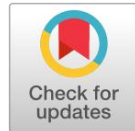


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The Kiai's Life Stories: A Narrative Inquiry into Fostering Inclusive Character within *Pesantren* Education

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ABSTRACT

Background. Inclusive character development in *pesantren* education is increasingly important amid concerns over declining social tolerance and diversity awareness among students. Limited scholarly attention has addressed how informal kiai teachings are systematically integrated into formal educational structures to shape santri values.

Purpose. This study analyzes the values embedded in kiai's teachings and examines the patterns through which these values are incorporated into formal *pesantren* education to strengthen inclusive character formation among *santri* at Pondok Pesantren Terpadu Al-Kamal Blitar.

Method. A qualitative case study approach was employed. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with kiai, teachers, and santri, participatory observations over three months, and analysis of curriculum documents, religious study materials, and institutional regulations. Data were analyzed through reduction, categorization, interpretation, and triangulation to ensure validity.

Results. Kiai's teachings emphasize religious moderation, tolerance, social justice, empathy, exemplary conduct, and concern for others. These values are integrated into formal education through several patterns: curriculum contextualization, open tafsir study sessions, exemplary leadership, inclusive *pesantren* culture, and value habituation in daily activities, shaping santri who are moderate, socially aware, and open to diversity.

Conclusion. The study positions kiai's teachings not merely as informal moral guidance but as a systematic framework for curriculum development, pedagogy, institutional culture, and inclusive character formation.

KEYWORDS

Inclusive Character, Islamic Boarding School Education, Kiai's Message

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INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, formal education in Indonesia has faced increasingly complex challenges. These challenges are not only related to students' academic achievement but also touch on a more fundamental aspect: character development (Nurhasanah et al., 2024). Various social phenomena indicate a trend toward a decline in inclusive attitudes among students, as reflected in rising intolerance, exclusivism, and a limited ability to address differences in a mature and constructive manner (Ismail, 2025). This situation indicates that education has not yet been fully able to fulfill its role as a vehicle for the deep and sustained internalization of humanistic values, tolerance, and moderation (Azzubair et al., 2025).

This reality underscores the need for an educational approach that is not solely focused on cognitive and academic achievement, but also places serious emphasis on the character development of students (Azzubair et al., 2025). Education is called upon to promote values that are contextually appropriate, relevant to social realities, and rooted in local culture and wisdom (Hendayati et al., 2025). In this context, educational institutions with a strong tradition of moral and character development are particularly important to examine; one such institution is the pesantren (Hosnan & Halim, 2024).

As the oldest Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia, pesantren hold strategic potential in addressing these challenges. For centuries, pesantren have been known as centers of moderation and guardians of the harmony of diversity through the teachings of the kiai. However, since the emergence of formal education within the pesantren environment (madrasahs and pesantren-based schools), a significant shift in orientation has occurred. Formal education in pesantren tends to emphasize cognitive-academic aspects and memorization, while the development of an inclusive character has not yet become a top priority in the curriculum and learning process (Idris et al., 2024).

On the other hand, the intellectual legacy of the kiai, as embodied in their writings (testaments, classical Islamic texts, speeches, and Islamic teachings), contains noble values that are highly relevant to an inclusive character, such as *tasamuh* (tolerance), *tawasuth* (moderation), *rahmatan lil 'alamin*, *ukhuwwah basyariyah*, and *al- 'adl*. These values have largely been conveyed informally through religious study sessions, *sorogan*, and daily interactions within traditional pesantren environments. Yet, the potential for integrating them into the formal educational system of the pesantren has not been fully realized.

In the pesantren tradition, the kiai occupies a central position as an authoritative figure who combines the roles of educator, moral leader, and spiritual role model (Hafidh et al., 2025). In the context of pesantren leadership, the role of the kiai can be understood from both traditional and modern leadership perspectives. From a traditional leadership perspective, the kiai's leadership exhibits the characteristics of situational leadership as described by Hersey and Blanchard (Febriantina et al., 2026.), namely, a leader's ability to adapt their leadership style to the circumstances and personalities of their followers. The kiai does not merely issue instructions, but also guides, directs, and tailors their mentoring approach to the students' level of maturity and needs. This makes the kiai's leadership adaptive and context-sensitive in shaping the students' character.

