

Reorienting Moral Education for Millennial Muslims: The Changing Role of Islamic Boarding Schools in Indonesia

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Abstract

Islamic boarding schools, or *pesantren*, are traditional educational institutions that have contributed significantly to the development of the Indonesian nation. Before independence, these institutions—under the leadership of their *kyai*—contributed to the fight against colonialism. Since independence, *pesantren* have become integral to the education system, being particularly noted for their contribution to character education. As such, these educational institutions are important parts of national life and significantly inform the character and morality of young Muslims. This article is based on qualitative research. Data were collected through two approaches, namely observation and literature review. Observations were conducted at a senior high school-level madrasah in South Sulawesi, namely As'Adiyah Sengkang Wajo Pesantren. This Islamic boarding school was chosen owing to its status as South Sulawesi's oldest *pesantren* as well as its significant contribution to human development in the surrounding community. The data was got also from some relevant literatures to support the arguments of this article. This article shows that *pesantrens* have not only educated millions of Muslims, but have also become pillars of national development, imbuing youths with mental and

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emotional maturity necessary to create an independent, visionary, and excellent Indonesia that can navigate the challenges of the future. This article argues that it is necessary to understand *pesantren* not only as institutions that fulfill students' educational needs, but also as defending and maintaining national morals and values in the face of widespread depravity.

Keywords: *Politics and Islamic Education, Islamic Boarding Schools, Moral Education, Millennials, Indonesia.*

Introduction

In Indonesia, Islamic boarding schools—or *pesantren*—have a strategic role in national development, not only through their dissemination of knowledge (Damanhuri, Mujahidin, and Hafidhuddin 2013) but also through their transfer of values and morals (Jamaluddin 2012). *Pesantren* present Islamic teachings uniquely, using a characteristically simple approach, and thus contribute to national development by defending and maintaining morals and values (*akhlak*) in the face of widespread depravity. Morality, one key tenet of Islam, is strongly emphasized by Islamic boarding schools in the learning process. At *pesantren*, students internalize Islamic teachings and values (as adapted to Indonesian culture) using a model in which teachers and students interact directly. With the rise of the new media, *pesantren* have been challenged by the introduction of new values; at the same time, however, these new media have also provided these institutions with new opportunities and alternatives for disseminating Islamic teachings.

Studies of *pesantren* have been common. These studies fall into three categories. *First* are studies that have examined the institutional role of *pesantren*, such as (van Bruinessen 2012; Jamaluddin 2017; Yaqin 2017; Damanhuri, Mujahidin, and Hafidhuddin 2013; Jamaluddin 2012) in moral education. *Second* are studies that have examined the learning models used by *pesantren* (as seen in (Asy'ari 1996; Saridjo 1983; Junaedi 2012; Rouf 2016)). These studies have framed *pesantren* as traditional educational institutions that have been innovatively transformed into modern educational institutions. *Third* are studies that discuss the challenges faced by *pesantren* in the modern era (as seen in (Bashori 2017; Gazali 2018b; Ismail 2016)), which have positioned modernization and globalization as objective conditions that have forced Islamic boarding schools to adapt.

These studies, however, have not discussed how *pesantren* have dynamically responded to these challenges through their curricula.

This article is intended to explore the challenges faced by *pesantren* as educational institutions that defend and maintain Indonesia's morals and values in the modern era. It seeks to understand how *pesantren* have adapted to the changing times and implemented a teaching model that is not only rooted in religious doctrine, but also capable of meeting the everyday needs of young Muslims. As part of its exploration, this article seeks to answer three questions. *First*, how have *pesantren* interacted with other educational institutions that also transfer religious knowledge. *Second*, how have *pesantren* been influenced by the new values that have massively penetrated the everyday lives of Muslims? This question is intricately linked to the condition of the Indonesian nation, particularly its openness to values that may clash with its own. *Third*, how have *pesantren* provided moral education in the new media era? This question is closely related to the challenges faced by educational institutions, particularly *pesantren*, as instantaneous interpersonal communications have enabled the rapid transfer and adoption of diverse and sometimes conflicting values.

This article departs from three assumptions. *First*, Islamic boarding schools are presently experiencing competition as new institutions have begun offering a range of educational facilities and services. These institutions have their own specific missions and programs, and thereby must compete for students. *Second*, the penetration of new values into Indonesian society presents a challenge to *pesantren*, and as has thus influenced how they transfer knowledge to their students. *Third*, given their difficult and important mission, Islamic boarding schools must be innovative in their dissemination and conveyance of Islamic values and beliefs.

