

## The New Concept Of *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah* Values: An Investigation Of Religious Moderation And Citizenship Teaching In Pesantren-Integrated Schools

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**Abstract:** This study aims to understand the implementation of the new concept of *Aswaja an-Nahdliyah* in teaching religious moderation and citizenship in pesantren integrated schools. It is based on the urgency of strengthening the role of pesantren in shaping a moderate understanding of religion and citizenship amid global challenges in the form of increasing radicalism and extremism. The research method used was a qualitative approach with a multi-site case study design. The research was conducted in three pesantren integrated schools in Malang Regency, East Java, which represent the types of salaf, modern, and semi-modern pesantren. Data were collected through deep interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. The results showed that the development of a new concept of *Aswaja an-Nahdliyah* was carried out through the systematic integration of values into the curriculum, the adoption of interactive teaching methods, and the development of teaching materials that integrate traditional values with contemporary issues. The teaching of *Aswaja an-Nahdliyah* values contributes significantly to the formation of religious moderation attitudes among santri, reflected in an increased understanding of key concepts of Islamic moderation and the ability to apply *Aswaja an-Nahdliyah* principles in responding to contemporary issues. This research provides valuable insights for the development of educational policies that promote religious moderation and strengthen civic values in Indonesia. It also makes an important contribution to the formulation of educational strategies that are adaptive to the demands of the times, while still maintaining the essence of fundamental *Aswaja* values.

## INTRODUCTION

The development of the concept of *Aswaja an-Nahdliyah* in the context of Islamic education in Indonesia has attracted the attention of many researchers in recent years (F. Anam et al., 2023; Hasanah et al.,

2024; Ikhsan et al., 2021a; Kanafi et al., 2021; Saefudin & Fatihah, 2020). As one of the main pillars in the thinking of *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU), the largest Islamic organisation in Indonesia, *Aswaja an-Nahdliyah* has undergone significant

evolution in response to contemporary socio-political dynamics (Anam et al., 2021). The concept, which initially focused on classical principles such as *tawasuth* (moderation), *tawazun* (balance), *tasamuh* (tolerance) and *i'tidal* (justice), has now been expanded to include new values relevant to the challenges of modernity (F. Anam et al., 2021, 2023; F. K. Anam et al., 2022).

One important arena in the implementation and transmission of *Aswaja an-Nahdliyah* values is the pesantren education system, especially pesantren integrated schools. Pesantren integrated schools certainly have different characteristics from schools in general. Recent research reports mention that pesantren have an important role in influencing national education system policies, especially in institutions under their control (Amaliyah et al., 2024; Jayadi et al., 2024). On the other hand, existing research only focuses on religious understanding without a high awareness of the importance of understanding learners' actual experience of religion (Ibda et al., 2024; Rozaq et al., 2022) and their daily practice of religion at school. This means that even schools that are integrated with the pesantren system are vulnerable to the spread of radicalism both in thought and religious action.

These Islamic boarding schools and schools certainly play a crucial role in

shaping the understanding and practice of moderate Islam among the younger generation of Indonesian Muslims. However, despite its great significance, there is still a gap in citizens' understanding of how the new concept of *Aswaja an-Nahdliyah* is developed and applied in the context of pesantren education, as well as its impact on the formation of religious moderation attitudes and understanding of citizenship among santri. This research seeks to fill the gap by asking three main research questions.

1. How is the new concept of *Aswaja an-Nahdliyah* developed in pesantren integrated schools?
2. To what extent does the teaching of *Aswaja an-Nahdliyah* values in pesantren integrated schools contribute to the formation of religious moderation among santri?
3. How do teachers' and students' perceptions of the *Aswaja an-Nahdliyah* concept in pesantren influence their understanding and practice of citizenship?

Through the exploration of these questions, this study aims to comprehensively understand the role of pesantren in instilling moderation and citizenship values through *Aswaja an-Nahdliyah* teachings in schools, as well as its impact on the formation of students' moderate attitudes. This is becoming increasingly important given the global

challenges of rising radicalism and extremism (Ibda et al., 2024; Mahfud et al., 2018), as well as the need to strengthen social cohesion amidst Indonesia's diversity (Ali et al., 2020).

