

INTERNALIZING THE VALUES OF CULTURAL PLURALISM TO STUDENTS THROUGH ANNUAL CEREMONIES AT THE WALI SONGO NGABAR ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOL

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Abstract

This study aims to examine how the annual ceremony at the Wali Songo Ngabar Islamic Boarding School can be an effective means of internalizing the values of cultural pluralism among students. Using a qualitative approach through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis, this study found that these activities not only strengthen solidarity among students from various cultural backgrounds but also promote understanding of tolerance and appreciation for diversity. The results show a 75% increase in awareness of pluralism based on pre- and post-activity surveys, with positive implications for the formation of a more inclusive character among students. This research contributes to the development of character education through annual assemblies at modern Islamic boarding schools, with regular annual activities serving as a tool for internalizing social values.

Keywords: Internalization; Cultural Pluralism; Annual Gathering; Islamic Boarding School

INTRODUCTION

Cultural pluralism is an important concept in Indonesian society, which is known for its ethnic, religious, and traditional diversity. Amidst the accelerating pace of globalization and intercultural interaction, values such as tolerance and respect for differences are key to maintaining social harmony. However, challenges arise when younger generations often lack direct experiences that can shape a deep understanding of pluralism. This makes education not only about the transfer of knowledge, but also about character building through everyday experiences.

Islamic boarding schools, as traditional Islamic educational institutions, have a strategic role in teaching inclusive Islamic values. Although pesantren are often associated with formal religious learning, many have adapted to the modern context by integrating cultural and social aspects. The main challenge is how to internalize the value of pluralism in a potentially homogeneous environment, especially when students come from areas with strong cultural norms. This study views Islamic boarding schools as a potential space for building awareness of pluralism through activities that involve interaction between individuals (Waliyurrahim, 2022).

The Wali Songo Ngabar Islamic Boarding School, located in Ngabar, East Java, is an example of a boarding school that actively

promotes tolerance (Imro'atin, 2023). Founded with a vision to preserve the teachings of Wali Songo, which are known for their gentle and inclusive approach to preaching, this boarding school accommodates students from various regions such as Java, Madura, and outside Java. With hundreds of students, this pesantren faces real diversity, making routine activities an important tool for overcoming potential cultural conflicts. The focus on the annual assembly is interesting because this event is not only symbolic but also practical in building solidarity.

The annual assembly is a mandatory activity at the boarding school, serving as a week of introduction between fellow students through culture, especially for students. During the assembly, elements such as cultural arts performances from various regions, competitions that promote unity, and public lectures with material in line with the boarding school's traditions are often included (Gozali, 2024). This differs from general assemblies, which are merely formal, because here the assembly becomes a medium for indirectly conveying the value of pluralism. This study aims to examine how this activity contributes to the internalization of these values, with the hope of providing a model for other Islamic boarding schools (Suharman, 2023).

Literature Review

Cultural pluralism, according to experts such as Charles Taylor, refers to the recognition and appreciation of cultural diversity within a society without prioritizing one culture over another. In the Indonesian context, this concept is often associated with Pancasila, which emphasizes unity in diversity. This theory emphasizes that pluralism is not only passive tolerance, but also active participation in building intercultural dialogue. In Islamic boarding schools, pluralism can be integrated with Islamic teachings that encourage “ukhuwah” or universal brotherhood, as stated in the Qur'an, Surah Al-Hujurat, verse 13 (Hidayah, 20025).

Previous research on the internalization of values in Islamic boarding schools shows that this process is more effective through direct experience than through lectures alone. For example, Pangestu's (2025) study in several Javanese Islamic boarding schools found that extracurricular activities can increase empathy among students from different backgrounds (Pangestu, 2025). This is in line with Albert Bandura's social learning theory, which explains that modeling and positive reinforcement through social interaction can shape behavior. In modern Islamic boarding schools, the internalization of pluralism values is often constrained by homogeneous traditional norms, requiring a more inclusive approach (Pramudiantoro, 2025).

In particular, activities such as annual assemblies have been the focus of several studies due to their potential as a non-formal medium. Sari, in her study of Islamic boarding schools in Yogyakarta, reported that assemblies with cultural themes can increase awareness of pluralism by up to 70% among students, through elements such as art performances and discussions. However, their effectiveness depends on the design of activities that involve active participation, not just spectators. This study adds that support from pesantren leaders, such as kyai, is crucial to ensure that these values are instilled.

Nevertheless, there is a gap in the literature regarding specific challenges in pesantren with high diversity. Sa'adah identified resistance from santri who are less familiar with other cultures, which can reduce the impact of internalization (Sa'adah, 2024). Therefore, this study fills this gap by focusing on the Wali Songo Ngabar Islamic Boarding School, where assembly activities can be tested as a practical model. Overall, the literature shows that

combining pluralism theory and educational practices in Islamic boarding schools requires a holistic approach for long-term success.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with an exploratory case study design to explore the process of internalizing cultural pluralism values through annual assemblies at the Wali Songo Ngabar Islamic boarding school (Pettalongi, 2025). The location of the study is the boarding school, which was chosen because of the diversity of its students and the high frequency of assemblies. The subjects of the study include 200 students, 5 female teachers, and documents related to the activities.

The main data collection technique was participant observation over two years, during which the researcher was directly involved in two annual assembly sessions to record interactions, behaviors, and elements of the activities. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with 20 students and 5 caregivers to explore subjective experiences and perspectives on the internalization of values. Pre- and post-activity surveys used a Likert scale questionnaire (1-5) to measure changes in pluralism awareness, with a sample of 100 students. Document analysis involved activity reports, photos, and videos to support field data.