Meanwhile, from the perspective of modern leadership, the role of the kiai can be understood as charismatic and transformational leadership that is, leadership capable of influencing, guiding, and instilling values in all members of the pesantren through personal example and influence. Transformational leadership emphasizes a leader's ability to instill values, build a shared vision, and drive positive change within educational institutions (Febriantina et al., 2026.). In the context of Islamic boarding schools, the kiai serves not only as a decision-maker but also as a central figure who instills Islamic and social values in the lives of the students, thereby playing a crucial role in fostering an inclusive and moderate character.

Through teaching, counsel, and daily practice, the kiai conveys messages about life's values known as the kiai's teachings. These teachings are not always documented in written form, but live on through exemplary conduct, patterns of social interaction, and the pesantren culture passed down from generation to generation. The values contained in the kiai's teachings are generally moderate, humanistic, and emphasize a balance between religious commitment and a complex social reality (Mukti, 2025). Thus, the leadership of the kiai plays a key role in the process of integrating the values of the Risalah into the formal educational system of the pesantren in order to foster an inclusive character among the students.

The growth of Islamic boarding schools that offer formal education has brought new dynamics to the Islamic boarding school education system (Nasith et al., 2023). On the one hand, formal education offers opportunities for academic capacity building and broader institutional recognition. However, on the other hand, there is a challenge in integrating the formal education system which tends to be structural, administrative, and based on the national curriculum with the distinctive values of pesantren, which are cultural and practical in nature. In many cases, the teachings of the kiai still function informally and have not been systematically integrated into the curriculum, learning strategies, or the academic culture of formal pesantren education (Marzuki, 2023). As a result, the significant potential of Islamic boarding schools to foster an inclusive character among their students has not yet been fully realized.

A number of previous studies have examined character education in Islamic boarding schools as well as the role of religious leaders in the moral development of students (Selamat et al., 2023). However, most of these studies still view the kiai's teachings as a cultural practice that occurs naturally and have not yet explored how the kiai's teachings can be systematically integrated into formal pesantren education (Ryan Andrianto et al., 2025). Furthermore, research specifically examining the integration of kiai teachings with the development of inclusive character within the context of formal pesantren education remains relatively limited. This situation indicates a research gap, particularly regarding the integration of the values of kiai teachings into a structured formal education system aimed at fostering inclusive character.

In this study, inclusive character is understood as a set of attitudes and behaviors that reflect religious moderation, tolerance, openness, empathy, social concern, and respect for diversity within both educational and social life. Religious moderation refers to the ability to practice religious teachings in a balanced and non-extremist manner, while tolerance is reflected in the willingness to appreciate differences in perspectives, backgrounds, and beliefs. Openness is demonstrated through students' readiness to engage in dialogue, build positive relationships, and interact harmoniously with others from diverse social and cultural backgrounds. Meanwhile, empathy and social concern are reflected in students' sensitivity toward the conditions of others, cooperative attitudes, mutual assistance, and participation in collective social activities within the pesantren environment. In the context of this study, these dimensions of inclusive character are identified through students' daily interactions, participation in educational and pesantren activities, classroom behavior, and the values expressed during interviews and observations.

Although previous studies have widely discussed character education in pesantren and the role of kiai in shaping students' morality and religious attitudes, most of these studies still position kiai's teachings as informal cultural traditions transmitted through daily interaction, religious gatherings, and exemplary conduct. Limited attention has been given to how these informal values are systematically transformed into formal educational structures within pesantren-based schools and madrasahs. This study addresses that gap by examining how the values embedded in kiai's teachings are formally integrated into curriculum design, pedagogical practices, institutional culture, and students' daily habituation within formal pesantren education. The novelty of this study lies in its effort to position kiai's teachings not merely as moral advice or traditional religious narratives, but as a structured and sustainable framework for fostering inclusive character development in contemporary pesantren education. In the context of Pondok Pesantren Al-Kamal, this transformational role is reflected in the kiai's active involvement in curriculum direction, religious study forums, and the cultivation of inclusive pesantren culture. The kiai does not merely function as a symbolic

leader, but as a central actor who translates moral values into educational practices experienced directly by students.

