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Strategies for Preventing Radicalism: A Case Study at Pondok Pesantren (Islamic Boarding School)

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ABSTRACT

Background: This study examines the strategies employed at Pondok Pesantren Makrifatul Ilmi in South Bengkulu to prevent radicalism, a growing concern in educational institutions, especially Islamic boarding schools. **Objective:** The primary objective is to identify the steps taken by the pesantren to combat radicalization and to assess the factors that support and hinder these efforts. **Method:** A descriptive qualitative approach was employed to collect data through interviews, observations, and documentation. **Result:** The findings reveal that the pesantren implements three key strategies: religious functions, educational activities, and social engagement. Supporting factors include heightened student awareness, strong internal cooperation within the pesantren, and active parental involvement. However, the study also highlights several challenges, including students' diverse social backgrounds, varying interpretations of nationalism, and the pervasive influence of technology. **Conclusion:** While the pesantren's strategies for preventing radicalism are effective, overcoming these barriers requires sustained cooperation and adaptability. **Contribution:** This research contributes to a deeper understanding of counter-radicalism strategies in pesantren and offers insights into the unique challenges faced by Islamic educational institutions in South Bengkulu.

KEYWORDS

Strategies; Preventing Radicalism; Islamic Boarding School

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1. INTRODUCTION

Radicalism is an ideology that can lead to social unrest within society. This ideology tends to seek drastic and harsh social and political changes. In many cases, radicalism is associated with extreme actions involving violence and terrorism. Terrorism often causes fear and human rights violations, primarily targeting civilians (Trip et al., 2019). In an increasingly global and connected world, radicalization has become an alarming issue, especially when this ideology justifies violence in the name of religion or politics (Gaspar et al., 2020).

In Indonesia, the issue of radicalization does not only occur in certain societal groups but can also extend into the educational environment. Pondok Pesantren, as the oldest Islamic educational institution in Indonesia, is often linked to radicalism. However, research has shown that this perception is not entirely accurate. Kusmanto et al. (2015) found that the relationship between radicalism and anti-radicalism in pesantren is dialectical. On one hand,

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some pesantren can be a place for spreading radical ideologies. However, on the other hand, many pesantren play an active role in the anti-radicalism movement through education and da'wah (Islamic preaching).

In line with these findings, Malik et al. (2017) explained that the educational culture in pesantren significantly influences the tendencies of santri (students) in understanding religious teachings. Pesantren with inclusive, open, and contextual learning systems tend to form moderate and tolerant characters in their students. At the same time, pesantren that are closed to social change have the potential to foster exclusionary attitudes. Research by Raharja et al. (2023) demonstrates that the internalization of religious moderation values, such as *tawassuth* (middle ground), *tasamuh* (tolerance), and *muwathanah* (love for the homeland), is an effective strategy in preventing radicalism within pesantren. Additionally, research by Effendi & Oktovia (2023) emphasizes the importance of an inclusive learning approach in pesantren education as a strategy to mitigate religious intolerance and radicalism. By integrating values of pluralism and nationalism into the curriculum, pesantren can cultivate an awareness in santri to appreciate differences and reject violence in the name of religion. Similarly, Izzuddin (2023) in his research at Pondok Pesantren Tebuireng revealed that strengthening religious forums such as *bahtsul masail* (religious discussions), learning the *Kitab Kuning* (traditional Islamic texts), and conducting regular gatherings with the guardians of santri strengthen the spirit of nationalism and curb the potential infiltration of radical ideologies.

Pesantren plays a vital role in shaping moderate religious understanding in Indonesia, particularly in the face of globalization and the growing trend of radicalization (Mujahid, 2021). As a traditional educational institution, pesantren not only teaches religious knowledge but also instills life values based on tolerance, compassion, and respect for differences (Supadi, 2024). The approach used by pesantren in educating santri involves providing contextual understanding of religion, teaching that religious teachings are not only applicable in individual contexts but also in multicultural social life (Hasanah, 2025). In this regard, pesantren strives to form the understanding that moderate and peaceful Islam must be applied in all aspects of life, both in personal relationships and broader social interactions, including with those from different religious, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds (Qodriyah et al., 2024).

Moreover, moderate education in pesantren also involves the development of social and emotional character in santri (Putro & Suryono, 2019). Within the pesantren, santri are taught to prioritize principles of peace, justice, and balance in their lives (Safi'i, 2022). This includes fostering attitudes of mutual respect, avoiding discrimination, and strengthening social awareness through community-oriented activities. Pesantren becomes a place that not only teaches worship and ethics but also teaches how to interact with others in the spirit of togetherness and mutual respect (Solihin et al., 2020). Through this approach, pesantren can produce a generation that not only understands religion deeply but also contributes actively to creating an inclusive, harmonious, and tolerant society while addressing the potential for radicalization that could threaten social peace.

