

HUMAN ETHICS AS THE BASIS OF RELIGIOUS MODERATION A Reflection on Character Education Practices at Pondok Al Fithrah Surabaya

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the role of human ethics as a foundation for fostering religious moderation, with a particular focus on character education practices at Pondok Al Fithrah Surabaya. In the contemporary era, where religious polarization and intolerance remain pressing challenges, pesantren institutions play a crucial role in nurturing balanced and inclusive perspectives among young Muslims. Human ethics, understood as universal values such as justice, compassion, tolerance, and respect for human dignity, provides an essential framework for developing a moderate religious attitude rooted in Islamic spirituality. The study employs a qualitative-descriptive approach, drawing on observations, interviews with educators and students, and document analysis at Pondok Al Fithrah. Findings suggest that the pesantren integrates human ethics into daily practices, including the cultivation of humility, discipline, cooperation, and respect for diversity in religious and social life. These values are embedded not only in the formal curriculum but also in extracurricular activities, communal rituals, and the living tradition of Sufi-oriented education. Moreover, the article highlights how Al Fithrah's approach contributes to the broader discourse of religious moderation in Indonesia by promoting harmony, preventing radical tendencies, and encouraging constructive engagement with plural society. It concludes that the integration of human ethics in character education at pesantren serves as a practical model for shaping moderate, ethical, and socially responsible individuals, thereby reinforcing the role of Islamic boarding schools as vital agents of peacebuilding and moral development in the 21st century.

Keywords: human ethics; religious moderation; character education; Pondok Al Fithrah.

ABSTRAK

Artikel ini mengkaji peran etika manusia sebagai landasan dalam menumbuhkan sikap keagamaan yang moderat, dengan fokus khusus pada praktik pendidikan karakter di Pondok Al Fithrah Surabaya. Di era kontemporer ini, di mana polarisasi dan intoleransi keagamaan masih menjadi tantangan yang mendesak, lembaga pesantren memainkan peran penting dalam menumbuhkan perspektif yang seimbang dan inklusif di kalangan pemuda Muslim. Etika manusia, yang dipahami sebagai nilai-nilai universal seperti keadilan, kasih sayang, toleransi, dan penghormatan terhadap martabat manusia, menyediakan kerangka kerja esensial untuk mengembangkan sikap keagamaan yang moderat yang berakar pada spiritualitas Islam. Studi ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif-deskriptif, dengan mengandalkan pengamatan, wawancara dengan pendidik dan siswa, serta analisis dokumen di Pondok Al Fithrah. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa pesantren mengintegrasikan etika manusia ke dalam praktik sehari-hari, termasuk pembinaan kerendahan hati, disiplin, kerja sama, dan penghormatan terhadap keragaman dalam kehidupan keagamaan dan sosial. Nilai-nilai ini tertanam tidak hanya dalam kurikulum formal tetapi juga dalam kegiatan ekstrakurikuler, ritual komunal, dan tradisi hidup pendidikan yang berorientasi Sufi. Selain itu, artikel ini menyoroti bagaimana pendekatan Al Fithrah berkontribusi pada wacana moderasi agama yang lebih luas di Indonesia dengan mempromosikan harmoni, mencegah kecenderungan radikal, dan mendorong keterlibatan konstruktif dengan masyarakat yang plural. Artikel ini menyimpulkan bahwa integrasi etika kemanusiaan dalam pendidikan karakter di pesantren berfungsi sebagai model praktis untuk membentuk individu yang moderat, beretika, dan bertanggung jawab secara sosial, sehingga memperkuat peran pesantren sebagai agen penting dalam pembangunan perdamaian dan pengembangan moral di abad ke-21.

Kata kunci: etika manusia; toleransi beragama; pendidikan karakter; Pondok Al Fithrah.

Introduction

The discourse on human ethics has become increasingly significant in recent years as societies across the globe face the challenges of pluralism, social fragmentation, and religious polarization.¹ Human ethics, often defined as a set of universal moral values such as justice, compassion, honesty, tolerance, and respect for human dignity, offers an essential foundation for building a peaceful and inclusive society.² In the context of Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim-majority nation, the role of religious institutions in cultivating human ethics is particularly important. Indonesia's rich diversity of cultures, religions, and traditions requires a model of education that not only transmits religious knowledge but also strengthens ethical awareness to foster harmony in a pluralistic environment.³ Within this framework, the concept of religious moderation has emerged as a strategic national and global agenda. Religious moderation emphasizes the necessity of avoiding extremism and radicalism on one side, and indifference or relativism on the other.⁴ Instead, it encourages individuals and communities to adopt a balanced perspective that values both the particularity of religious faith and the universality of human values. For Muslim communities in Indonesia, pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) stand out as crucial institutions in shaping attitudes of moderation. Historically, pesantren have combined religious learning with moral cultivation, social solidarity, and adaptability to societal changes.⁵

In the Indonesian pesantren context, several recent studies have examined ethics, character formation, and the integration of national values, including at Pondok Pesantren Assalafi Al Fithrah itself. Twindhar and Yani's qualitative study on the practice of Pancasila values in the daily life of santri at Al Fithrah shows that the principles of divinity, humanity, and unity are internalized through routines, interpersonal relations, and institutional regulations, yet their focus remains on civic and constitutional dimensions of Pancasila rather than on human ethics as a comprehensive moral framework for religious moderation.⁶ Other case studies, such as Wahyudin et al.'s research on the khidmah system at Darussalam Sumber Sari, conceptualise

¹ Taylor, Charles, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 513.

² Hans Küng, *A Global Ethic for Global Politics and Economics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 27.

³ Robert W Hefner, *Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 15.

⁴ Azyumardi Azra, *Moderasi Beragama dalam Konteks Indonesia* (Jakarta: Prenadamedia Group, 2021), 42.

⁵ Zamakhsyari Dhofier, *Tradisi Pesantren: Studi Pandangan Hidup Kyai dan Visinya Mengenai Masa Depan Indonesia* (Jakarta: LP3ES, 2011), 33.

⁶ Mohamad Badrun Zaman dan et.al, "Harmonisasi Pendidikan Islam dan Negara: Pengarusutamaan Nilai-nilai Pancasila dalam Orientasi Pendidikan Pesantren di Indonesia," *Jurnal Tarbawi* 10, no. 2 (2022): 139–64, <https://jurnal.alfithrah.ac.id/index.php/tarbawi/article/view/213>.

service duties as a model of human resource development and character education in pesantren life, yet they do not explicitly relate these practices to the project of religious moderation.⁷

Research on Islamic boarding schools as distinctive Indonesian religious institutions highlights their strategic role in cultivating religious moderation through character formation. The study on Harisul Khairaat Islamic Boarding School demonstrates that values such as *tawassuth* (moderation), *i'tidal* (justice), *tasamuh* (tolerance), *shura* (consultation), and *qudwah* (exemplary leadership), along with patriotism and anti-violence, are systematically nurtured through educational practices. Using a qualitative approach with observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, and analyzed through the Miles, Huberman, and Saldana model, the findings emphasize that moderation is not merely doctrinal but embodied in daily ethical conduct. In relation to the study titled “Human Ethics as the Basis of Religious Moderation: A Reflection on Character Education Practices at Pondok Al Fithrah Surabaya,” these findings reinforce the argument that human ethics serve as the foundational framework for internalizing moderation values. Thus, character education in pesantren, including Pondok Al Fithrah, can be understood as a transformative process that integrates ethical principles into religious life, fostering inclusive, balanced, and non-violent attitudes within the broader social context.⁸ However, despite these contributions, existing studies have not sufficiently explored human ethics as a comprehensive and foundational framework for religious moderation, particularly within the context of Pondok Al Fithrah Surabaya.