Based on these realities and disparities, this study aims to address two main questions. First, what values are contained in the kiai's treatises that are relevant to the development of inclusive character among santri? Second, how are the values of the kiai's treatises integrated into the formal education system of pesantren? In line with this, this study aims to conduct an in-depth analysis of the forms of values in the kiai's treatises and the strategies for their integration into the formal pesantren education system as an effort to build an inclusive character.

Previous studies have highlighted the role of kiai, pesantren culture, and religious values in shaping students' moral behavior, tolerance, and religious moderation through exemplary leadership and daily interaction within pesantren life (Akmansyah & Nurnazli, 2024). However, most studies still position kiai's teachings as informal cultural practices, with limited discussion on how these teachings are systematically integrated into formal pesantren education through curriculum, pedagogy, institutional culture, and structured character formation. Therefore, this study examines how the institutionalization of kiai's teachings in formal pesantren education contributes to the development of inclusive character among santri.

Theoretically, this study is expected to enrich the body of research on Islamic education, particularly within the discourse on integrating pesantren values into formal education. Practically, the findings of this study are expected to serve as a reference for pesantren in designing a formal education model that is not only academically excellent but also strong in fostering inclusive character. The novelty of this research lies in the effort to position the kiai's teachings as the primary source of values systematically integrated into formal pesantren education, so that these teachings are no longer understood merely as informal cultural practices but as an integral part of the curriculum design, learning strategies, and academic culture of the pesantren.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study design (Assyakurrohim et al., 2023). This approach was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of the process of integrating the values of the kiai's teachings within the context of formal pesantren education. The research was conducted at Pondok Pesantren Terpadu Al-Kamal Blitar, a pesantren institution that integrates formal secondary education with pesantren-based character formation under the active guidance of the kiai. The participants involved 15 informants consisting of the kiai, school leaders, teachers, and students who were selected purposively based on their involvement in educational and character-building activities. The informants included the kiai, two teachers, and two students. Data collection was conducted over a two-month period from January to February 2026. Participatory observations were carried out regularly during classroom learning activities, religious study sessions, student dormitory activities, and pesantren social programs to obtain an in-depth understanding of the process of integrating the kiai's teachings into formal education. The documents analyzed included curriculum documents, pesantren regulations, student activity programs, and institutional archives related to character education.

Data were analyzed interactively through the stages of data reduction, coding, categorization, theme development, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2014). The analysis was conducted manually by identifying recurring patterns and themes related to the institutionalization of the kiai's teachings in formal educational practices. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, the study applied source and technique triangulation, member checking, and prolonged engagement in the field. Ethical considerations were also carefully

maintained through informed consent, confidentiality of participants' identities, and formal permission from the pesantren authorities prior to conducting interviews and observations. In addition, the researchers continuously reflected on their positionality throughout the research process to maintain interpretive balance and contextual sensitivity.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study were obtained through a series of data collection methods, including in-depth interviews with kiai and pesantren teachers, observations of formal education practices within the pesantren environment, and an analysis of curriculum documents and educational activities. Field findings indicate that the teachings of religious leaders play a significant role in shaping students' character particularly an inclusive character when the values contained therein are consciously and consistently integrated into the pesantren's formal education system. This integration enables pesantren values to not only thrive within cultural traditions but also to be internalized through formal learning processes.

The Values of the Kiai's Teachings Relevant to the Development of Inclusive Character in Santri

The findings of this study were obtained through in-depth interviews with the kiai, teachers, and students, observations of formal educational activities and daily life within the pesantren, as well as an analysis of curriculum documents and institutional programs at Pondok Pesantren Terpadu Al-Kamal Blitar. The field findings indicate that the values embedded in the kiai's teachings serve as the primary foundation for developing students' inclusive character through habituation, role modeling, and integration into the pesantren's formal education system. Based on an interview with (A. Mahfudz, personal communication, February 18, 2026), he explained that the pesantren was built upon the principles of openness and social benefit. According to him, "the pesantren should become a place where everyone can learn regardless of organizational background, economic status, or regional origin."