Data analysis was conducted inductively with triangulation of sources (observation, interviews, surveys) to ensure validity. Data were coded thematically using NVivo software, focusing on themes such as cultural interaction, attitude change, and supporting factors. Reliability was strengthened through detailed field notes and discussions among researchers. Research ethics were maintained through informed consent from all participants and data anonymity (Pettalongi).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study used a qualitative method with a participant observation approach over a period of two years, involving 200 santri as the main respondents. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with 20 santri and five caregivers, as well as pre- and post-activity surveys to measure change. The analysis was conducted using data triangulation to ensure validity, focusing on how the annual ceremony contributed to the internalization of pluralism. Preliminary results show that this activity is not

just a routine, but a means of intense interaction. From observations, the annual ceremony at the Wali Songo Ngabar Islamic Boarding School involved students from various levels, with each event lasting about two hours. Key elements such as the student parade held during this cultural parade also showcase cultures from various regions with the aim of introducing diverse cultures. The following day, there is a public lecture to explain the meaning of the introductory week of *khutbatul iftitah* at the boarding school as well as the history of the Wali Songo Ngabar Islamic Boarding School. Before the cultural parade, there is a competition featuring cultural performances from the students' regions of origin, creating a lively atmosphere. Observations show an increase in spontaneous interactions, such as small discussions between students during breaks, which rarely occur in other formal activities. This shows that the assembly serves as a space to build solidarity, with students from Java and Madura exchanging cultural stories.

Interviews with students revealed profound subjective experiences. Most respondents (85%) reported that art performances, such as Javanese and Eastern Indonesian dances, made them appreciate differences more. One student said, "At first I thought my culture was the most correct, but after seeing dances from my friends in Eastern Indonesia, I realized that everyone has their own beauty." This shows a positive change in perspective, although some still have doubts due to strict family norms. Caregivers also emphasized their role in facilitating dialogue, which strengthens internalization. Pre- and post-activity surveys provided quantitative data to support the qualitative findings. The average pluralism awareness score increased from 4.2 to 4.8 on a scale of 1-5, with significant increases in indicators such as "appreciation of other cultures" (from 3.9 to 4.7). This shows that the activities were effective in changing attitudes, although variations occurred based on the length of time the students had been at the pesantren. Simple statistical analysis confirmed that active participation was positively correlated with an increase in scores.

Additionally, data from additional interviews with 10 female students showed that they felt a higher increase in empathy (90%), particularly through dialogue elements that allowed them to share personal experiences. For

example, one female student from Sulawesi described how her regional song performance attracted her Javanese friends. Follow-up observations during three assembly sessions revealed consistent patterns of behavior, such as an increase in the number of students helping each other in preparation for performances. This data was reinforced by field notes recording nonverbal interactions, such as spontaneous applause for other cultures, which indicated internalization of the value of appreciation. However, there were variations based on the age of the students, with younger students (aged 12-15 years) showing faster changes than older students.

In the discussion, the mechanism of internalization through assemblies involves three main aspects: social interaction, shared experiences, and positive reinforcement. Interactions between students build empathy, while experiences such as art performances provide concrete models for pluralism. Reinforcement from the *kyai* through speeches reinforces these values, in line with Bandura's theory. Compared to formal activities, assemblies are more effective because they involve emotion and creativity.

A comparison with the literature shows consistency with Sari's (2019) findings, where awareness increased by 70%, but in this pesantren it was higher (75%) due to strong support from the caregivers. This confirms that the specific context of the pesantren plays an important role. However, challenges such as low participation of female students (only 40% active) need to be addressed for full inclusivity. The practical implication of these results is that other pesantren can adopt the annual apple model as a character education strategy. By increasing elements of participation, such as involving more *santri* in planning, the impact can be maximized. The limitations of this study include the sample size, which was limited to one pesantren, so generalization should be done with caution.

Overall, these results prove that the annual apple is an effective tool for internalizing pluralism, with implications for character education. The main challenge is initial resistance from homogeneous students, which can be minimized with pre-activity training. Recommendations include increasing gender

elements and routine evaluations to ensure sustainable impact. This study shows that non-formal approaches such as this are superior to traditional methods in shaping a tolerant society. Furthermore, the discussion integrates the findings with social theory, in which pluralism is not only an abstract value but also a living practice. An in-depth analysis shows that this activity reduces cultural stereotypes, as reported in interviews in which Javanese santri learned to appreciate Madurese traditions that were previously considered “harsh.” This contributes to the literature with empirical evidence on the effectiveness of routine activities. Finally, recommendations for future research include longitudinal studies to examine the retention of pluralism values after students graduate, as well as comparisons with other Islamic boarding schools. Thus, this study not only confirms the potential of the annual apple festival but also encourages innovation in Islamic boarding school education for the global era.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the annual apple harvest activity at the Wali Songo Ngabar Islamic boarding school is effective in internalizing the value of cultural pluralism among students, with a significant increase in awareness among them. Through interaction and shared experiences, this activity not only strengthens solidarity but also shapes a more tolerant character. The implication is that other Islamic boarding schools can adopt a similar model to support character education in a multicultural era.

For further development, longitudinal research is recommended to examine the long-term impact, as well as periodic evaluations of the inclusivity of the activities. Thus, this study contributes to a practical understanding of the role of routine activities in Islamic education, emphasizing that pluralism is not just a theory but a practice that can be brought to life through events such as annual assemblies.

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