

## Islamic Boarding School Response to the Impact of COVID-19 in Maintaining the *Pesantren* Values

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### ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 affects all aspects of life, including Islamic boarding schools or *pesantren*. These institutions are having difficulty conducting online learning activities because they are not familiar with this method. This study aims to reveal Islamic boarding schools' response toward the impact of COVID-19 in maintaining *pesantren* values at *Pesantren Miftahul Ulum*, Subang, West Java. The study utilized the descriptive qualitative method. The respondents of this study were teachers (*ustadz*), students (*santri*), and leaders (*kyai*). The data were collected through observation, interviews, documentation, and online searching. The triangulation was employed as the data validity technique, and the data analysis technique used data reduction, data display, data verification, and conclusion. The result showed that *pesantren* responses in maintaining the *pesantren* values due to the impact of COVID-19 such as limiting the learning time in class, limiting the *santri's* capacity per classroom, and limiting *ustadz* interaction with *santri* in the classroom. The learning process during the pandemic was carried out face-to-face and strictly adhered to the health protocol. The learning methods employed were *sorogan*, *bandongan*, and *kempekan*. *Pesantren* also internalizes morals to the students to guarantee the value.

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## INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic restricts many sectors in human life, especially in Indonesia, which is currently experiencing online-based learning. This method is done outside the classroom through the existing communication media platforms. The COVID-19 affects formal and religious-based education, such as Islamic Boarding School, based on Islamic religion (Syah, 2020). It is easier for Islamic Boarding School, commonly known as *pesantren*, to shape the students' character because they use a dormitory system to implement Islamic values in everyday life.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, *pesantren* classifies their learning models into three: 1) online learning (Kahfi & Kasanova, 2020), 2) independent learning or with parental guidance (Murtadlo, 2020), and 3) face-to-face learning at *pesantren* (Murtadlo, 2020). In response to the rapid social changes in society and to maintain the values of *pesantren*, the Ministry of Religious Affairs provides several conditions for those which conduct a face-to-face learning activity such as the environment of *pesantren*, and teachers and students who need to be safe from COVID-19 (Suud, et al., 2020), and the enforcement of strict health protocols. Unfortunately, *pesantren* faced a problem to carry out the online-based learning activities because students were not able to receive any moral value provided by their *kyai* (the leader of *pesantren*) (Syafe'i, 2017).

Based on the rules issued by the government, *Pesantren Miftahul' Ulum* continues to apply face-to-face learning activities, done due to its effectiveness. Furthermore, *pesantren* is the most appropriate place to deal with the pandemic condition. Although it is different from the goal of the health quarantine, the students stated that those who stay at *pesantren* are safer from exposure to COVID-19.

Studies related to the learning activities carried out at *pesantren* have been conducted by many researchers, such as Kholili (2021), who discussed the challenges for *pesantren* in the revolution era of society 5.0. *Pesantren* must be aware of the challenges to maintain its existence by implementing morals, a technology-based *pesantren* system, and digital literacy and digital ethics (Kholili, 2021). Mustakim (2021) discussed learning strategies at *pesantren* during the COVID-19 pandemic (Mustakim, 2021). Zamhari and Rahmayanti (2021) discussed *pesantren's* response and negotiation in maintaining its values during the pandemic. Blended learning between the offline learning system for some students who live at *pesantren* and the online learning system for those who live at home was regarded as less effective in teaching the values of *pesantren* (Zamhari & Rahmayanti, 2021). Hannan et al. (2020) discussed the dynamics of social roles carried out by *pesantren* in response to the COVID-19 in Madura (Hannan et al., 2020).

Based on the reality above, it is necessary to conduct this study. It aims to analyze how *Pesantren Miftahul' Ulum* responds to the rapid change and maintenance of

the community and assure its values during the pandemic. The writers also revealed that *pesantren* tends to maintain its identities built for a long time, such as *bandongan* (learning method where *santri* get to learn in a group and are allowed to discuss the subject matters), *sorogan* (individual learning where *santri* ask the *kyai* to teach them about materials they want to know), and *kempekan* (learning method to practice how to read Al-Qur-an). It becomes the main evident that *pesantren* can survive and keep up with several developments despite the social change due to COVID-19 or other aspects.