The value of inclusivity is implicitly evident in a culture of openness and togetherness. This openness is reflected in the dialogic relationships between superiors and subordinates, as well as in social interactions that prioritize mutual assistance among the boarding school community. Furthermore, religious study sessions that are open to people from all walks of life also reinforce the value of inclusivity. The tafsir study sessions, which have been held for approximately 30 years, for example, are attended not only by members of Nahdlatul Ulama but also by people from diverse backgrounds. Based on an interview with (A. Mahfudz, personal communication, February 18, 2026) one of the primary strategies is maintaining the continuity of religious study traditions and Islamic activities as a medium for value transmission. He explained that regular religious study sessions are intended not only to convey religious knowledge, but also to shape students' mindsets and characters so that they develop moderate and open attitudes toward society.

The researcher's observations further revealed that interactions among the kiai, teachers, and students were communicative and non-hierarchical. During several student deliberation forums, students were given opportunities to express their opinions and participate in simple decision-making processes related to pesantren activities. This situation demonstrates the existence of a dialogical culture that fosters mutual respect and openness toward differences.

The value of inclusivity is further reinforced by the presence of a community group comprising approximately 50 people from various networks associated with the pesantren. Religious activities such as daily study sessions for students, monthly gatherings for alumni, and

weekly meetings for the community serve as platforms for cross-group interaction that foster tolerance and openness. Thus, the teachings of the kiai not only shape the students' spiritual development but also cultivate their inclusive social character.

This study reveals that the kiai's teachings are not limited to religious advice or moral messages, but serve as a dynamic framework of values that shapes the social and educational orientation of the pesantren. In contrast to previous studies that mainly viewed the kiai's teachings as part of pesantren cultural traditions, this research shows that these values can be systematically integrated into formal educational practices through curriculum development, institutional culture, pedagogical processes, school regulations, and the exemplary roles of educators. Values such as religious moderation, tolerance, social justice, and empathy are not only conveyed informally, but are also internalized within the formal education system, allowing pesantren values to remain relevant amid the development of modern education while preserving their spiritual and traditional foundations. The novelty of this study lies in its perspective that positions the kiai's teachings as an integrative framework for inclusive character education, offering a model of formal pesantren education that is rooted in local religious values and responsive to contemporary social diversity.

Based on the results of an in-depth interview at Pondok Pesantren Terpadu Al-Kamal Blitar Integrated Islamic Boarding School in Blitar with KH. Asmawi Mahfudz, as well as observations of the dynamics of life at the boarding school, he explained that kiai are pioneers in Muslim diversity in Indonesia who consistently stand by the community in addressing and helping to resolve various life challenges, whether of a worldly or spiritual nature. These findings further underscore that the pesantren, as the work and legacy of the kiai, functions not only as an institution for the transmission of religious knowledge but also as a strategic space for fostering an inclusive character among students. The kiai's role as the primary driving force in the management and development of the pesantren makes the kiai's teachings a living source of values that remains relevant in addressing the social and religious dynamics within society. In the context of formal pesantren education, the kiai's teachings are not merely understood as moral advice but serve as the conceptual and practical foundation for building an educational system that is adaptive, moderate, and open to diversity.

The integration of the values of the kiai's teachings into formal pesantren education, as reflected in the dynamics of contemporary pesantren development, demonstrates a systematic effort to connect traditional pesantren values with the demands of modern education. The strengthening of the curriculum, institutional management, the training of educators, and the fostering of openness and inclusivity are concrete manifestations of this integration. Through this process, formal pesantren education is not only oriented toward strengthening students' academic capabilities but is also directed toward fostering a moderate, empathetic character capable of living harmoniously in a pluralistic society.

Thus, the integration of the values of the kiai's teachings into formal pesantren education becomes a crucial strategy in building an inclusive character among students. As an educational institution deeply rooted in Islamic values and local wisdom, the pesantren has great potential to produce a generation that possesses not only spiritual and intellectual depth but also social awareness and an open attitude toward differences. This aligns with the primary purpose of the pesantren as an institution for training ulama and a generation of Muslims capable of playing an active role in a diverse and dynamic society.

Among these values, religious moderation stands out as the most dominant and prominent value in the kiai's treatise (Muhaemin & Yunus, 2023). This is reflected in the messages of the kiai, who consistently emphasize the importance of wasathiyyah a balanced, non extremist approach that

integrates religious teachings into social life in a proportionate manner. The clerics encourage students not to be quick to blame others, to respect differing viewpoints, and to approach diversity with wisdom and maturity. Instilling this moderate attitude serves as a crucial foundation for fostering an inclusive character among students amidst a pluralistic and dynamic social reality (Ridho et al., 2025).