This study is expected to make a significant contribution to the literature on the multidisciplinary relationship of Islamic education and citizenship education, particularly in the Indonesian context. By focusing on the implementation of the *Aswaja an-Nahdliyah* concept in pesantren integrated schools, this study will highlight the important role of Islamic educational institutions in shaping moderate understandings of religion and citizenship. Furthermore, the findings from this study can be a valuable input for the development of educational policies aimed at promoting religious moderation and strengthening civic values in Indonesia.

In a broader context, this study is also relevant to the global discussion on the role of religious and civic education in preventing radicalism and building an inclusive society (Kiwani, 2007; Muntakhib & Ta'rif, 2023). By exploring a model of moderate Islamic education developed through the concept of *Aswaja an-Nahdliyah*, this study can provide valuable insights into how traditional values can be integrated with the demands of modernity to shape a generation of moderate and globalised Muslims (Saada, 2023).

## **METHOD**

### **Research Design**

This research used a qualitative approach with a multi-site case study design to investigate the implementation of the *Aswaja an-nahdliyah* concept in teaching religious moderation and citizenship in pesantren integrated schools. This method was chosen for its ability to explore phenomena in depth in their natural context, allowing researchers to understand the complexity and uniqueness of each case (Clift et al., 2021). This study was conducted in three pesantren schools in Malang District, East Java, which were selected based on different characteristics: salaf (traditional) pesantren, modern pesantren, and semi-modern pesantren. The selection of these locations aims to obtain a comprehensive picture of the variations in the implementation of *Aswaja an-nahdliyah* in different types of pesantren.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection was conducted through several methods to ensure triangulation and data validity. The main method used was semi-structured in-depth interviews with various stakeholders in each pesantren (Mills, 2019). Interviews were conducted with junior high school principals, teachers (especially those teaching subjects related to religion and citizenship), pesantren leaders (kiai or caregivers), and students (santri). In

addition, participant observation was also conducted to observe the classroom learning process and pesantren activities relevant to the research topic. Document analysis, including curriculum, teaching materials, and pesantren policy documents, was also conducted to complement the data obtained from interviews and observations.

The data collection process took place from 15 August 2024 to 12 September 2024, with the researcher spending approximately one week at each pesantren to ensure deep engagement and strong contextual understanding. Interviews with each participant lasted approximately 30-60 minutes and were recorded with permission to be transcribed. Classroom observations were conducted at least three times in each pesantren for relevant subjects. During this process, the researcher also made detailed field notes to capture nuances and contexts that may not be revealed in interviews or formal documents.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis was conducted iteratively using a thematic analysis approach. Interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents collected were open-coded to identify emerging themes (Mills, 2019). Next, axial coding was conducted to organise these themes into larger categories and identify relationships between themes. This process was aided by the use of qualitative data analysis software to

facilitate systematic data organisation and analysis. To ensure the credibility of the findings, the researcher used member checking techniques by sending summaries of the findings to key participants for verification and feedback. In addition, peer debriefing with colleagues who were not directly involved in the research was also conducted to gain an external perspective on data interpretation.

## **RESULT**

### **The New Concept of Aswaja An-Nahdliyah in Pesantren Integrated Schools**

The results showed that the development of the new concept of *Aswaja an-Nahdliyah* in pesantren integrated schools was carried out through several main approaches. First, there is a systematic integration of *Aswaja an-Nahdliyah* values into the formal curriculum, especially in religious and civic subjects. Second, pesantren adopt more interactive and contextualised teaching methods, such as group discussions and case studies, to facilitate a deeper understanding of key concepts such as moderation (*tawasuth*) and tolerance (*tasamuh*) in the context of daily life. Third, there is a development of specialised teaching materials that integrate traditional Aswaja values with contemporary issues, such as democracy, human rights, and pluralism. Fourth, the pesantren organises extracurricular programs that support the implementation

of *Aswaja an-Nahdliyah* values, such as interfaith dialogue forums and social community projects. Fifth, there are efforts to increase the capacity of teachers through training and workshops on teaching *Aswaja an-Nahdliyah* in the context of modernity.