Conceptual Framework

1. *Pesantren*: A Pillar of Islamic Education

Linguistically, the common Indonesian term for Islamic boarding schools (*pondok pesantren*) consists of two terms: *pondok* and *pesantren*. It has been claimed that *pondok* is etymologically derived from the Arabic word *funduk*, which means 'accommodation', 'lodging', or 'hotel'. However, in Indonesian this term is similar in meaning to the English term 'dormitory', referring to simple residential buildings that are divided into small rooms; in a *pondok pesantren*, as in in traditional educational systems such as

wetonan, *bandongan*, or *sorogan*, these rooms are used by students (Nasir 2010, 80; Shiddiq 2015, 221; Daulay 2001, 16). In a *pondok pesantren*, students must follow specific rules, as well as strict prayer, study, exercise, sleep, and rest schedules.

Pesantren are Indonesia's oldest form of Islamic educational institution (Nasir 2010), and as such they have significantly influenced the trajectory of the country's education system. Their teaching systems, though varied, have specific characteristics that may be identified as uniquely Indonesian. Indeed, the teaching of Islamic beliefs through *pesantren* and similar educational institutions has become a great tradition in Java and the Malay Peninsula (van Bruinessen 2012). According to Martin, these institutions emerged as a means of transmitting the Islamic beliefs ensconced within the region's classical religious texts.

However, *pesantren* are more than (traditional) educational institutions. They are also systems that enlighten the *ummah* and protect Muslims from sin and depravity (Jamaluddin 2017). During the colonial era, Islamic boarding schools of all forms not only played a significant role in transmitting Islamic knowledge, but also in mobilizing the faithful against colonialism and subjugation. Since then, *pesantren* have developed rapidly. Various non-traditional forms have emerged, while alumni of Islamic boarding schools have taken important positions in Indonesian society and politics. As Indonesians have increasingly chosen them to educate their children, *pesantren* have increased rapidly in number.

2. Character Education

In Indonesian, three Arabic terms are often used interchangeably to refer to Islamic education: *tarbiyah*, *ta'dīb*, and *ta'lim*. Although all these terms refer to a learning process, they differ in their emphases as well as their use of text and context. The most used term, *tarbiyah*, refers to formal education. As such, it is commonly incorporated in the names of faculties and programs at Islamic universities (viz. *Fakultas Tarbiyah*). The term *ta'dīb* is less common among Muslims, particularly in Indonesia. Finally, the term *ta'lim*—also Romanized sometimes in Indonesia as *taklim*—is commonly used to refer to prayer groups and other non-formal educational institutions (viz. *majelis taklim*).

The Arabic term *at-tarbiyah* is etymologically derived from *rabbā*. Some scholars have defined *at-tarbiyah* as equivalent to *ar-rabb*. According to

Fahrur Razi, as cited in (Nasir 2010), these two terms are derived from the same root and denote *at-tanmiyah* (growth, development). Meanwhile, Al Jauhari, as cited in (Al-Attas 1988, 66), defines *at-tarbiyah*, *rabbān*, and *ar-rabb* as denoting 'to nurture, to care for, to raise'. According to Abdul Fattah Jalal, *at-tarbiyah* refers to the process of nurturing children from their earliest years, and as such is done within the family. *Ta'lim*, meanwhile, refers to the continuous transmission of knowledge experienced by human beings from birth. According to Rasid Ridla, *ta'lim* refers to all forms of learning, rather than being limited to a specific discipline; as such, *ta'lim* is much broader in scope than *at-tarbiyah* (Nasir 2010).

According to (Al-Attas 1988), the term *at-ta'dīb* is the most appropriate for referring to Islamic education. As argued by al-Attas, it is this concept that was taught by the Prophet to the first Muslims. Through *at-ta'dīb*, the Prophet introduced humanity to the proper path towards knowing and acknowledging the power and greatness of God. The word *addaba* (meaning 'to educate') is found in the Hadiths, as in *Tuhanku telah mendidikku, dan dengan demikian menjadikan pendidikanku yang terbaik* ("The Lord has taught me, and as such made my education the best"). Such an education includes character, which is emphasized in the modern Indonesian education system.