One Madrasah Aliyah teacher (A. Hatmayanti, personal communication, February 18, 2026) explained that the values of tolerance and togetherness are consistently emphasized during classroom learning. The teacher stated that learning activities are not limited to delivering academic material, but are also connected to attitudes of respecting differences and living harmoniously with others. The teacher noted that “students here are accustomed not to easily blame others and are encouraged to understand friends with different characters and backgrounds.”

In addition to religious moderation, the values of tolerance and respect for differences are also an integral part of the kiai's message. Through advice repeatedly conveyed in various forums, the kiai emphasizes the importance of building social relationships grounded in mutual respect among students. Based on research, through counsel, setting a good example, and daily interactions at the pesantren, the kiai consistently instills the values of mutual respect, tolerance, and cooperation, which strengthen social bonds among students in their communal life (Kutsiyah & Tianah, 2025). Students are encouraged to avoid behavior that is demeaning, domineering, or exclusionary, and to maintain harmony in their shared living environment at the pesantren. Differences in social background, personality, and perspective are viewed as opportunities for social learning that allow students to develop empathy and an open-minded attitude toward diversity (Saepurokhman & Ali, 2025).

In addition, interviews with several students (Umi, personal communication, February 18, 2026) revealed that life in the pesantren accustomed them to living together with peers from different regions, cultures, and personal backgrounds. One student explained that activities such as communal work, group discussions, and social service programs trained them to cooperate and appreciate differing opinions. These experiences gradually nurtured empathy and social awareness among the students.

The kiai's teachings are also rich in values of social justice and concern for others, aimed at strengthening the students' social awareness. Observational findings indicate that the values of social justice and care for others are not merely delivered through religious sermons, but are directly practiced in the daily life of the pesantren. The researcher found that teachers and pesantren administrators attempted to treat students equally regardless of their social background or academic ability. When students experienced economic difficulties or personal problems, the pesantren community collectively provided guidance and assistance.

These findings demonstrate that the kiai's teachings at Pondok Pesantren Terpadu Al-Kamal are not merely understood as moral advice, but are embodied within the daily educational culture of the pesantren. Values such as religious moderation, tolerance, empathy, and social concern are internalized through social interaction, formal learning processes, the exemplary conduct of teachers and kiai, and collective student activities. This study reinforces the view that pesantren education possesses strong potential to develop inclusive character through the integration of local religious values into formal educational practices.

Patterns of Integrating the Values of Kiai's Teachings into Formal Pesantren Education

The findings of this study indicate that the integration of the kiai's teachings into formal education at Pondok Pesantren Terpadu Al-Kamal is carried out through systematic and continuous

patterns. Based on observations, values such as tolerance, religious moderation, social responsibility, and care for others are not only taught during religious study sessions, but are also integrated into formal learning activities and the daily culture of pesantren life.

The pesantren manages various formal educational institutions, ranging from early childhood education, kindergarten, elementary school, junior high school, vocational high school, to senior high school, all of which operate within a single, well-coordinated system. This coordination among institutions serves as a form of value integration that fosters a shared vision in shaping the character of the students. Additionally, there is an integrated study schedule across these institutions, including the use of media as a tool for monitoring and guidance.

An interview with a junior high school teacher (Rohmah, personal communication, February 18, 2026) revealed that teachers are encouraged to connect classroom materials with pesantren values. The teacher explained that learning activities are not solely oriented toward academic achievement, but also toward character formation. The teacher stated that “every subject is directed to help students learn how to respect others and develop positive social attitudes.”

Religious activities such as the commemoration of major Islamic holidays, anniversary ceremonies, and founding anniversaries are also part of the process of integrating the values of the kiai's teachings. In these activities, students from formal educational institutions are actively involved, so that the traditional values of the pesantren can be internalized in their lives. Furthermore, the boarding school administrators also have a duty roster (on-call shifts) as a form of collective responsibility in preserving these values.

However, this integration is not an instant process. Based on the interview results, it was noted that establishing a school integrated with the pesantren system takes a long time. The challenge of “adapting” students from the formal education system to the pesantren environment is one indicator that the integration of values requires a continuous process of acculturation and internalization.