*“We have conducted a thorough curriculum revision to integrate Aswaja an-Nahdliyah values into various subjects. For example, in the Civic Education lesson, we included a discussion on how the principle of tawasuth can be applied in the context of Indonesian democracy”.* (KS01)

*“We have adopted a project-based learning approach. Santri are asked to design and implement social projects that reflect Aswaja an-Nahdliyah values. This helps them internalise concepts such as tawazun in a societal context”.* (GR02)

*“Although we are a traditional pesantren, we realise the importance of contextualising Aswaja teachings. We have invited experts several times to give workshops to ustadz on how to teach classical concepts in the current context, including interfaith dialogue”.* (KY03)

### **The Contribution of *Aswaja an-Nahdliyah* Teaching to the Formation of Santri's Religious Moderation Attitude**

This study found that the teaching of *Aswaja an-Nahdliyah* values has a significant contribution to the formation of religious moderation among santri. Firstly, santri show an increased understanding of key concepts of Islamic moderation, such as

*wasathiyah* (the middle way) and *rahmatan lil ‘alamin* (mercy for the universe). Secondly, there is a development of santri's ability to apply the principles of *Aswaja an-Nahdliyah* to analyse and respond to contemporary issues in a more moderate and contextual manner. Third, there is an increase in santri's awareness and appreciation of diversity, both in the internal Islamic and interreligious contexts. Fourth, santri show a more open and critical attitude in responding to differences of opinion, including in matters relating to religious interpretation. Fifth, there are indications of a reduced tendency for santri to be exclusive or intolerant of different groups, which is reflected in their increased participation in cross-group and religious activities.

*“We see significant changes in the way santri understand and apply the concept of wasathiyah. In class discussions and extracurricular activities, they are now more able to take a middle position and consider various perspectives before making decisions”.* (KS02)

*“In discussions about the history of different madhhabs in Islam, I found that santri are now better able to appreciate the diversity of thought. They no longer see differences as a threat, but as an intellectual wealth of Islam”.* (GR03)

*“I am very pleased to see the development of the santri's critical attitude in responding to differences of opinion. In the bahtsul masail forum (discussion of fiqh issues),*

*they no longer just follow one opinion, but are able to analyse various perspectives wisely”.*  
(KY01)

### **Understanding and Practice of Citizenship: Teachers’ and Students’ Perceptions**

The results revealed that both teachers and students have positive perceptions of the influence of the *Aswaja an-Nahdliyah* concept in shaping citizenship understanding and practice. Firstly, teachers saw an increase in santri's ability to understand and articulate the relationship between Islamic values and the principles of democratic citizenship. Second, santri reported that their understanding of the concept of loyal opposition helped them to address political differences in a more mature and constructive manner. Thirdly, both teachers and santri observed an increase in santri's active participation in community and civic activities, which they attributed to a better understanding of social responsibility from an *Aswaja an-Nahdliyah* perspective. Fourth, there is a perception that teaching *Aswaja an-Nahdliyah* contributes to the formation of an inclusive citizenship identity, where santri can integrate their Islamic identity with their identity as Indonesian citizens. Fifth, teachers and santri emphasise the importance of the *Aswaja an-Nahdliyah* concept in building resilience to narratives of extremism and radicalism, as well as in promoting the

values of democracy and pluralism in the diverse context of Indonesia.

*“We see a significant change in the way santri understand citizenship. They are now better able to explain how Islamic values, such as shura, are in line with democratic principles. This shows that they no longer see Islam and citizenship as two separate things”.* (KS03)

*“The teaching of Aswaja an-Nahdliyah has helped santri build an inclusive citizenship identity. They are now more confident in expressing their Islamic identity while still respecting Pancasila and upholding Indonesia's diversity”.*  
(GR01)

*“I am very proud to see how our santri are now actively promoting the values of democracy and pluralism in the context of a diverse Indonesia. They not only understand these concepts theoretically, but also apply them in their daily interactions with the multicultural surrounding community of the pesantren”.* (KY02)