One pesantren that embodies this vision is Pondok Al Fithrah Surabaya, a well-known institution with strong roots in both classical Islamic scholarship and Sufi spirituality.⁹ Pondok Al Fithrah not only provides its students with mastery of Islamic sciences but also emphasizes the internalization of ethical values through character education. Its educational philosophy is deeply influenced by the traditions of *tasawuf* (Sufism), which prioritizes purification of the soul (*tazkiyatun nafs*), humility, compassion, and service to others.¹⁰ This makes Al Fithrah an ideal case for examining how human ethics can serve as the basis of religious moderation in practice. The urgency of this study stems from the contemporary reality in which religious intolerance, radical interpretations, and social conflicts often stem from a lack of ethical grounding in

⁷ Aji Wahyudin, Rohmad, dan Fadhil Akbar, “Khidmah System as a Model for Human Resources Development and Character Education in Islamic Boarding Schools,” *Jurnal Islam Nusantara* 9, no. 2 (2025): 271,” *Jurnal Islam Nusantara* 9, no. 2 (2025).

⁸ Hendi Sugianto dan Farnela Diva, “Pendidikan Moderasi Beragama di Pesantren (Studi Kasus di Pondok Pesantren Harisul Khairaat Kota Tidore Kepulauan),” *Al-Riwayah: Jurnal Kependidikan* 15, no. 2 (2023): 167–87, <https://doi.org/10.47945/al-riwayah.v15i2.1140>.

⁹ Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, *Moderasi Beragama* (Jakarta: Badan Litbang dan Diklat Kementerian Agama RI, 2019), 12.

¹⁰ Abu Hamid (al-) Ghazali, *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiah, 2005), 55.

religious education.¹¹ While theology provides principles of belief, and jurisprudence (fiqh) regulates external conduct, it is ethics that bridges the gap between belief and social responsibility. Without a strong ethical dimension, religious knowledge risks being reduced to rigid formalism or, worse, manipulated for exclusionary and violent purposes.¹² Thus, reasserting the centrality of human ethics within religious education is critical for cultivating individuals who are both devout in faith and respectful toward others.

Character education at Pondok Al Fithrah provides a concrete manifestation of this principle. Unlike purely cognitive models of learning, character education involves the holistic development of students' moral awareness, emotional intelligence, and interpersonal skills.¹³ It integrates classroom learning, ritual practices, and daily social interactions within the pesantren environment. Through communal activities such as congregational prayers, collective study circles, voluntary service, and mentorship by senior students and teachers, human ethics are not only taught but lived and experienced.¹⁴ This integration of knowledge, ethics, and practice forms the foundation for developing moderate religious attitudes that are resilient against radicalism. Furthermore, the practice of human ethics at Pondok Al Fithrah aligns with broader Islamic teachings. The Qur'an repeatedly emphasizes values such as justice (al-'adl), compassion (rahmah), honesty (sidq), and patience (sabr) as fundamental to religious life (Qur'an 16:90). The Prophet Muhammad himself is described in the Qur'an as a "mercy to the worlds" (rahmatan lil-'alamin), embodying the perfect model of ethical conduct (Qur'an 21:107). The pesantren's Sufi orientation deepens this ethical framework by encouraging students to cultivate humility, control their desires, and develop empathy for others.¹⁵ In this sense, the pesantren operates as both a school and a spiritual training ground, fostering ethical dispositions that are indispensable for religious moderation.

The significance of Pondok Al Fithrah's approach becomes clearer when situated within the wider context of Indonesia's plural society. With more than 17,000 islands and hundreds of ethnic groups and religious communities, Indonesia faces ongoing challenges in maintaining social cohesion.¹⁶ Incidents of intolerance, inter-religious conflicts, and radical recruitment illustrate the vulnerabilities of a diverse nation. Government initiatives, such as the Ministry of

¹¹ R. Scott Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 89.

¹² Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Islam and the Challenge of Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 76.

¹³ Thomas Lickona, *Educating for Character: How Our Schools Can Teach Respect and Responsibility* (New York: Bantam Books, 1991), 45.

¹⁴ Nurcholish Majid, *Islam: Doktrin dan Peradaban* (Jakarta: Paramadina, 1992), 214.

¹⁵ Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 102.

¹⁶ Azyumardi Azra, "Cultural Pluralism in Indonesia: Continuous Reinventing of Indonesian Islam in Local, National and Global Contexts," *Asia Pacific Journal on Religion and Society* 2, no. 2 (November 2018): 57, <http://dx.doi.org/10.24014/apjrs.v2i2.6399>.

Religious Affairs' promotion of religious moderation, seek to address these challenges, but their effectiveness depends greatly on grassroots educational institutions.¹⁷ Pesantren like Al Fithrah thus serve as vital partners in translating abstract policies into lived practices among youth. From an academic perspective, examining human ethics in the context of pesantren education contributes to ongoing debates in moral philosophy, religious studies, and educational theory.¹⁸ It raises questions about the universality of ethics: To what extent are human ethics shared across cultures and religions? How do religious traditions interpret and apply these universal principles differently? By analyzing Al Fithrah, we can see how Islamic ethics, rooted in revelation and tradition, converge with broader human ethical values while retaining their unique spiritual depth.¹⁹ This case also highlights the role of pedagogy in shaping ethics—not merely through formal instruction but through lived experience and mentorship.

Moreover, the integration of human ethics and religious moderation at Al Fithrah provides a model that is relevant beyond Indonesia. In a world increasingly marked by polarization—whether religious, political, or cultural—the need for educational models that promote ethical responsibility and mutual respect is urgent.²⁰ The pesantren's experience demonstrates that religious education does not have to be narrow or exclusionary; rather, it can be a powerful force for building bridges across differences. By grounding moderation in ethics, Al Fithrah equips its students to navigate diversity with confidence, empathy, and resilience.²¹ This introduction thus sets the stage for a deeper exploration of how Pondok Al Fithrah operationalizes human ethics in its educational practices, and how these practices contribute to the broader project of religious moderation. The study argues that human ethics provide not only a moral compass for individual behavior but also a foundation for social harmony in plural societies. By reflecting on the case of Al Fithrah, we can gain insights into how religious education can be reimagined as a transformative force for peace, tolerance, and ethical citizenship in the twenty-first century.²²

Research Methods

This study employs a qualitative-descriptive research design aimed at exploring how human ethics function as the basis of religious moderation in the educational practices of

¹⁷ Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, *Moderasi Beragama.*, 6.