3. Millennial Muslims

Communication technology, which has been widely used by millennials, has reduced space, time, and distance; all are linked, no matter their physical proximity. The ease with which younger individuals' access and share information has transformed their cultural values. Millennials, also known as Generation Y, are those persons born between 1980 and 2000. Having grown up with extensive communication technology, this generation has experienced a transformation in its cultural values and practices (Yonefendi 2017). One study in Malaysia, for instance, found that university students are more likely to download academic articles from the internet rather than search for physical copies (Yusop and Sumari 2013). Millennials expect all things to be ready 'out of the box', and tend to always remain connected to the internet (Zulhazmi and Hastuti 2018). This can potentially have detrimental effects, as millennials have ready access to illicit materials and other immoral content through the internet (Doni 2017).

In the present global era, Islamic education has become increasingly intertwined with technology, including internet and social media. As such, even as they require students to internalize Islamic beliefs, doctrines, and morals, *pesantren* and other Islamic educational systems have sought to modernize themselves to meet market demands (Shofiyah, Ali, and Sastraatmadja 2019). It cannot be denied that modernization has driven (Islamic) educational institutions to adapt, embracing foreign knowledge even as Islamic beliefs and understandings remain fundamental (Norazmi Anas, Engku Ahmad Zaki bin Engku Alwi, and Mohd Hudzari Razali. 2013). These institutions have employed various methods to teach the Quran—including the Bilhikmah, Al Mauizah Hasanah, Al-Jadil, and Al Layyinah methods (Nurdin 2019)—as a means of ensuring that millennial Muslims do not devote themselves to practices that violate religious doctrines and norms. In this, they have referred to Verse 125 of Surah an-Nahl, particularly its invocation to "Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction".

Method

Research into *pesantren* is important owing to three recent phenomena. Firstly, the number of students at Islamic boarding schools has increased, while their regions of origin have diversified; this also holds true at As'Adiyah Sengkang Wajo, the *pesantren* discussed in this article. *Secondly*, many *pesantren* are in rural villages that lack accommodations and lodgings for their students. *Thirdly*, there is a reciprocal relationship between students and the *kyai*, whom they perceive as a parental figure. *Pesantren* are places in which students obtain religious knowledge; as such, they are religious institutions that function to provide education, develop religious knowledge, and proselytize Islam (Daulay 2001).

In 2017, the newspaper *Republika*—citing data from the Directorate General of Islamic Institutions at the Ministry of Religion—reported that, in 2001, Indonesia was home to 11,312 *pesantren*, with 2,737,805 students enrolled at these institutions. This number has only increased over time; according to data from the Ministry of Religion, in 2019 Indonesia was home to 27,218 *pesantren*, spread throughout the archipelago, with a total enrollment of 3,642,738.

In the past decade, the Indonesian education system has been widely criticized as students have failed to exhibit important values and morals.

Rather, Indonesia's youths have become increasingly involved in crime and other immoral behaviors (Imron 2018). Educational institutions, rather than being places in which students are imbued with humanitarian values, have become the sites of brawls and other conflict. Violence has been structured, with seniors attacking juniors, existing students attacking new ones, etc. over such minor issues as being unwilling to 'share snacks', 'show deference', or otherwise act politely to their elders. This violence is justified as necessary to promote discipline and ensure obedience.

This article is based on qualitative research. Data were collected through two approaches, namely observation and literature review. Observations were conducted at a senior high school-level madrasah in South Sulawesi, namely As'Adiyah Sengkang Wajo Pesantren. This Islamic boarding school was chosen owing to its status as South Sulawesi's oldest *pesantren* as well as its significant contribution to human development in the surrounding community. Since its establishment, the *pesantren* has produced alumni who have taken important and diverse roles in local society. Today, the *pesantren* provides education from the kindergarten through the university level and operates junior- and senior high school-level madrasah (*madrasah tsanawiyah* and *madrasah aliyah*) in ten Indonesian provinces.

Further data were collected through a review of the literature on *pesantren*. Several of the works consulted did not only discuss *pesantren* as educational institutions, but also their contribution to Indonesian society and the independence movement. This review of the literature showed that these educational institutions, particularly the *madrasah aliyah* they operate, have promoted the transformation and internalization of desired values and morals amongst students. This reflects the fact that *pesantren* are intended not only to convey knowledge, but also to imbue students with Islamic values and morals (also known as *akhlak*).

