a multicultural student body, an integrated curriculum, a boarding-school environment, and strong teacher commitment creates a supportive ecosystem for value formation. At the same time, the school is aware of the need for continuous improvement, particularly in areas such as teacher training, value-based assessment, and navigating the broader political and social context. Strengthening professional development, inviting external expertise, promoting peer learning among teachers, and systematically evaluating programs can help MATIQ As-Surkati deepen and sustain its efforts.

In conclusion, MATIQ As-Surkati Salatiga emerges in this study as an educational institution that actively strives to embody moderate Islamic values, foster inclusive nationalism, and cultivate social responsibility. Through a combination of policy, curriculum, school culture, and community engagement, it prepares students not only to succeed academically but also to become morally grounded, socially aware, and nationally committed individuals who are ready to contribute positively to their religion, nation, and society.

Finally, future research could focus more specifically on the particular challenges highlighted in this study, such as teacher training, the political climate, and the distance between schools and communities. For example, researchers could evaluate the effectiveness of specific teacher training programs on *wasathiyah* pedagogy, or examine how students negotiate political narratives they encounter on social media with the moderate, inclusive nationalism taught at school. Studies on the design, implementation, and impact of community service models in schools with geographical limitations would also be valuable. By addressing these areas, future research can provide more practical guidance for schools seeking to strengthen the integration of religious moderation, nationalism, and social responsibility in their educational practices.

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