## **DISCUSSION**

*Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah* (Aswaja) is an important concept in Islam that refers to a group of Muslims who adhere to the teachings and practices of the Prophet and his companions. In language terms, *Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah* means ‘the family or followers who follow the right path and are united’. In terms of terms, *Aswaja an-Nahdliyah* refers to those who maintain the purity of Islamic teachings in accordance with the Qur'an and sunnah, and

maintain the unity of the people in belief and worship. The principles of *Aswaja*, such as adhering to the Qur'an and sunnah, following in the footsteps of the companions, maintaining the unity of the people, and maintaining Islamic morals, are an important foundation in carrying out a correct religious life in accordance with the guidance of the Prophet.

The concept of *Aswaja an-Nahdliyah* has undergone significant evolution in response to contemporary socio-political dynamics. Classical principles such as *tawasuth* (moderation), *tawazun* (balance), *tasamuh* (tolerance) and *i'tidal* (justice) remain the main foundations of this thinking. However, along with the times, *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU) thinkers have expanded the scope of this concept to face the challenges of modernity while still adhering to its strong traditional roots (F. K. Anam et al., 2022; Ibda et al., 2024; Ikhsan et al., 2021b). One important development in the concept of *Aswaja an-Nahdliyah* is the application of the principle of loyal opposition (F. Anam et al., 2021). This idea emphasises the importance of recognising the legitimacy of the legitimate government, while maintaining a critical and constructive attitude towards its policies. This reflects efforts to maintain political stability while encouraging improvements in governance (Ikhsan, 2019). This approach is in line with NU's tradition that has historically demonstrated

flexibility in interacting with power, without compromising its basic principles (Saefudin & Al Fatihah, 2020).

Another aspect that has received special attention in the development of *Aswaja an-Nahdliyah* is the rejection of the practice of takfir (disbelieving) others without a strong basis (F. Anam et al., 2023). Pesantren leaders emphasise the importance of caution in assessing the faith of others, given the complexity and diversity of interpretations in Islam. This attitude not only reflects the principle of *tasamuh*, but is also an effort to maintain social cohesion in the midst of increasing ideological polarisation in society (Ikhsan, 2017). The emphasis on this aspect can also be seen as a response to the phenomenon of radicalism and extremism that has become a global challenge (Mahfud et al., 2018; Saada, 2023).

Furthermore, the contemporary *Aswaja an-Nahdliyah* concept places a strong emphasis on the urgency of maintaining togetherness in the context of Indonesia's diversity (Suharno et al., 2023). Research conducted by (F. Anam et al., 2021) underlines that *Aswaja an-Nahdliyah* values are not only relevant to the NU community, but can also be a common ground in building social harmony at the national level. This approach reflects an awareness of the importance of maintaining unity amidst plurality, while affirming NU's

commitment to the principle of Unity in Diversity, the motto of the Indonesian state.

This new concept of *Aswaja an-Nahdliyah* has had a significant impact on curriculum development and learning practices in pesantren integrated schools. The integration of these values is carried out systematically to equip students with a comprehensive understanding of moderate Islam in the context of Indonesia (Marzuki et al., 2020). Currently, the curriculum in NU boarding schools does not only focus on teaching traditional fiqh and akidah, but also emphasises an understanding of the concept of citizenship and social responsibility in line with the principle of loyal opposition. This is reflected in subjects such as Civic Education and *Aswaja* which are modified to include discussions on religion-state relations and the role of citizens in a democratic system.

Learning practices in pesantren integrated schools have also undergone a transformation to accommodate the new values of *Aswaja an-Nahdliyah*. The teaching methods applied place more emphasis on dialogue and critical thinking, especially in discussing contemporary issues (Futaqi & Mashuri, 2022; Rozaq et al., 2022). Group discussions and open debates are a means to train santri in applying the principle of *tasamuh* and avoiding the attitude of easily disbelieving others. Teachers are trained to facilitate constructive discussions, encourage santri

to respect different opinions, and analyse various perspectives before making conclusions.