Research was not conducted at all levels but focused on the senior high school level. The *madrasah aliyah* was chosen for several reasons. First, students at this level are in transitional stage, as they are preparing to begin their tertiary education and thus receiving a wide range of knowledge—including through moral, value, and character education. Second, *madrasah aliyah* have specialized programs, and as such their students tend to focus only on specific subjects. Third, students at *madrasah aliyah* are taught religious and general knowledge simultaneously.

Qualitative data were obtained through the above-mentioned approaches and analyzed descriptively and phenomenologically. Data were first classified, then interpreted in accordance with the needs of the researcher. This descriptive–phenomenological approach viewed the learning activities at the *madrrasah aliyah* as a string of texts that could be explained and signified. To complement and strengthen this analysis, the findings of previous studies have also been utilized as texts.

Results and discussion

1. The Position and Societal Expectations of *Pesantren*

Having existed for centuries, *pesantren* have long helped fulfil the spiritual needs of Indonesia's Muslims and convey religious knowledge (Bani 2015). Such educational institutions are found in every in every corner of the Indonesian Archipelago, and each has its own character. Before Indonesia's independence, *pesantren* played a key role in the national struggle. *Kiai* banded together to fight colonialism, and even used their *pesantren* to house freedom fighters (Ilahi 2014; Wahyuddin 2017). These Islamic boarding schools' deep roots in their local communities—particularly in rural villages—enabled them to rally support for the revolutionary movement. Since independence, *pesantren* have continued to contribute to national development, producing some of Indonesia's most prominent leaders, even as some sought to oppose the authoritarian New Order government.

Through their educational activities, *pesantren* have created and promoted what has been identified as a *santri* identity. In Java, the word *santri* is commonly used to refer to individuals who passionately believe in and devote themselves to religious (Islamic) teachings. As such, *santri* are identified as more devout and pious than other Javanese—particularly the syncretic, or *abangan*, Muslims. The term *santri* also connotes social status and prestige, being identified with excellence and devotion. As such, Indonesian Muslims tend to seek out and maintain a *santri* identity, and the elites have even worked to institutionalize it.

In recent years, globalization and the Fourth Industrial Revolution has reshaped all aspects of everyday life. This has provided significant challenges to education, including religious education (Marshall 2018). Relations, lifestyles, and roles have radically transformed as humans have

become increasingly dependent on the internet. With the advancement of communication technology and automatization, productivity and efficiency have increased. At the same time, however, direct interactions have become less common, being mediated by the internet and other forms of information technology. This has also affected religious education; religious authority has shifted as conventional means of education, which center on face-to-face meetings and discussions, have been eroded (Bunt 2018).

Despite these challenges, there are significant opportunities for *pesantren* if they can respond to the social realities surrounding them. The increased prevalence of religious activities in society show that significant demand exists for spiritual fulfilment. By adopting information technology, thereby responding to the widespread use of the internet to find answers to religious questions, *pesantren* can meet this demand through their offline and online activities (Halim and Rahim 2011). By gaining a command of technology, *pesantren* can address society's spiritual needs, thereby buttressing their position within Indonesian society and enabling them to remain competitive in a continuously changing world.

2. Fortifying *Pesantren* as Institutions

Human beings use various approaches to achieve satisfaction, including spiritual journeys (Lazenby 2018). In Islam, such spirituality has a long history, and has been widely institutionalized. The religion holds that spiritual experiences are obtained through practice, not coming suddenly but requiring a lengthy process (Upe 2008). In this, the *pesantren* found throughout the Indonesian Archipelago have sought to promote piety and devotion to religious teachings. By teaching students about the world and the afterlife, *pesantren* guide students on a journey that enables them to achieve spiritual satisfaction.

Pesantren seek not only to promote piety among students, but also to ensure that they are independent, patient, and prepared for future challenges. As such, these educational institutions do not only function to transfer religious knowledge, but also to cultivate necessary life skills. Students are taught to live simply yet independently, not relying on anyone else. Such a spirit reflects the common religious doctrine, which is also found in Islam, which promotes challenging work and self-reliance. Religion, it can clearly be seen, plays a significant role in character

education, promoting the values and skills that enable humans to achieve success and satisfaction. As such, *pesantren*—as religious educational institutions—are expected to provide their communities with applicative solutions to their everyday problems.

The Darul Mukhlisin Pesantren in South Sulawesi, for example, has taken a clear practical role in its community. This *pesantren* teaches its students to become honorable people with good character. As such, it does not only transfer religious knowledge, but also cultivates Islamic behaviors, values, and morals (Upe 2008). Through the learning process, students' behaviors are significantly improved, as are their interpersonal communications. This shows that *pesantren* have the potential to create scholars with the knowledge and character necessary to compete at the local, national, and international level.