¹⁸ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. 3rd ed. . (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 21.

¹⁹ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 77.

²⁰ Tariq Ramadan, *Radical Reform: Islamic Ethics and Liberation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 113.

²¹ John L Esposito, *Islam and Peacebuilding: Political and Religious Values*. (DC Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2010), 92.

²² Küng, *A Global Ethic for Global Politics and Economics.*, 54.

Pondok Al Fithrah Surabaya. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the research seeks to understand values, meanings, and lived experiences rather than to quantify variables.²³ By focusing on the narratives and practices within the pesantren, the study provides an in-depth understanding of how ethics and moderation are integrated into daily life and character education. Research Site and Context; The research site, Pondok Al Fithrah, was selected due to its unique combination of traditional pesantren education and Sufi orientation. This pesantren is known for embedding moral and ethical values within its curriculum and extracurricular programs. Al Fithrah emphasizes spiritual purification (*tazkiyatun nafs*), communal responsibility, and tolerance, making it an ideal case for examining the intersection of human ethics and religious moderation.²⁴

Data was collected using three main techniques. Firstly, observations were conducted in classrooms, religious gatherings, study groups, and extracurricular activities to capture how ethical values are practised and internalised in real-life contexts. Secondly, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants, including teachers, administrators, and students, to explore personal reflections on how humanistic ethics shape their perspectives on religious moderation. Third, a document analysis was carried out on the curriculum, educational materials, institutional policies, and publications produced by the pesantren. This triangulation of methods ensures that the findings are not limited to individual perceptions but are grounded in institutional structures. Participants were selected through purposive sampling. This selection was based on their direct involvement in character education activities and their experience of life in the pesantren.²⁵

The data were analysed using a thematic analysis approach. Interview transcripts and field notes were coded inductively to identify recurring patterns and themes relating to human ethics and religious moderation.²⁶ Codes such as “justice,” “tolerance,” “discipline,” “respect for diversity,” and “spiritual humility” were developed into broader categories reflecting the pesantren’s ethical framework, and these themes were subsequently compared with existing theoretical frameworks in moral philosophy and Islamic studies to highlight both universal dimensions and specific contexts.²⁷

Results and Discussion

Human Ethics in Daily Practices of Pondok Al Fithrah

²³ John W Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative & Quantitative Approaches* (London, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1994), 45.

²⁴ Dhofier, *Tradisi Pesantren: Studi Pandangan Hidup Kyai dan Visinya Mengenai Masa Depan Indonesia.*, 33.

²⁵ Spradley, *Participant Observation* (United States of America: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1980).

²⁶ Virginia Braun dan Victoria Clarke, “Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology,” *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77–101, <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>.

²⁷ MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory.*, 21.

One of the most striking findings is how human ethics are embodied in the daily practices of santri. The day at Pondok Al Fithrah begins before dawn with communal prayers (*ṣalāt al-fajr*) followed by recitations of Qur'an and litanies (*awrad*). These activities are not merely religious rituals but also ethical training, fostering discipline, spiritual humility, and collective solidarity.²⁸ Students are taught that punctuality in prayer reflects responsibility, while communal worship nurtures empathy and the sense of belonging to a larger moral community. In addition, interpersonal ethics are consistently emphasized in everyday interactions. Senior students are expected to guide juniors not only in academic matters but also in matters of conduct, speech, and etiquette. Politeness (*adab*) toward teachers, peers, and visitors is strongly enforced, reflecting the pesantren tradition that *adab* precedes knowledge (*al-adab fawq al-'ilm*). Teachers interviewed confirmed that they consider respect and humility as key indicators of a student's success, sometimes even more than academic achievement.²⁹

The pesantren also encourages voluntary service (*khidmah*) as part of daily life. Students are assigned rotating responsibilities such as cleaning classrooms, cooking, or maintaining the mosque. These seemingly mundane tasks are framed as ethical training that cultivates a spirit of service, cooperation, and respect for communal needs.³⁰ Teachers often remind students that true knowledge is not measured by intellectual mastery alone but by one's readiness to serve others selflessly. This perspective reflects the Sufi heritage of Al Fithrah, which emphasizes that ethical conduct is inseparable from spiritual growth.³¹ Another significant dimension of daily ethics is the pesantren's emphasis on conflict resolution. Interviews with students revealed that when disagreements occur, they are encouraged to resolve them through dialogue, forgiveness, and mediation rather than confrontation. This practice reflects the pesantren's broader vision of moderation, where differences are seen not as threats but as opportunities for growth and mutual understanding.³²

Ethical training is also reinforced through communal study sessions (*halaqah*) where students read classical Islamic texts under the supervision of teachers. These sessions emphasize not only the transmission of knowledge but also the cultivation of patience, humility, and discipline. Teachers frequently interject moral advice (*man'idah hasanah*) to remind students of the ethical implications of their learning. This method reflects the pesantren's holistic understanding of education, in which cognitive, spiritual, and ethical dimensions are inseparably linked.³³

²⁸ Majid, *Islam: Doktrin dan Peradaban.*, 214.

²⁹ Dhofier, *Tradisi Pesantren: Studi Pandangan Hidup Kyai dan Visinya Mengenai Masa Depan Indonesia.*, 33.

³⁰ Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred.*, 77.

³¹ Ghazali, *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din.*, 55.

³² Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation.*, 89.

³³ Esposito, *Islam and Peacebuilding: Political and Religious Values.*, 92.

Perhaps the most notable finding is the role of role modeling (*uswah hasanah*). Teachers are seen as living examples of ethical and spiritual ideals. Students interviewed expressed that they learn ethics more from observing their teachers' behavior than from formal instruction. For instance, the simplicity of a teacher's lifestyle, the humility in their speech, or their patience in dealing with students are all considered powerful lessons in ethics. This finding aligns with broader Islamic pedagogical traditions where embodiment of ethics by teachers is central to moral education.³⁴ In sum, the daily practices at Pondok Al Fithrah reveal that ethics are not abstract concepts but practical habits embedded in every aspect of life. Through prayer, service, discipline, dialogue, and role modeling, students are gradually shaped into ethical individuals capable of embodying religious moderation. This lived culture demonstrates how pesantren education operationalizes human ethics as a basis for both personal development and societal harmony.