The research findings indicate that the integration of the values of the kiai's teachings into formal pesantren education does not occur in isolation, but rather through interconnected and continuous patterns. This integration positions the kiai's teachings as a living source of values that actively functions within the entire pesantren educational system at the curricular, pedagogical, and cultural levels. These patterns of integration allow pesantren values to be understood not merely as moral discourse, but to be genuinely internalized within the learning process and the daily lives of the students (Imam Nurhakim, 2022).

The first pattern of integration is reflected in the strengthening of the pesantren curriculum. The values of the kiai's teachings are integrated into both religious and general subjects, emphasizing not only academic achievement but also character formation.

Classroom observations showed that teachers frequently related lesson materials to social realities within pesantren life. In several learning sessions, students were given opportunities to express opinions and discuss differing perspectives. This situation demonstrates that openness and respect for differences are internalized through daily learning processes. Thus, learning is not solely directed toward academic achievement, but also serves as a space for the internalization of values that shape students' perspectives and behavior (Salama, 2025).

The integration of values through the formal curriculum makes inclusive values an inherent part of the learning process. These values are not presented as separate, normative content, but are internalized and practiced continuously within the dynamics of classroom learning. Through this approach, formal pesantren education is able to fulfill its dual role as a vehicle for intellectual development and the integrated formation of inclusive character among students.

The findings also indicate that the exemplary conduct of the kiai and teachers represents the most dominant integration pattern. Based on observations, the openness, simplicity, and empathy demonstrated by the kiai and teachers strongly influence students' behavior. Students not only receive verbal advice, but also directly witness how these values are practiced in daily life. In this context, kiai and teachers act as living representations of the pesantren's moral system, transforming abstract religious values into practical social ethics (Anam & Hakim, 2023). The novelty of this study lies in its identification of role modeling as a strategic bridge connecting traditional pesantren values with modern formal education, demonstrating that exemplary behavior serves as a systematic strategy for reinforcing inclusive character development within formal pesantren schooling.

One Madrasah Aliyah student (Naila, personal communication, February 18, 2026) explained that communal life in the pesantren taught students to help one another and respect friends with different personalities and backgrounds. The student stated that "when someone faces difficulties, other students usually help. We are taught to live together and care for one another." The fairness, openness to diversity, and empathy demonstrated by religious leaders and teachers serve as the primary means through which the values of the religious leader's teachings are internalized. Students learn not only through what is taught, but also through what they observe and experience in their daily lives. When kiai and educators treat students equally, respect differences in background, and respond to issues with empathy, inclusive values are gradually instilled in the students through the process of emulation (Hafidh et al., 2025). The exemplary conduct of religious leaders and teachers in their daily lives through both their words and actions serves as a vital means of instilling character values. Through the consistent examples they set, students learn to respect differences, act fairly, and help one another, allowing inclusive values to take root and flourish in their lives (Mahtumah, 2023).

Through this exemplary behavior, students not only understand the values of the kiai's teachings on a conceptual level, but also witness firsthand how those values are applied in real-life situations. This experience enables students to emulate and internalize inclusive values as part of their own attitudes and behaviors. Thus, the exemplary conduct of the kiai and teachers serves as a bridge connecting the normative values of the kiai's teachings with the students' social reality, while simultaneously strengthening the effectiveness of inclusive character education within the pesantren environment (Ardli, 2024).

The third pattern of integration is reflected in the development of an inclusive pesantren culture centered on togetherness, consultation, and mutual respect. Observations showed that students were accustomed to participating in deliberation forums, collaborative activities, and communal responsibilities within the pesantren environment. The values of togetherness, consultation, and respect for the diverse backgrounds of the students form the cornerstone of building an inclusive pesantren culture (Firmansyah, 2022).

These values are reflected in various institutional activities at the pesantren, ranging from decision-making processes that involve dialogue and deliberation to conflict resolution mechanisms that prioritize persuasive and participatory approaches. In practice, students are encouraged to express their opinions, listen to others' perspectives, and collaboratively seek solutions to the various challenges they face. The relatively egalitarian social dynamics among students and between students and educators reinforce the internalization of inclusive values in daily life.

This pesantren culture fosters a social environment conducive to the development of mutual respect, empathy, and openness to diversity (Panjalu et al., 2022). Through intense and ongoing interaction within the cultural environment of the pesantren, students learn to view differences not

as a source of conflict, but as part of the dynamics of communal life. Thus, the pesantren culture serves as a strategic medium that enables the values of the kiai's teachings to be internalized naturally and sustainably in the formation of the students' inclusive character.