In the early years of Indonesian independence, *pesantren* were heavily criticized by President Soekarno as being outmoded and exclusive (Gazali 2018a; Asy'ari 1996; Saridjo 1983). In recent years, these educational institutions have often been branded as promoting radical religious beliefs; their identification as dens of radicalism has been exacerbated by the fact that several *pesantren* alumni have been involved in terrorist activities around Indonesia. Meanwhile, *pesantren* have also been heavily influenced by market demands for religious education. Consequently, these educational institutions—as well as their lessons of peace and dignity—have faced serious challenges.

Nonetheless, *pesantren* have been capable of overcoming these hurdles, as seen in their successful provision of public services to Muslims and the public. To do so, these educational institutions have had to adapt to technological and cultural transformations (Anwar 2008). They have had to act flexibly as they have responded to the challenges and problems of the *ummah*. Today's Muslims demand an innovative approach to religious education, one that does not simply enlighten students through lectures and sermons, but also undertakes real action. *Pesantren* now work to prevent terrorism and radicalism, promote a spirit of openness and diversity, embrace (interfaith) harmony, and provide an Islamic approach to character education. They have thus been required to transform themselves, to transfer religious doctrine in conjunction with more worldly knowledge as a means of creating social and spiritual security. In this, it has been necessary to embrace new messages. To avoid hatred and distrust of other

religions, sermons must promote openness and dialogue, no longer claiming that Islam is the sole source of truth.

The tendency for many Muslims to relate their every difficulty and experience to religion underscores religion's importance in human life. Religion remains a cornerstone of everyday life (Johnstone 1995; Ene and Barna 2015), functioning both to integrate the faithful and provide necessary social services; in Islam, these services are not only provided through mosques, but also through educational institutions. When religion can offer solutions to everyday problems, it remains a central part of everyday life and practices. Conversely, when religion is unable to offer solutions, or provides unsatisfactory results, it is abandoned over time as alternatives are sought. As such, religion must not only play a doctrinal role, but offer applicable solutions. The same holds true for *pesantren*; if they are capable of transferring and contextualizing knowledge, they will offer better solutions to the problems plaguing the *ummah*. As such, the Qur'an must be interpreted in a manner that helps resolve everyday issues. It must be contextualized, thereby enabling it to meet the base needs of the *ummah* and of humanity.

3. *Pesantren*: Challenges and Opportunities

Experts have widely voiced their concern for the current condition of education in Indonesia, particularly its potential future consequences. At all levels of education, from early childhood through tertiary, lessons tend to focus improving students' knowledge rather than their moral intelligence (Gazali 2018a). This is particularly evident in the social sciences, where students are expected to memorize materials rather than analyze and contextualize them. This has occurred because curricula are designed to improve the mental faculties of students. This approach has its advantages, as that it enables students to obtain at least a normative understanding of all materials. Under such curricula, students must meet specific standards before being recognized as having the competencies to graduate; as such, students tend to focus solely on meeting these standards.

During lessons, both religious and otherwise, students learn many things but fail to obtain a comprehensive understanding. In other words, although students are taught numerous disciplines, they do not gain expertise. Instead, their concentration is broken by the diversity of their lessons, and—owing to this difficulty—they have difficulty determining their

trajectory after graduation. To address this issue, it is necessary to fundamentally transform the educational system—particularly its curricular orientation. Curricula should focus not only on improving students' normative knowledge, but also their ability to achieve an in-depth understanding of their lessons (including religious ones) (Schmidt et al. 2017). Such an understanding cannot be achieved under the current system, where students are expected to receive a multitude of knowledge at the same time. Education must not only promote intellectual growth, but also character development. Cognitive capabilities must be developed in conjunction together with analytical skills, thereby ensuring that students do not only 'know' the subject and lesson, but also 'understand' it.

Presently, the Indonesian system has nearly ignored character development and education, focusing instead on developing students' mental faculties through normative and unidirectional lessons. As such, students only obtain superficial knowledge of materials over the course of their studies, with their marks being the main indicator of their success and determining their ability to continue their education. Tertiary educational institutions use students' marks as benchmarks during their admissions processes, and as such behave discriminatively. Students who receive higher marks can enter better universities, while those with lower marks have limited opportunities students pursue better marks, not better understandings.