Integration of Ethics in the Curriculum and Character Education

One of the defining characteristics of Pondok Al Fithrah is its capacity to integrate ethics into the formal and informal structures of education. Unlike many modern institutions where ethics may be taught as a distinct subject under moral education or civics, at Al Fithrah, ethical formation is woven seamlessly into the very fabric of learning. The findings from document analysis and interviews with administrators reveal that the pesantren views education as inseparable from moral cultivation. In this regard, 'ilm (knowledge) is never divorced from akhlāq (ethics) but rather is considered its natural extension.³⁵

Ethics in the Formal Curriculum : The formal curriculum of Al Fithrah covers the classical Islamic sciences: Qur'an, Hadith, fiqh, Arabic grammar, and taṣawwuf. Yet each of these subjects is taught with explicit ethical undertones. For instance, in fiqh classes, discussions about ritual purity or commercial transactions are linked to broader ethical concerns such as honesty, fairness, and respect for others' rights. Teachers intentionally highlight that Islamic law is not a mechanical set of rules but a means of cultivating just and ethical behavior in social life.³⁶ In Qur'anic studies, students are encouraged not only to memorize verses but to reflect on their ethical implications. Surah al-Hujurat, for example, which emphasizes respect, avoiding mockery, and refraining from suspicion, is taught as a guideline for maintaining harmonious relations within a diverse society. Students are reminded that the Qur'an addresses humanity as a whole, inviting them to see ethical principles as universally relevant.³⁷ Taṣawwuf holds a particularly

³⁴ Ramadan, *Radical Reform: Islamic Ethics and Liberation.*, 113.

³⁵ Ghazali, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn.*, 55.

³⁶ Fadl, *Islam and the Challenge of Democracy.*, 76.

³⁷ Küng, *A Global Ethic for Global Politics and Economics.*, 54.

important place in the curriculum, as it explicitly focuses on the purification of the soul and the cultivation of virtues such as patience (*ṣabr*), sincerity (*ikhlaṣ*), and humility (*tawāḍu'*). This subject serves as a formal bridge between spiritual discipline and ethical practice, reinforcing the pesantren's Sufi orientation.³⁸

Extracurricular Activities as Ethical Training: Beyond formal instruction, extracurricular activities serve as laboratories for ethical training. Students participate in arts, sports, and community service programs, all of which are framed as opportunities for developing discipline, cooperation, and respect for diversity. For example, theatrical performances organized during Islamic holidays often carry ethical themes such as justice or compassion. These performances allow students to creatively engage with moral narratives, making abstract values more concrete and relatable.³⁹ Community service is another key extracurricular component. The pesantren regularly sends students to surrounding neighborhoods to conduct literacy programs, religious tutoring, and environmental clean-ups. Administrators explained that this practice is not merely social outreach but part of the pesantren's ethical training, teaching students to embody service (*khidmah*) as a central Islamic value. By engaging directly with society, students learn to balance devotion to God with responsibility toward humanity.⁴⁰

Ritual and Ethical Discipline : The findings also highlight the central role of ritual practices in ethical formation. Daily prayers, Qur'an recitations, and collective remembrance (*dhikr*) function not only as acts of worship but also as exercises in self-control, discipline, and humility. Interviews with students revealed that punctuality in attending prayers or sincerity in reciting litanies are interpreted as signs of moral reliability. Teachers frequently stress that ritual without ethics is incomplete, reminding students that the goal of worship is to produce better human beings, not simply fulfill obligations.⁴¹ The pesantren's disciplinary system further reflects this integration of ritual and ethics. Rather than relying on punitive measures, the pesantren adopts restorative approaches that emphasize reflection and correction. For instance, students who break rules are often asked to lead communal service or spend additional time in study rather than face harsh punishment. This approach reflects the pesantren's belief that discipline should cultivate awareness and responsibility rather than fear or resentment.⁴²

Teacher–Student Relationship as Ethical Pedagogy: A major finding is the centrality of the teacher–student relationship in ethical education. In interviews, students repeatedly emphasized that they learned ethics less from explicit instruction and more from observing the

³⁸ Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam.*, 102.

³⁹ Ramadan, *Radical Reform: Islamic Ethics and Liberation.*, 113.

⁴⁰ Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred.*, 77.

⁴¹ Majid, *Islam: Doktrin dan Peradaban.*, 214.

⁴² Lickona, *Educating for Character: How Our Schools Can Teach Respect and Responsibility.*, 45.

conduct of their teachers. This reflects the Islamic pedagogical tradition where *uswah ḥasanah* (exemplary role modeling) is regarded as the most powerful form of teaching. Teachers embody humility, patience, and compassion in their interactions, and students internalize these virtues through imitation.⁴³ Teachers at Al Fithrah see their role not only as transmitters of knowledge but also as moral guardians. They intentionally cultivate close relationships with students, allowing space for informal conversations, mentorship, and personal advice. This personal dimension of pedagogy ensures that ethics are not abstract principles but lived realities contextualized in the students' daily struggles.⁴⁴

Integration of Ethics with Modern Educational Demands : The study also found that Pondok Al Fithrah is increasingly integrating ethics with modern educational demands. For instance, courses on information technology and entrepreneurship are offered, but always with an ethical orientation. In entrepreneurship training, students are taught that economic success must be accompanied by fairness, honesty, and social responsibility. In digital literacy, discussions include the ethical use of technology, combating misinformation, and avoiding harmful online behavior. This reflects the pesantren's effort to equip students for modern life without compromising ethical values.⁴⁵

Character Education Framework : Administrators at Al Fithrah described their approach as character education rooted in Islamic spirituality. Unlike secular models of character education that emphasize civic virtues such as responsibility and citizenship.⁴⁶ The pesantren frames character formation as both a spiritual and social project. Ethical values are cultivated with the explicit intention of producing individuals who are spiritually refined, socially responsible, and capable of contributing to Indonesia's plural society. The pesantren's framework resonates strongly with the national policy of promoting religious moderation. By embedding values such as tolerance, justice, and compassion into the educational process, Al Fithrah aligns itself with the broader societal goal of preventing radicalization and fostering interreligious harmony.⁴⁷

The centrality of voluntary service (*khidmah*) in Al Fithrah's daily life is consistent with broader research on pesantren as spaces of experiential moral education. Studies on *khidmah*-based human resource development in Islamic boarding schools show that assigning students to routine tasks such as cleaning, cooking, or managing facilities functions as an informal curriculum that cultivates discipline, responsibility, and social skills. Similarly, qualitative studies on santri's character formation and social interaction highlight how communal duties and close-

⁴³ Esposito, *Islam and Peacebuilding: Political and Religious Values*, 92.

⁴⁴ Taylor, Charles, *A Secular Age*, 513.

⁴⁵ Hefner, *Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia*, 15.

⁴⁶ Lickona, *Educating for Character: How Our Schools Can Teach Respect and Responsibility*, 45.

⁴⁷ Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, *Moderasi Beragama*, 6.

knit relationships with teachers and local communities foster resilience, grit, and moral awareness among students. Our findings at Al Fithrah confirm this pattern, but also indicate that khidmah is explicitly framed by teachers as an ethical obligation and spiritual practice, thereby linking service directly to the pesantren's project of religious moderation.⁴⁸

Human Ethics as the Foundation of Religious Moderation

The central argument emerging from the findings at Pondok Al Fithrah is that human ethics function as the foundation of religious moderation. Moderation (*wasatiyyah*) in Islam is not only a theological stance but also an ethical orientation. It entails balance, fairness, and openness toward diversity, grounded in universal human values such as justice, compassion, and respect for human dignity.⁴⁹ At Al Fithrah, this concept is operationalized through character education that links daily practice with broader societal responsibilities.