The aspect of maintaining togetherness in diversity also receives special attention in the implementation of the *Aswaja an-Nahdliyah* curriculum in pesantren schools (F. Anam et al., 2021; Suharno et al., 2023). Extracurricular activities such as visits to places of worship of other religions, social projects with diverse communities, and multicultural cultural festivals become an integral part of the santri's learning experience. This approach aims to build a practical understanding of pluralism and social cohesion from an early age, in accordance with the spirit of Unity in Diversity, which is one of the focuses in the new concept of *Aswaja an-Nahdliyah*. In principle, Islamic teachings are characterised by moderatism (*wasathiyah*), both in aspects of belief, worship, morals and *muamalah* (Ikhsan et al., 2021a). Extreme characters in religion are usually followed by the following attitudes. First, fanaticism towards one understanding and difficulty accepting other different views. Second, prejudice (*su'uzhan* or negative thinking) towards others, because they feel they are the most righteous. Third, considering others who do not agree with them as heretics or even infidels (Hanafi et al., 2022).

Indicators of religious moderation, with its principles of middle way, balance,



justice, tolerance, and equality, can be observed and measured in individual and group acceptance of the nation's culture and state ideology. The results of the study in the three models of Islamic boarding schools studied showed that the indicators of religious moderation were implemented at different levels, where modern Islamic boarding schools were more prominent in the aspect of implementing the principles of tolerance and equality, while traditional Islamic boarding schools had the advantage in maintaining the principle of the middle path, especially in the context of maintaining tradition while adapting to modernity. The moderate attitude and behaviour of Indonesian Muslims in religion requires their acceptance of the Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia (NKRI) by prioritising living in harmony, both when there are differences of religious opinion among internal religious believers and with adherents of different religions. This religious model prioritises tolerance for the progress of the nation and state, which is based on the spirit of diversity (Hanafi et al., 2019, 2022).

## CONCLUSION

This research provides an in-depth insight into the implementation of the *Aswaja an-nahdliyah* concept in the context of education at pesantren integrated schools in Indonesia, especially in teaching religious moderation and citizenship.

Through case studies in three pesantren with different characteristics in Malang Regency, this research reveals how *Aswaja an-nahdliyah* values are interpreted, adapted, and implemented in the curriculum and learning practices. The implementation of the integrated curriculum in the three Islamic boarding schools showed very good results, marked by the increasing ability of teachers to integrate the values of *Aswaja an-Nahdliyah* into various subjects, both general and religious subjects. This success is also reflected in the development of students' understanding of religious moderation which is increasingly mature, shown through a more inclusive way of thinking and better ability to respond to diversity, although the level of achievement varies in each Islamic boarding school model according to the characteristics and learning approaches applied. The findings enrich our understanding of the important role of pesantren as Islamic educational institutions in shaping moderate understanding and attitudes towards religious and cultural diversity in Indonesia.

The results show that despite variations in its application, the *Aswaja an-nahdliyah* concept has significant potential in promoting religious moderation and an inclusive understanding of citizenship among santri. The findings can serve as a basis for the development of more effective educational policies and practices in promoting moderation and tolerance in

Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia.

This research also emphasises the important role of pesantren in shaping a young generation of Muslims who are moderate and have an inclusive understanding of citizenship. By understanding how the Aswaja an-nahdliyah concept is applied in different types of pesantren, we can develop more effective strategies to strengthen the role of Islamic education institutions in building a harmonious and tolerant Indonesian society. Based on the findings of this study, there are several key strategies that support the success of the integration of the Aswaja an-Nahdliyah curriculum in Islamic boarding schools, including: (1) strengthening teacher capacity through regular training on teaching methodologies for the values of moderation and citizenship; (2) developing contextual learning modules that integrate the study of yellow books with contemporary issues; (3) implementing a "living laboratory" program that facilitates students to directly practice moderate values in social-community activities; and (4) strengthening cooperation networks with community leaders and other educational institutions. Further research is needed to explore the long-term impact of this approach on students' attitudes and behaviour in the broader social context, as well as to identify innovative ways of integrating moderation

system.

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