Further compounding the situation is the practice of violence at schools, from the primary through the tertiary level. This indicates a failure to cultivate empathy, thereby resulting in a fundamental lack of concern for others. Those who perpetrate violence cannot identify with their victims, instead acting to advance their own interests to the detriment of others. Character education is therefore essential to imbue students with humanitarian values and control the animal instincts. Only then can the education system produce Indonesians with the intellectual capacity to compete at the local, national, and international level as well as the moral integrity necessary to act in accordance with humanitarian and Islamic values (Muhammad 2017).

A study conducted by Junaedi (Junaedi 2012) as part of his dissertation, titled *Revitalizing Islamic Educational Institutions in South Sulawesi* (Revitalisasi Lembaga Pendidikan Islam di Sulawesi Selatan), provided a more comprehensive and integrative approach to education. This study clearly showed how *pesantren* have functioned not only to improve the

intellectual capabilities of their students, but also their emotional maturity and moral integrity. Such educational institutions have not only required students to read, understand, and disseminate the contents of religious texts, but also to conduct themselves in accordance with these religious teachings. Students are taught to live simply, respect others, and acknowledge others' beliefs and contributions, thereby integrating religious values into their everyday activities. At these *pesantren*, Islam is contextualized, and as such easily integrated into students' activities. These educational institutions not only facilitate students' intellectual growth, but also their emotional maturation, character development, and internalization of humanitarian and Islamic values (Asror 2014).

To ensure that Indonesia's education system can promote proper character development, it is necessary to understand how it can be reoriented. Since its inception, the education system has focused more on students' intellectual growth rather than their character development (Jubba & Pabbajah, 2018). Students' intellectual growth varies, as determined by their dedication and devotion to their studies. Such disparities have often been identified as contributing to school violence, as students are not provided the support and guidance they need to optimally internalize humanitarian and religious values (Cohen-Zada and Elder 2018). Students' intellectual capabilities are prioritized over their character development, and as such their personal maturation fails to keep pace with their academic growth. As a result, individualistic behavior is facilitated while collectivism is eroded. It is not surprising, thus, that students are unwilling to work with others, or even acknowledge others' interests and contributions. They only consider themselves.

Compounding this issue, globalization has posed new challenges to the Indonesian people. As a result of the fourth industrial revolution and advancements in information technology, software is replacing humans. At the same time, competition has reached beyond the local, while direct interpersonal communication has become mediated by technology (Pilliang 2012). What will occur to humanity? Will it, as with manual labor, be pushed aside? Latest trends have shown that such a situation is not only possible, but probable, as internet technology becomes increasingly widespread. To address this issue, it is thus necessary for educational institutions to adapt.

Conclusion

This article has shown that Indonesia has traditional educational institutions with a proven ability to promote innovation and imbue students with mental fortitude and moral integrity. *Pesantren* function not only to transfer knowledge, but also to promote openness and competition, and therefore balance academic and character education. While still employing quantitative means to measure students' academic achievements, *pesantren* cultivate values of diligence, discipline, and perseverance. This distinguishes them from mainstream educational institutions, which prioritize students' intellectual growth over their moral and humanitarian maturation capacity, and as such promote individualistic behaviors and responses to challenges. Although such an individualistic orientation is not always inappropriate, students must also recognize that they exist within a social system that includes people with diverse beliefs and backgrounds.

Educational institutions, no matter their form, should orient themselves towards promoting humanitarian values and harmonious spirit. In this context, *pesantren* must be recognized as contributing significantly to students' character development and their emotional maturation. These educational institutions, which have deep roots in Indonesian society, have long sought to humanize humanity. As such, they have received social legitimacy as a means of guiding youths' personal development and internalization of desired values. At the same time, however, it must also be recognized that *pesantren* are not the only institutions with this mandate. Other institutions have the same function, having been entrusted with the education and shaping of future generations. Educational institutions must work together to create an Indonesian society that is open to difference, free of discrimination, and recognizes the important contributions of all elements of society.

This article has shown that *pesantren*, both traditional and modern, utilize a comprehensive educational framework to cultivate religious values and advance the interests of the Indonesian nation. Having contributed significantly to the independence movement and struggle, these institutions have only become increasingly prominent in recent years. The uniquely Indonesian system employed by *pesantren* can be integrated into a broader model of character education, one that addresses the shortcomings of the current education system. By doing so, local wisdom can provide the

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foundation for students' personal development, as well as enable Indonesians to adapt to the challenges of modern times.

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