Findings from other studies on Pondok Pesantren Assalafi Al Fithrah show that ethical formation at the pesantren is closely intertwined with the internalization of Pancasila values in santri's everyday life. The values of divinity, humanity, and unity are not only taught in formal lessons but are also enacted in social interactions, for example in how santri respect their peers, cooperate in communal tasks, and respond to conflict. These observations resonate strongly with our data on human ethics and religious moderation at Al Fithrah, suggesting that the pesantren's ethical culture simultaneously draws on Islamic spiritual traditions and the national ideology of Pancasila as complementary moral frameworks.⁵⁰

Ethical Values as Moderating Forces: The study identified several key ethical values that act as moderating forces within the pesantren community. Justice (*'adl*), for instance, is emphasized in both classroom discussions and communal practices. Students are reminded that fairness in dealing with others—whether in economic matters, academic evaluation, or personal disputes—is essential for building trust and harmony. Teachers often cite Qur'anic injunctions such as “Indeed, Allah commands justice and excellence” (Qur'an 16:90), reinforcing that moderation requires fairness in all aspects of life. Compassion (*rahmah*) is another value deeply cultivated. Students are trained to assist their peers, care for the sick, and show kindness to visitors. Compassion is explicitly linked to moderation by teaching that intolerance and extremism emerge when empathy is absent. Teachers stress that the Prophet Muhammad's mission as *rahmatan lil-'alamin* (a mercy to all creation) provides the ethical basis for respecting

⁴⁸ Wahyudin, Rohmad, dan Akbar, “Khidmah System as a Model for Human Resources Development and Character Education in Islamic Boarding Schools,” *Jurnal Islam Nusantara* 9, no. 2 (2025): 271.”

⁴⁹ Azra, *Moderasi Beragama dalam Konteks Indonesia.*, 42.

⁵⁰ Achmad Ali Reza dan Nadia Aulia Nadhirah, “Adaptation and Resilience: A Narrative Study on Grit among Santri in Pesantren Environments,” *Santri: Journal of Pesantren and Fiqh Sosial* 6, no. 2 (2025): 171–86, <https://www.journal.ipmafa.ac.id/index.php/santri/article/download/1711/701>.

difference and rejecting violence (Qur'an 21:107). Similarly, tolerance (*tasāmuḥ*) is institutionalized through daily practices of respect for diversity. Although the pesantren is homogeneously Muslim, students are encouraged to recognize and honor differences in interpretation, background, and perspective. Teachers use classical debates among scholars (*khilāfiyyah*) as examples of how difference, if grounded in ethics, can enrich rather than divide the community.⁵¹

Moderation through Ritual and Discipline: Ethical moderation is also expressed through ritual discipline. Daily prayers, fasting, and remembrance practices cultivate self-control, patience, and humility—virtues that prevent the excesses of both radical zeal and spiritual negligence. Teachers emphasize that moderation means avoiding extremes: neither fanaticism nor apathy, neither rigidity nor relativism.⁵² By framing ritual obligations as ethical training, the pesantren highlights that moderation is not simply an intellectual stance but a habit of the soul cultivated through disciplined practice.⁵³ Disciplinary practices further reinforce moderation. For example, when students fail to meet responsibilities, they are guided through reflective dialogue rather than harsh punishment. This restorative approach teaches that justice must be tempered with mercy, and correction should aim at reform, not humiliation. By applying moderation in governance, the pesantren models how ethical principles can structure communal life.⁵⁴

Human Ethics and Social Engagement: Religious moderation at Al Fithrah is not confined to internal practices but extends to social engagement. The pesantren's community service programs are framed as ethical acts of moderation, teaching students that being a good Muslim entails serving broader society. Activities such as tutoring children in nearby villages, participating in disaster relief, or organizing environmental campaigns embody the principle that faith must translate into positive contributions for humanity.⁵⁵ Students interviewed noted that these activities made them more aware of social inequalities and environmental responsibilities. They explained that serving society helped them avoid narrow religiosity and appreciate that ethics requires engagement with real-world challenges. In this way, moderation is presented as the capacity to balance devotion to God with responsibility toward fellow human beings.⁵⁶

Moderation as Resistance to Extremism: Another significant finding is the role of human ethics as a protective shield against extremism. Administrators noted that in recent years, concerns about radical recruitment among youth have made pesantren education even more

⁵¹ Fadl, *Islam and the Challenge of Democracy*, 76.

⁵² Küng, *A Global Ethic for Global Politics and Economics*, 54.

⁵³ Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 102.

⁵⁴ Lickona, *Educating for Character: How Our Schools Can Teach Respect and Responsibility*, 45.

⁵⁵ Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred*, 71.

⁵⁶ Esposito, *Islam and Peacebuilding: Political and Religious Values*, 92.

critical. By cultivating empathy, humility, and respect for difference, the pesantren inoculates students against the rigid binary thinking often associated with extremism.⁵⁷ Teachers explicitly warn students against misinterpreting religious texts in ways that justify violence or exclusion. Instead, they emphasize ethical readings that highlight mercy, justice, and inclusivity. Students are encouraged to critically engage with texts, learning to differentiate between legitimate diversity of opinion and manipulative distortions. This critical engagement, grounded in ethics, forms the backbone of religious moderation.⁵⁸

The Role of Teachers as Ethical Moderators: Teachers play a central role as ethical moderators. Their authority is not merely intellectual but moral: they guide students by embodying moderation in their own conduct. In interviews, students highlighted that their teachers' humility, patience, and openness profoundly influenced their understanding of moderation. For instance, a teacher who listens to differing viewpoints without anger demonstrates in practice what moderation means. This role modeling is consistent with the Islamic pedagogical principle that ethics are best taught through lived example rather than abstract discourse.⁵⁹ Teachers also mediate between tradition and modernity. While rooted in classical texts, they frame ethical discussions in ways relevant to contemporary challenges such as digital ethics, pluralism, and environmental responsibility. By doing so, they model how moderation involves adapting timeless values to changing contexts without losing spiritual depth.⁶⁰

Moderation and National Identity: At a broader level, the pesantren aligns its ethical teachings with the national discourse of religious moderation (*moderasi beragama*) promoted by Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs. Administrators explained that this alignment reflects their commitment to contributing to national unity and social cohesion.⁶¹ Students are taught that being moderate Muslims means being good citizens who respect diversity and work for the common good. This linkage between ethics, moderation, and national identity illustrates how pesantren education contributes to civic nation-building. By grounding national ideals in ethical and spiritual practice, the pesantren ensures that moderation is not seen as an external imposition but as an organic extension of Islamic values.

Challenges in Implementing Human Ethics and Moderation

⁵⁷ Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation.*, 89.