The fourth integration pattern occurs through habituation in students' daily activities. Group discussions, communal work, and social service activities become practical spaces where students learn cooperation, empathy, and social responsibility directly through experience. This habituation serves as a space for practical application, enabling the values of the kiai's teachings to be internalized and put into practice directly in daily life (Mashluchah et al., 2023).

Activities such as group discussions, cross-group collaboration, and social and community service initiatives serve as important means for learning values in a practical way. In these activities, students are trained to collaborate with peers from diverse backgrounds, learn to respect differing viewpoints, and develop sensitivity to the needs and circumstances of others. The repeated interactions that occur during these activities allow the values of empathy, solidarity, and social responsibility to gradually take root within the students.

Through consistent practice, the values conveyed by the kiai do not remain merely at the level of discourse or normative advice, but manifest as a lived experience that continuously shapes the attitudes and behaviors of the students. This practice reinforces the internalization of inclusive values, as students learn through direct practice, reflection, and social interaction, thereby embedding these values more deeply in their character (Muslimin et al., 2023).

Thus, the integration of the kiai's teachings at Pondok Pesantren Terpadu Al-Kamal occurs through the synergy of formal learning, pesantren culture, social habituation, and the exemplary conduct of the kiai and teachers. This process enables inclusive values not only to be understood conceptually, but also to be practiced in students' daily lives.

Strategies Used by Islamic Scholars to Integrate the Values of the Risalah into Formal Education at Islamic Boarding Schools

The findings reveal that the kiai at Pondok Pesantren Terpadu Al-Kamal employ various strategies to integrate the values of the risalah into formal pesantren education. These strategies are implemented through strengthening pesantren culture, role modeling, teacher development, and continuous religious and social activities.

In addition, the kiai also develops social networks through community groups and alumni networks. Alumni study sessions, which have been held since 2002, demonstrate efforts to maintain the continuity of the kiai's teachings across generations. This strategy strengthens the emotional and intellectual bonds between the pesantren and its alumni.

Observations showed that religious activities involving students, alumni, and the wider community became important spaces for maintaining pesantren values. Through regular study sessions, alumni gatherings, and collective religious traditions, the pesantren continuously strengthened the transmission of values such as moderation, togetherness, and social responsibility. In an interview conducted (A. Mahfudz, personal communication, February 18, 2026) emphasized the importance of exemplary conduct and the continuity of good deeds in preserving pesantren values. According to him, good traditions must be continuously maintained so that the pesantren's moral values remain alive across generations.

The findings also indicate that the kiai play a central role in directing the integration of pesantren values into formal education. Their role is reflected not only in institutional policies, but also in daily guidance, educational practices, and interactions with students and teachers.

Based on interviews with teachers (Rohmah, personal communication, February 18, 2026) the pesantren leadership consistently encourages educators to integrate values such as tolerance, moderation, empathy, and social responsibility into classroom learning and school regulations. These values become part of the educational orientation implemented across formal educational institutions within the pesantren.

Observations showed that the kiai consistently demonstrated moderation, fairness, and empathy in interactions with students and teachers. This exemplary conduct became an important strategy for strengthening students' understanding and practice of inclusive values in daily life. The kiai reinforces the integration of the message's values through setting an example in daily life. The kiai consistently demonstrates moderation, fairness, and empathy in interactions with both students and educators (Ulya & Triyuliasari, 2024). This exemplary leadership serves as an effective strategy because it provides concrete examples of how the values taught by the kiai are put into practice in real life. Through this exemplary leadership, students not only understand these values intellectually but also internalize them through direct experience. This underscores that the role of the kiai as a central figure in the pesantren is crucial to the success of value integration.

Kiai reinforces the role of educators as the embodiment of the kiai's teachings in formal education. The kiai encourages and guides teachers to use the kiai's teachings as a moral compass in the learning process (Ahmad, 2021). Through ongoing training and guidance, teachers are expected to be able to integrate the values of the kiai's teachings into their lesson plans, teaching methods, and interactions with students. This strategy broadens the scope of value integration, ensuring that it does not rely solely on the figure of the kiai but is also supported by all educators at the pesantren. One Madrasah Aliyah teacher (A. Hatmayanti, personal communication, February 18, 2026) explained that teachers regularly receive guidance from the pesantren leadership regarding the importance of embedding pesantren values into classroom learning. According to the teacher, educators are expected not only to teach academic material, but also to become role models for students in practicing tolerance and empathy.