The importance of strategies for moderate education is also emphasized by Mahfud et al. (2023), who studied the role of national insight education at Pondok Pesantren Lirboyo. Their research findings show that the internalization of nationalism and love for the homeland among santri can strengthen the pesantren's ideological defense against extremism. However, a report from the Center for Radicalism and Deradicalization Studies notes that some pesantren remain vulnerable to radical influences due to weak digital literacy and limited interaction with the outside community.

Therefore, research at Pondok Pesantren Makrifatul Ilmi in South Bengkulu becomes crucial to examine how strategies to prevent radicalism are implemented in a local context. This pesantren is expected to serve as a model for strengthening religious moderation through education based on social values, nationalism, and tolerance. This aligns with previous findings that the role of teachers as role models in instilling moderation values and integrating peaceful Islamic teachings into everyday life is a key factor in preventing radicalization. Challenges such as the influence of technology, the social backgrounds of santri, and differences in understanding of nationalism must be anticipated with more adaptive and contextual approaches. Thus, pesantren can continue to be at the forefront of building a peaceful, tolerant, and civilized society.

Although many pesantren in Indonesia have great potential to shape a moderate religious understanding, a gap still exists between societal expectations regarding the role of pesantren in preventing radicalization and the reality on the ground (Jusubaidi et al., 2024). Many pesantren still lack systematic and structured strategies to address radicalization, so their role in shaping tolerant and moderate santri has not been optimized (Faidkholidi & Fajri, 2025). Furthermore, although religious moderation values are taught in some pesantren, their application and implementation are often limited to textual religious teachings without considering the broader social context (Mulyana, 2023). On the other hand, external factors such as the influence of technology and differences in religious understanding among santri also worsen the situation, highlighting the urgent need to develop a more holistic and adaptive approach to preventing radical ideologies in pesantren environments.

This research aims to describe the strategies implemented by Pondok Pesantren Makrifatul Ilmi in South Bengkulu to prevent the spread of radical ideologies among santri. This study also aims to identify the factors that support and hinder the success of these strategies. The primary focus of this research is on understanding the role of pesantren in shaping moderate and tolerant attitudes through inclusive Islamic education based on social values and how pesantren integrate radicalization prevention strategies with approaches that align with local social and cultural contexts.

2. METHOD

2.1 Research Design

This study uses a descriptive qualitative design with a case study approach. This approach was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of the radicalism prevention strategies implemented at Pondok Pesantren Makrifatul Ilmi in South Bengkulu. The research design enables the researcher to collect data directly from primary and secondary sources, thereby gaining a deeper understanding of the context and dynamics occurring in the field.

2.2 Research Object

This research was conducted in 2024. The research subjects comprise the leadership of Pondok Pesantren Makrifatul Ilmi, as well as several ustadz (male teachers) and ustadzah (female teachers) who teach at the pesantren, and some santri (students) who are part of the educational process at the pesantren. The selection of research subjects was based on criteria, such as informants who have direct knowledge and relevance to the topic being studied.

2.3 Data Collection

Data were collected using three main techniques: interviews, observations, and documentation. Interviews were conducted with the leadership of the pesantren, ustadz, ustadzah, and santri to gather information about the strategies for preventing radicalism and the factors that support or hinder these strategies. Observations were made to gain a direct understanding of the learning processes and activities taking place at the pesantren. Documentation included various archives and records relevant to the efforts to prevent radicalism within the pesantren.

2.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using the data analysis model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which consists of three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction stage, the researcher filters and organizes information relevant to the research objectives. In the data presentation stage, the categorized information is presented in narrative form to facilitate understanding. In the conclusion drawing stage, the researcher draws conclusions based on the findings to provide a comprehensive overview of the strategies and factors influencing radicalism prevention at the pesantren.