⁵⁸ Ramadan, *Radical Reform: Islamic Ethics and Liberation.*, 113.

⁵⁹ Majid, *Islam: Doktrin dan Peradaban.*, 214.

⁶⁰ Taylor, Charles, *A Secular Age.*, 513.

⁶¹ Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, *Moderasi Beragama.*, 6.

While the findings from Pondok Al Fithrah demonstrate the strong integration of human ethics into educational practices and the cultivation of religious moderation, the research also reveals a set of challenges that complicate the full realization of these ideals. These challenges stem from both internal dynamics within the pesantren and external pressures from broader societal and global contexts. Understanding these challenges is crucial, as they highlight the limitations of ethical education while also suggesting areas where further innovation and resilience are required.

Internal Challenges: One internal challenge lies in the diverse backgrounds of students. Pondok Al Fithrah attracts students from various regions of Indonesia, with differing family traditions, levels of prior education, and cultural orientations. Teachers noted that students who come from more conservative or rigid religious backgrounds sometimes struggle to embrace the pesantren's emphasis on tolerance and moderation. Conversely, students from more liberal environments may initially find the pesantren's discipline too strict. Bridging these differences requires patient guidance and consistent reinforcement of ethical principles, yet it also slows down the pace of ethical internalization.⁶² Another challenge is the generational gap between teachers and students. Teachers, many of whom were trained in earlier decades, often rely on traditional teaching methods and authority structures. While students generally respect this, some expressed in interviews that they desire more dialogical and participatory approaches to ethical education. Younger generations, growing up in an era of digital interactivity, sometimes perceive hierarchical methods as outdated. Balancing respect for tradition with the need for pedagogical innovation remains an ongoing tension.⁶³

The pesantren also faces resource limitations. As with many educational institutions, financial constraints limit the ability to expand programs that could deepen ethical and moderational training. For example, while administrators expressed interest in creating more structured community service initiatives or expanding digital literacy programs, budgetary limitations have curtailed these plans. This can reduce the breadth of opportunities for students to practice ethics in broader contexts, thereby limiting the pesantren's impact.⁶⁴

External Challenges: Externally, one of the most pressing challenges is the influence of digital media. Students at Pondok Al Fithrah, like their peers globally, are immersed in social media platforms that often amplify polarized and extremist narratives. Teachers observed that while the pesantren provides a protective environment, students are not isolated from online

⁶² Dhofier, *Tradisi Pesantren: Studi Pandangan Hidup Kyai dan Visinya Mengenai Masa Depan Indonesia.*, 33.

⁶³ Taylor, Charles, *A Secular Age.*, 513.

⁶⁴ Louis Cohen, Lawrence Manion, dan Keith Morrison, *Research Methods in Education* (London: Routledge, 2011)., 75.

discourses that promote intolerance or oversimplified religious interpretations. This creates tension, as the pesantren's careful cultivation of moderation can be undermined by external influences that glamorize radical or sensationalist positions.⁶⁵

Linked to this is the challenge of global religious polarization. The spread of transnational movements—both ultra-conservative and secularizing—filters into Indonesia and influences young Muslims. Some movements criticize religious moderation as compromising “true Islam,” while others dismiss ethical religiosity as insufficient in the face of modern challenges. Teachers at Al Fithrah reported the difficulty of countering these narratives, especially when students encounter them online or during breaks at home.⁶⁶ Another external pressure comes from the socio-political climate in Indonesia. Although the state promotes *moderasi beragama* (religious moderation), political polarization, particularly during elections, often undermines these ideals. Identity politics and sectarian rhetoric can seep into pesantren communities, testing their commitment to ethical moderation. Administrators noted that at times, parents or alumni influenced by polarized politics bring divisive discourses into the pesantren environment, creating tensions that must be carefully managed.⁶⁷

Pedagogical and Theoretical Challenges: A further challenge lies in the translation of ethical ideals into concrete behavior. While students may be able to articulate values such as justice, compassion, and tolerance, applying these values consistently in real-world situations is more complex. Interviews revealed that some students struggled to reconcile ethical ideals with practical pressures, such as competition in academic achievement or conflict in peer relationships. This gap between theoretical knowledge and lived application remains a perennial challenge in ethical education.⁶⁸ Moreover, there is the issue of ethical relativism versus universality. Teachers strive to convey that human ethics are universal, yet students sometimes question whether certain practices are culturally specific or universally binding. For instance, debates arose over whether traditional forms of politeness, such as bowing before elders, are essential ethical requirements or cultural expressions. Navigating these questions requires teachers to carefully distinguish between timeless ethical principles and culturally contingent practices.⁶⁹

Institutional Sustainability Challenges: Finally, the sustainability of ethical and moderational education at Pondok Al Fithrah depends on institutional continuity. Succession in leadership, generational shifts among teachers, and the ability to adapt to changing societal

⁶⁵ Esposito, *Islam and Peacebuilding: Political and Religious Values*, 92.

⁶⁶ Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation*, 89.

⁶⁷ Azra, *Moderasi Beragama dalam Konteks Indonesia*, 42.

⁶⁸ Lickona, *Educating for Character: How Our Schools Can Teach Respect and Responsibility*, 45.

⁶⁹ MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 21.

contexts all pose challenges. Administrators expressed concern about ensuring that future leaders of the pesantren maintain the same commitment to human ethics and moderation while also being innovative enough to respond to new realities. Without careful planning, there is a risk that the pesantren's unique synthesis of ethics and moderation could weaken over time.⁷⁰

Responses to Challenges: Despite these challenges, Pondok Al Fithrah has adopted several strategies to mitigate their impact. To address generational gaps, teachers increasingly incorporate discussion-based learning, student presentations, and peer mentoring into the curriculum. To counter digital influences, the pesantren is piloting workshops on digital ethics, teaching students how to critically assess online content and avoid extremist narratives. Financial constraints are partially addressed through partnerships with alumni and local communities who provide support for specific programs. Administrators also emphasize ongoing reflection and dialogue within the pesantren community. Regular meetings between teachers, students, and administrators serve as forums to discuss ethical issues and refine practices. This reflective culture helps the pesantren adapt to challenges without abandoning its core principles.

Synthesis: Challenges as Opportunities. Ultimately, the challenges faced by Pondok Al Fithrah highlight that the pursuit of human ethics and religious moderation is a dynamic and contested process, not a static achievement. Rather than undermining the pesantren's mission, these challenges present opportunities for growth and innovation. By confronting digital media, political polarization, and generational shifts, Al Fithrah demonstrates resilience and adaptability. Its commitment to ethics ensures that moderation remains not just a slogan but a lived and continually negotiated reality.⁷¹ These findings suggest that ethical and moderational education must always be contextualized, acknowledging the realities of students' lives and the pressures of broader society. Challenges should therefore be seen as integral to the educational process, pushing institutions to refine their approaches and deepen their impact.