Observations revealed that students were accustomed to participating in deliberative forums, collaborative activities, and communal responsibilities within the pesantren. These activities fostered openness, mutual respect, and dialogue-oriented interactions among students and educators. The values of solidarity, consultation, and respect for diversity are instilled as integral parts of life within the boarding school community (Khusnan et al., 2025). This culture is reflected in decision-making processes, the resolution of conflicts through dialogue, and relatively egalitarian social relationships between students and educators. This cultural strategy allows the values espoused by the kiai to be naturally internalized through the students' daily lives within the pesantren environment (Wardhani & Heriyudanta, 2025).

The kiai integrates the values of the Risalah through daily practice in the students' educational and social activities. The kiai encourages students' participation in various activities that require cooperation, empathy, and social awareness, such as group discussions, community service, and other social activities at the pesantren. Through these practices, the kiai's teachings do not remain merely theoretical but manifest as practical experiences that continuously shape the students' attitudes and behaviors. One student (Umi, personal communication, February 18, 2026) explained that communal activities in the pesantren taught students responsibility and mutual assistance. According to the student, living together in the pesantren helped them learn how to deal with differences in personality and solve problems collectively.

These findings demonstrate that the kiai's strategies for integrating the values of the risalah are implemented not only through structural approaches within formal education, but also through

cultural and exemplary approaches embedded in daily pesantren life. These strategies strengthen the internalization of inclusive values so that students not only understand these values theoretically, but are also able to apply them in social life.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the integration of kiai's teachings into formal pesantren education plays a significant role in fostering the inclusive character of santri at Pondok Pesantren Terpadu Al-Kamal Blitar. The findings indicate that the values of religious moderation, tolerance, social justice, exemplary conduct, empathy, and concern for others are integrated through four interconnected patterns, namely values-based curriculum reinforcement, the exemplary role of kiai and educators, the development of an inclusive pesantren culture, and the habituation of values in students' daily activities. These patterns show that the internalization of values takes place not only at the cognitive level, but also within the affective and practical dimensions of students' lives. This study also highlights the central role of kiai as key actors in shaping educational orientation, institutional culture, and holistic character formation within formal pesantren education. Theoretically, this study contributes to the discourse on Islamic education by positioning kiai's teachings not merely as informal moral advice, but as a systematic framework that influences curriculum development, pedagogical practices, institutional culture, and inclusive character formation. Practically, the findings suggest that other pesantren and Islamic educational institutions may adapt this integration model by strengthening value-oriented curricula, reinforcing exemplary leadership, cultivating inclusive educational cultures, and embedding character values into students' daily learning experiences.

Nevertheless, this study is limited to a single-site qualitative case study conducted at Pondok Pesantren Terpadu Al-Kamal Blitar, and therefore the findings cannot be generalized to all pesantren contexts in Indonesia, which are diverse in terms of tradition, leadership, and educational orientation. In addition, the perspectives and experiences of santri were not explored as extensively as those of institutional leaders and educators. Despite these limitations, the study provides contextual insights into how kiai's teachings can be systematically integrated into formal educational structures to strengthen inclusive character development among santri. Future studies are encouraged to examine similar integration models in different pesantren typologies, including salafiyah, modern, and hybrid pesantren, in order to enrich broader discussions on inclusive character education within Islamic educational institutions.

DECLARATION OF AI AND AI ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

During the preparation of this work the author(s) used Gemini and Grammarly in order to support academic writing improvement, including language polishing, clarity enhancement, and structural refinement of the manuscript in accordance with scholarly standards. After using this tool/service, the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as needed and take(s) full responsibility for the content of the publication.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.

Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; In-vestigation.

Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.

Author 4: Formal analysis; Methodology; Writing - original draft.

Author 5: Supervision; Validation.

Author 6: Other contribution; Resources; Visuali-zation.

Author 7: Supervision; Validation.

Author 8: Other contribution; Resources; Writing - original draft.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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