2.5 Data Validity Check

To ensure the validity of the data, this study employs triangulation techniques, namely source triangulation, method triangulation, and researcher triangulation. Source triangulation is carried out by comparing information obtained from different informants. Method triangulation is done by combining various data collection methods, such as interviews, observations, and documentation, to ensure the consistency of the findings. Researcher triangulation involves engaging multiple researchers in the data collection and analysis process to minimize bias and enhance the objectivity of the research results.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Result

The results of this study show that Pondok Pesantren Makrifatul Ilmi in South Bengkulu implements three main strategies to prevent radicalism among its santri. First, the religious function focuses on an in-depth understanding of the Qur'an and Hadith, considering the social context, so that the santri not only understands the texts literally but also in a broader context. Second, the educational function aims to instill social values such as nationalism, pluralism, and a culture of tolerance, enabling the santri to accept differences and foster a love for the homeland. Third, the social function emphasizes social activities involving santri in interactions with the community, thereby strengthening

the relationship between the pesantren and the surrounding society. Key supporting factors in the implementation of these strategies include the santri's awareness of practicing their religion effectively, their young age, which makes them receptive to new insights, as well as the positive support from all members of the pesantren and their parents. However, there are also hindering factors such as the diverse social backgrounds of the santri, differences in understanding of nationalist values, and the influence of technology, which brings radical ideologies.

Based on the interview results, several key findings were uncovered regarding the efforts of Pondok Pesantren Makrifatul Ilmi in preventing radical ideologies. The leadership of the pesantren explained that the pesantren focuses on education that teaches religious moderation, emphasizing the importance of understanding religion in a moderate and balanced way. "We instill the importance of understanding religion that is not extreme, so that santri can respond to differences wisely," said the leader of the pesantren (Informant, HTF). One of the ustadz (teachers) also added, "We do not only teach fiqh, but also motivate the santri to interact positively with society" (Informant, MU). Several ustadzah (female teachers) and santri also highlighted the success of the teaching implemented, with one ustadzah stating, "In this pesantren, we involve the santri in various social activities to build an understanding of the importance of living together with various backgrounds" (Informant, UMT), and a santri added, "The lessons about religious moderation here opened my mind about how Islam teaches peace" (Informant, UDS).

However, despite the progress made, several obstacles were also revealed. One santri said, "The biggest challenge is the differences in understanding between us, who come from different regions, which makes it difficult to unite our views" (Informant, UGD). Similarly, one of the ustadz highlighted the influence of social media, saying, "The influence of social media also brings ideas that do not always align with our teachings, which is one of the main challenges" (Informant, UFS). These challenges indicate that while the pesantren has made significant efforts to teach religious moderation, external factors such as social background and the influence of technology remain challenges that need to be addressed to strengthen more inclusive and moderate education.

The analysis of the interview results shows that Pondok Pesantren Makrifatul Ilmi has implemented a comprehensive approach to preventing radicalism, with a focus on religious moderation education, teaching social values, and empowering santri through social activities. The leadership and teachers emphasize the importance of non-extreme religious understanding, as well as building positive relationships between the santri and the community. However, the main challenge faced is the difference in backgrounds and understanding among the santri, which makes it difficult to unify perspectives on religious moderation. Additionally, the influence of social media, which brings radical ideologies, poses a significant barrier in the pesantren's efforts to maintain peaceful and tolerant religious teachings. This indicates that, despite effective strategies being in place, external factors and internal differences continue to pose obstacles to implementing religious moderation education within the pesantren.

3.2. Discussion

Pondok Pesantren has successfully implemented various strategies to prevent the spread of radical ideologies, focusing on education that promotes religious moderation. One of the strategies applied is a deep understanding of religious texts, especially the Qur'an and Hadith. The leadership of the pesantren has emphasized their efforts to avoid shallow or textual interpretations of religion and to focus on a contextual and adaptive understanding of social values in Indonesia. Faisal (2022) found that the authority of the kiai (Islamic scholar) in interpreting Islamic teachings contextually plays a crucial role in curbing the rise of extreme views among santri. This contextual interpretation approach helps instill the values of Islam as *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (a mercy to all the worlds) and encourages santri to understand Islam within the framework of national social unity (Faisal, 2022).

In addition to strengthening religious understanding, the education of nationalism and pluralism has also become a key strategy of pesantren in preventing radicalization. Moderate Islamic education has been proven to shape the character of santri to be tolerant and open to differences (Susilo, 2019). This aligns with the pesantren's efforts, which not only teach fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) and worship but also instill social values such as nationalism, pluralism, and interfaith tolerance. Therefore, pesantren functions not only as a religious institution but also as a national character-building institution that instills love for the homeland and togetherness in diversity.

The social function of pesantren also plays an important role in preventing radicalism. Social activities that involve santri in interactions with the local community provide a platform for learning empathy and social solidarity. Abubakar (2020) emphasized that involving santri in social activities enhances their social sensitivity and reduces the potential for developing exclusionary attitudes. Pesantren that emphasize active social interaction are more successful in fostering a generation of santri who are moderate and have strong social ties with the community.