Comparative Insights across Civilizations and Religious Traditions

The comparative insights emerging from this study are grounded in how actors at Pondok Al Fithrah themselves make sense of their ethical practices in relation to other traditions. In interviews, several teachers and administrators explicitly stated that values such as justice, compassion, and balance “are not exclusive to Islam but can become a common language with people of other faiths,” as one senior teacher explained during an in-depth interview. Building on these local interpretations, the discussion that follows situates Al Fithrah's emphasis on human ethics and moderation within broader conversations on moral formation across religious and

⁷⁰ Hefner, *Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia.*, 15.

⁷¹ Ramadan, *Radical Reform: Islamic Ethics and Liberation.*, 113.

civilizational contexts, while keeping the lived experiences of santri and teachers as the primary reference point.

The findings from Pondok Al Fithrah do not stand in isolation but resonate with broader discourses on human ethics and moderation across different civilizations and religious traditions. A comparative perspective demonstrates that while each tradition possesses its own theological foundations and cultural expressions, there are striking commonalities in how ethics function as the basis for harmony, balance, and moderation. This universality underscores the relevance of Al Fithrah's model not only within Islam but also within the wider human family.

Human Ethics in the Islamic Tradition; Within Islam, the idea of moderation (*wasatiyyah*) is deeply rooted in the Qur'an, which describes the Muslim community as a "middle nation" (*ummatan wasaṭan*) (Qur'an 2: 143). Classical scholars such as al-Ghazali emphasized that ethics (*akhlaq*) are inseparable from faith and law, and that the purification of the soul is the foundation for both personal piety and social justice.⁷² Sufism, which influences Pondok Al Fithrah, stresses virtues such as humility, patience, and compassion as central to spiritual development and as safeguards against extremism.⁷³ Al Fithrah's practices reflect this heritage, showing how ethical cultivation through prayer, service, and role modeling can produce moderate individuals. This is consistent with the Islamic view that knowledge without ethics is incomplete and potentially dangerous, while ethics without knowledge lacks grounding.⁷⁴

Ethics in Christian Thought; Christianity similarly emphasizes the role of ethics in moderation. The teachings of Jesus, particularly in the Sermon on the Mount, stress love of neighbor, forgiveness, and humility as central virtues. Augustine (354–430) argued that true justice arises only when ordered toward God, while Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) developed a framework of virtues—prudence, temperance, fortitude, and justice—that balance human passions and reason.⁷⁵ Like Al Fithrah's insistence on *adab* before knowledge, Christian monastic traditions emphasize discipline, community life, and service as means of ethical cultivation. The Benedictine Rule, for example, places humility and obedience at the center of monastic education, paralleling *pesantren* practices of *khidmah* (service) and respect for teachers. Both traditions converge on the idea that ethics is inseparable from spiritual discipline and community formation.⁷⁶

Ethics in Buddhist and Confucian Traditions; Buddhism provides another illuminating comparison. The concept of the "Middle Way" (*madhyamā-pratipad*)—avoiding extremes of

⁷² Ghazali, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn.*, 55.

⁷³ Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam.*, 102.

⁷⁴ Fadl, *Islam and the Challenge of Democracy.*, 76.

⁷⁵ MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory.*, 21.

⁷⁶ Taylor, Charles, *A Secular Age.*, 513.

indulgence and asceticism—bears a striking resemblance to Islamic moderation. Buddhist ethics emphasize compassion (*karuṇā*), mindfulness, and non-harming (*ahiṃsā*), which serve as foundations for peaceful coexistence.⁷⁷ Like Al Fithrah, Buddhist monasteries cultivate ethics through ritual, meditation, and communal living, showing that moderation arises from disciplined daily practice rather than abstract ideals. Confucianism, although not theistic, also highlights ethics as the foundation of harmony. The Confucian virtue of *ren* (humaneness) and the ideal of the “Doctrine of the Mean” (*zhongyong*) stress balance, self-cultivation, and respect for social roles. Education, for Confucius, was fundamentally about shaping moral character rather than merely imparting knowledge. This resonates strongly with the pesantren model where ethical formation takes precedence over cognitive achievement.⁷⁸

Universal Ethical Principles; Comparing these traditions reveals a set of universal ethical principles: justice, compassion, humility, and balance. These principles cut across civilizations, demonstrating that human ethics are not exclusive to any one religion but constitute a shared heritage of humanity. While the metaphysical foundations differ—Islam grounds ethics in divine revelation, Christianity in Christ’s example, Buddhism in enlightenment, and Confucianism in social harmony—the practical outcomes converge. This universality supports the argument that human ethics can serve as a common ground for interreligious dialogue and cooperation. By focusing on shared ethical values rather than doctrinal differences, communities can build bridges of understanding and collaboration. Al Fithrah’s emphasis on moderation through ethics positions it as a potential model for such dialogue within Indonesia’s plural society and beyond.⁷⁹

Tensions and Divergences; Nevertheless, comparative analysis also highlights certain divergences. For instance, Islamic moderation emphasizes balance between law (*shariah*), faith (*iman*), and ethics (*akhlaq*), whereas Buddhist moderation is more existential, focused on liberation from suffering. Similarly, Confucian ethics prioritize social harmony through hierarchy and duty, which can sometimes conflict with modern ideals of individual rights. These divergences remind us that while ethical principles may converge, their implementation is context-specific and shaped by unique historical trajectories.⁸⁰ At Pondok Al Fithrah, students are taught to appreciate both universality and particularity. Teachers explain that while values such as compassion and justice are shared, their grounding in Islamic revelation gives them

⁷⁷ Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 68.

⁷⁸ Weiming Tu, *Confucianism and Human Rights* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 113.

⁷⁹ Küng, *A Global Ethic for Global Politics and Economics.*, 54.

⁸⁰ Taylor, Charles, *A Secular Age.*, 513.

specific depth and meaning for Muslims. This approach fosters confidence in one's tradition while cultivating openness to others, embodying moderation as both fidelity and inclusivity.⁸¹

Implications for Global Ethical Discourse; The comparative insights suggest that Pondok Al Fithrah's model contributes to a broader global ethical discourse. In an age marked by religious polarization and cultural clashes, the pesantren demonstrates that education rooted in ethics can cultivate individuals capable of engaging constructively with diversity. By linking human ethics with moderation, Al Fithrah aligns with initiatives such as Hans Küng's "Global Ethic" project, which calls for a common moral framework across religions.⁸² Moreover, the pesantren's emphasis on lived ethics—service, discipline, role modeling—offers a corrective to overly abstract or theoretical approaches in global ethics. It shows that moderation is not achieved through declarations alone but through daily habits and community structures. This insight is valuable not only for Islamic contexts but also for educational institutions worldwide seeking to cultivate ethical citizenship.

Synthesis of Discussion

The exploration of Pondok Al Fithrah's integration of human ethics and religious moderation reveals a multi-layered educational model that is both deeply rooted in Islamic tradition and responsive to contemporary challenges. Synthesizing the findings across daily practices, curriculum integration, foundations of moderation, challenges, and comparative insights, several key themes emerge that highlight the pesantren's role as a dynamic agent of ethical formation and social harmony.