However, the research also indicates that the variation in the character of pesantren influences the effectiveness of radicalism prevention strategies. Malik (2024) found that some pesantren are more conservative and may poten-

tially become breeding grounds for exclusive ideologies if not balanced with curriculum oversight and strong leadership. Therefore, radicalism prevention strategies in pesantren need to take into account the typology and internal dynamics of each institution to be more targeted and effective.

From an internal policy perspective, [Akmansyah & Nurnazli \(2020\)](#) explain that supervising teaching materials, selecting instructors, and controlling ideologies within the pesantren environment are practical steps in preventing the infiltration of radical ideologies. These practices demonstrate the seriousness of pesantren in maintaining the purity of peaceful Islamic teachings and rejecting all forms of extremism. Furthermore, [Widjanarko \(2025\)](#) highlights the new challenge pesantren faces: the influence of social media as a channel for spreading radical ideologies. Digital platforms are often used to disseminate hateful narratives, which makes it necessary for pesantren to use counter-narratives through social media to spread moderate messages and strengthen digital literacy among santri.

The awareness of santri also plays a key role in supporting the success of radicalism prevention strategies. According to [Faisal \(2023\)](#), awareness of the importance of moderate religious education helps develop critical thinking and openness to differences, making santri more resilient against extreme ideologies. However, the same study found that the differences in the cultural backgrounds and regions of origin of the santri often lead to gaps in understanding the concept of religious moderation ([Bahri et al., 2025](#)). This highlights the need to strengthen the capacity of teachers and adopt more contextual teaching approaches to unify the perspectives of diverse santri.

Therefore, pondok pesantren has successfully implemented strategies for religious moderation education through a contextual understanding of religious texts, teaching national values, engaging in social activities, and strengthening internal policies. Despite challenges such as the influence of social media and the heterogeneity of santri, pesantren remains at the forefront of promoting a tolerant and peaceful Islam in Indonesia ([Ali & Halim, 2023](#)). Pesantren has the potential to become an effective anti-radicalism education model if it can continue to adapt to social and technological changes while maintaining the noble values of Islam ([Mastrianto, 2024](#)).

Pondok Pesantren plays a key role in shaping the religious understanding of its santri (students) and preventing the spread of radical ideologies ([Nasith, 2024](#)). One of the main strategies employed is the religious function, which emphasizes a deep understanding of religious texts, especially the Qur'an and Hadith, through a contextual approach. This method encourages santri to interpret religious texts not just literally, but in a manner that is adaptable to the social and cultural context of Indonesia. By doing so, pesantren aims to foster a moderate and balanced understanding of Islam that aligns with the values of peace, tolerance, and coexistence ([Huda, 2024](#)). This approach also helps combat radical interpretations by providing santri with the tools to engage critically with religious teachings, reinforcing the idea that Islam is a religion of peace that should be applied in harmony with diverse societal values.

In addition to the religious approach, the educational function plays an equally important role in shaping the character and mindset of santri. Pesantren incorporates social values such as nationalism, pluralism, and interfaith tolerance into its curriculum, aiming to build a sense of solidarity and unity among students ([Habibulloh, 2024](#)). By teaching these values, pesantren not only strengthens the santri's religious knowledge but also their social consciousness. The emphasis on nationalism and pluralism ensures that santri develop an appreciation for Indonesia's diversity and understand the importance of living peacefully with people from different ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds ([Hutabarar, 2023](#)). This comprehensive educational approach helps santri to appreciate differences rather than see them as a threat, which is crucial in preventing the rise of radical ideologies that promote exclusivism and intolerance.

The social function of pesantren further contributes to the prevention of radicalism by involving santri in community engagement activities ([Sadiah, 2022](#)). These social activities provide a platform for santri to interact with the broader society, promoting empathy, social solidarity, and active participation in community life. By fostering positive interactions between santri and the community, pesantren contributes to creating a more inclusive environment where students understand their role as responsible citizens ([Rofiah et al., 2025](#)). This interaction also reduces the likelihood of developing exclusive attitudes, as it fosters a sense of belonging and responsibility towards the community. Through these social engagements, pesantren not only educates santri in religious matters but also nurtures their character as agents of peace and tolerance, further contributing to the broader effort to counteract radical ideologies.

This study offers a novel contribution by exploring the strategies for preventing radicalization at Pondok Pesantren Makrifatul Ilmi, a topic that remains underexplored in the literature, particularly within the context of pesantren in South Bengkulu. The research not only identifies the approaches implemented but also examines the unique factors that support and hinder these efforts, including student awareness, internal cooperation within the pesantren, and the influence of technology. The approach that combines religious functions, educational activities,

and social engagement in countering radicalization provides fresh insights into understanding the dynamics within pesantren and the challenges faced in maintaining moderate ideologies amid rapid social and technological changes.

4. IMPLICATIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

4.1 Research Implications

The implications of this research underscore the significant role of Pondok Pesantren in preventing the spread of radical ideologies through its religious, educational, and social functions. Pondok Pesantren Makrifatul Ilmi in South Bengkulu has successfully implemented strategies that blend moderate religious understanding with values of nationalism and tolerance. A further implication of this study is the need to strengthen the synergy between pesantren management, santri, and the community in building collective awareness of the dangers of radicalization. Moreover, the diversity of santri backgrounds and the influence of technological advancements present challenges that must be addressed to ensure that these prevention strategies are effective across all levels of society. This research also contributes to the development of an education model based on the values of pluralism within the context of Islamic religious education.

4.2 Research Contributions

This study makes a significant contribution by illustrating how pesantren can play a role in preventing radicalization through religious education. The findings can serve as a model for other pesantren to design more effective strategies to combat radicalization while fostering peace and interfaith tolerance in Indonesia. One key implication of this research is the importance of integrating religious moderation education into the pesantren curriculum.

5. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

4.1 Research Limitation

The limitation of this study lies in the small sample size, which focuses solely on Pondok Pesantren Makrifatul Ilmi in South Bengkulu. As a result, the findings may not fully reflect the practices of radicalism prevention in other pesantren with different characteristics and contexts. Additionally, this research predominantly relies on qualitative methods, such as interviews and observations, which the subjectivity of both informants and researchers may influence. Furthermore, the time and resource constraints limited the depth of analysis regarding external factors, such as the impact of social media and globalization, which also play a role in radicalization.

4.2 Recommendation for Future Research Directions

Future research should expand the sample size by involving several pesantren across different regions to gain a more representative picture of the radicalism prevention strategies implemented in various cultural and social contexts. It is also recommended that future studies incorporate a quantitative approach to objectively measure the effectiveness of radicalism prevention programs, such as through surveys or data analysis from relevant parties, including the government and other educational institutions. Additionally, it is crucial to explore in greater depth the influence of external factors, such as technological advancements, social media, and global information flows, on radicalization patterns among santri, as well as to examine the role of families and communities in supporting a more holistic prevention strategy.

6. CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study indicates that Pondok Pesantren Makrifatul Ilmi in South Bengkulu has successfully implemented three primary strategies to prevent the spread of radical ideologies. First, through the religious function, which focuses on an in-depth understanding of religious texts, notably the Qur'an and Hadith, with a contextual approach that avoids shallow and literal interpretations. Second, by utilizing its educational function, the pesantren instills social values such as nationalism, tolerance, and pluralism, thereby strengthening the santri's awareness of the importance of coexisting with differences. Third, the social function is carried out through activities that involve santri with the surrounding community, building stronger relationships and fostering an understanding of their role in society.

Significant supporting factors in the implementation of radicalism prevention strategies in this pesantren include the early awareness among santri to understand religion in a moderate way, and the strong support from all

members of the pesantren, including the parents of the santri. Furthermore, the relatively young age of the santri provides an excellent opportunity to introduce them to broader insights into the values of pluralism. This support is crucial for ensuring that pesantren functions not only as a religious educational institution but also as a character-building institution that contributes positively to society.

The greatest challenge faced in implementing these strategies is the variation in backgrounds and understanding among santri regarding radical ideologies, as well as the influence of rapidly advancing technology and information. The differences in character and understanding require a more flexible and adaptive approach in applying moderation values. Therefore, this study recommends that pesantren continue to strengthen their educational and social strategies by involving the community more actively and considering the impact of technology in shaping the mindset and understanding of santri regarding religion and the world around them.

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Author Contribution Statement

All authors discussed the results, contributed to the final manuscript, and approved the final version for publication. Bachtra Dona Lubis: Conceptualization, Design; Writing - Original Draft, Methodology, Performed data. Suhirman: Conceptualization, Review & Editing. Kasmantoni: Conceptualization, Review & Editing.

Declaration of GenAI in Scientific Writing

The authors declare that Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) tools were employed in the drafting and revision of this manuscript to check spelling and grammar, identify typos, grammatical errors, suggest paraphrases, reduce passive voice, and eliminate repeated words, sentences, and unnecessary adverbs. The suggestions provided by GenAI were critically evaluated and modified to ensure that the final draft remains representative of the authors' own work. All instances of Generative AI usage in this article were conducted by the authors in accordance with the [JISMB Generative AI \(GenAI\) Policy](#), with the authors assuming full responsibility for the originality, accuracy, and integrity of the work."

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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