Human Ethics as a Lived Practice; First, the research underscores that at Al Fithrah, human ethics are lived rather than merely taught. Students internalize virtues such as justice, compassion, humility, and tolerance through the rhythm of daily life: communal prayers, acts of service, interpersonal interactions, and conflict resolution. Teachers function as ethical exemplars, demonstrating moderation in their conduct and reinforcing the pesantren's Sufi ethos. This lived dimension of ethics reflects the classical Islamic idea that *adab* precedes knowledge (*al-adab fawq al-'ilm*) and affirms that intellectual mastery without ethical grounding is incomplete.⁸³ (al-Ghazali 2005, 55).

Integration of Knowledge and Character; Second, the findings highlight the pesantren's success in integrating knowledge and character. The curriculum weaves ethics into the study of Qur'an, Hadith, fiqh, and taṣawwuf, ensuring that knowledge transmission is inseparable from

⁸¹ Esposito, *Islam and Peacebuilding: Political and Religious Values*, 92.

⁸² Küng, *A Global Ethic for Global Politics and Economics*, 54.

⁸³ Ghazali, *Ihya' Ulūm al-Dīn*, 55.

moral formation. Extracurricular activities, community service, and ritual practices further reinforce this integration, cultivating balanced individuals who embody moderation. This approach contrasts with modern educational models that often separate intellectual achievement from ethical development, and it demonstrates the continuing relevance of pesantren education in producing holistic graduates.⁸⁴

Moderation as Ethical Orientation; Third, the study confirms that religious moderation is fundamentally an ethical orientation. Rather than being imposed externally as a state policy or abstract theological doctrine, moderation emerges organically from ethical cultivation. By embedding justice, compassion, and tolerance into its practices, Al Fithrah inoculates students against extremism and prepares them to engage constructively with plural societies. This finding reinforces the argument that moderation is sustained not by slogans but by the consistent internalization of ethics.⁸⁵

Challenges as Opportunities; Fourth, the challenges faced by Al Fithrah—such as digital media influences, generational gaps, and socio-political polarization—highlight the dynamic and contested nature of ethical education. Yet these challenges also present opportunities for innovation, such as developing digital ethics workshops, adopting more dialogical pedagogies, and strengthening partnerships with the broader community. By engaging these challenges creatively, the pesantren demonstrates resilience and adaptability, ensuring that its mission remains relevant in changing times.⁸⁶

Resonance across Civilizations; Fifth, the comparative perspective shows that Al Fithrah's emphasis on ethics and moderation resonates with other civilizations and traditions, including Christianity's virtue ethics, Buddhism's Middle Way, and Confucianism's Doctrine of the Mean. These parallels affirm the universality of human ethics as a foundation for moderation and highlight the pesantren's potential role in interreligious dialogue. At the same time, the Islamic grounding of its practices ensures that its approach is not generic but rooted in revelation and tradition, embodying a balance of universality and particularity.⁸⁷

Broader Implications; Synthesizing these themes points to several broader implications. For Islamic education, Al Fithrah demonstrates that the path forward lies not in abandoning tradition but in reinterpreting it through ethical frameworks that address contemporary realities. For plural societies, the pesantren provides a model of how religious institutions can cultivate moderation as a lived ethic rather than a theoretical construct. And for global discourse, Al

⁸⁴ Dhofier, *Tradisi Pesantren: Studi Pandangan Hidup Kyai dan Visinya Mengenai Masa Depan Indonesia.*, 33.

⁸⁵ Azra, *Moderasi Beragama dalam Konteks Indonesia.*, 42.

⁸⁶ Esposito, *Islam and Peacebuilding: Political and Religious Values.*, 92.

⁸⁷ Küng, *A Global Ethic for Global Politics and Economics.*, 54.

Fithrah illustrates how local practices of ethical education can contribute to the search for a shared moral framework across civilizations.⁸⁸

Toward a Holistic Model of Education; Ultimately, the synthesis suggests that Pondok Al Fithrah embodies a holistic model of education where ethics, knowledge, spirituality, and social responsibility are seamlessly integrated. This model challenges dominant paradigms that fragment human development into intellectual, moral, or vocational compartments. Instead, it offers a vision of education that forms complete individuals—knowledgeable, ethical, moderate, and socially engaged. In this vision, human ethics are not peripheral but central, serving as both the foundation and the goal of the educational process.

Conclusion

The study of Pondok Al Fithrah Surabaya demonstrates that human ethics serve as the essential foundation of religious moderation. The pesantren successfully integrates ethical cultivation into every aspect of education—curriculum, rituals, extracurricular activities, community service, and teacher–student relationships. Ethics are not taught as abstract principles but embodied in daily practices, making virtues such as justice, compassion, humility, and tolerance part of the lived reality of students. Findings also show that religious moderation is best sustained through ethical orientation rather than political slogans or purely intellectual formulations. By embedding ethics into learning and communal life, Al Fithrah produces individuals capable of balancing devotion to God with responsibility toward society. This makes the pesantren a significant contributor not only to Islamic education but also to Indonesia’s broader agenda of fostering pluralism and preventing extremism.

Despite its successes, the pesantren faces challenges, including generational gaps in pedagogy, financial constraints, digital media influences, and socio-political polarization. However, these challenges are not insurmountable; instead, they provide opportunities for innovation. By adapting to new realities while holding firmly to ethical principles, Al Fithrah demonstrates resilience and ensures the sustainability of its mission. Comparative insights further reveal that Al Fithrah’s emphasis on ethics and moderation resonates with other civilizations, including Christianity, Buddhism, and Confucianism. This universality suggests that pesantren education can contribute to global ethical discourse, offering a lived model of how moderation is cultivated through the integration of spirituality, ethics, and community. In synthesis, Pondok Al Fithrah embodies a holistic model of education where knowledge and ethics are inseparable. This

⁸⁸ Ramadan, *Radical Reform: Islamic Ethics and Liberation.*, 113.

model not only strengthens the identity of the pesantren but also provides a framework for addressing the ethical challenges of modern, plural societies.

Based on the findings, several recommendations can be made: Strengthening Digital Ethics Education, Given the pervasive influence of social media, the pesantren should continue to develop structured programs on digital literacy and ethics, equipping students to navigate online spaces responsibly and resist extremist narratives. Expanding Community Engagement, Community service should be further institutionalized as part of the curriculum, reinforcing the message that ethics are best practiced through active social responsibility. Innovating Pedagogical Approaches, To bridge generational gaps, teachers can integrate more dialogical and participatory methods alongside traditional approaches, ensuring that students remain engaged while respecting pesantren authority structures. Sustaining Institutional Development; Greater investment in resources, partnerships with alumni, and collaborations with universities or NGOs can help ensure that ethical and moderational education remains sustainable. Fostering Interreligious Dialogue. By drawing on the universality of human ethics, Al Fithrah could take a proactive role in interreligious dialogue, showcasing pesantren education as a bridge between communities and civilizations.

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