### **Response of *Pesantren* to the impact of COVID-19**

*Pesantren* is an educational institution that typically originated from the archipelago. These Islamic educational institutions continue to develop with numerous variants. Some are traditional, modern, or mixed, but they do not leave their roots by emphasizing religious education and morality (Kholidi, 2016). By getting to know more about the types of *pesantren* in Indonesia, we will know the advantages and characteristics of each type of *pesantren*. Here are some types of *pesantren* in Indonesia: 1) traditional *pesantren*, 2) modern *pesantren*, and 3) mixed of both.

*Pesantren* is a traditional Islamic education dormitory where *santri* live and study the science of religion under a teacher who is better known as a *kyai*. In Indonesia, a *pesantren* must have a dormitory for its *santri*, whether for males or females. Dormitories and *pesantren* cannot be separated because they have merged, so up to this time, it is tricky to find a *pesantren* without a dormitory. At *pesantren*, a *kyai* teaches his *santri* about religious knowledge taken from Arabic books written by 'ulama who lived in the medieval era (Izzah & Hanip, 2018). The concept of barakah or commonly called a blessing is also closely related to *pesantren*. *Santri* who are serious about studying religious knowledge with their *kyai* will receive blessings. *Pesantren* and books written in Arabic are as close as *pesantren* with dormitories and *kyai* and *santri*. So far, Arabic books are still intensively used in this modern era.

The response of *pesantren* to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic can be seen from the type of understanding adopted by the *pesantren*, divided into two types: 1) conservative Islamic understanding and 2) non-conservative Islamic understanding. *Pesantren* that adhere to conservative Islam tend to oppose the government's policies because death belongs only to Allah SWT and invites all people to keep carrying out worship and social activities before the pandemic. Meanwhile, the non-conservative one is more dynamic and moderate in responding to the impact of COVID-19. *Pesantren* has two agendas during the pandemic. The first is Structural-Medical, where *pesantren* incorporate health protocols into all *pesantren's* activities. The second is Cultural-Religious, where the involvement of *pesantren* amid people's lives to educate the importance of taking care of themselves, their families, and the community to protect them from the COVID-19 (Hannan et al., 2020).

### ***Pesantren* Values; Learning and moral internalization**

*Pesantren* only has two learning methods, *sorogan* and *bandongan*, because they have been carried out for a long time. The *sorogan* method requires patience, skills, obedience, and discipline for both the *ustadz* and *santri* because this method is carried out individually between the two parties. The *bandongan* method is the primary learning method utilized at *pesantren*. The *ustadz* reads, translates, explains, and reviews several Arabic books to a group of *santri*. Meanwhile, the *sorogan* system is the most effective learning method at *pesantren* as the initial stage of those who aspire to become 'alim (Dhofier, 2019).

*Pesantren* is an Islamic educational institution in Indonesia that has long been consistent in providing character education to all its students with comprehensive learning as proof. Character education has three components: moral knowledge, moral feelings, and moral actions. Moral knowledge is the most important part of character education concerning moral awareness, moral values, moral thinking, decision-making, and personal knowledge (Salim, 2012).

In making decisions, individuals can think about how to act through moral problems by employing reflective decision-making skills. What are the consequences of making moral decisions that have been taught even to preschool children? Meanwhile, personal knowledge is a type of moral knowledge that is tricky to obtain, but it is necessary for character development (Julaeha, 2019). This component discusses a person's emotional nature, which is often overlooked in moral education even though it is essential. A person possesses six characteristics: conscience, self-esteem, empathy, loving, kindness, self-control, and humility (Julaeha, 2019).

If one has moral intelligence and emotional qualities, they might do what they want to know and what they think is true. Moral action is found in several aspects, such as competence, desire, and habits. In great situations, moral action gains benefits from the habit. A person often does a good deed because of habitual encouragement. As part of moral education, every child requires many opportunities to develop good habits and a lot of practice when it comes to being a good person (Julaeha, 2019). Character education is divided into four types: 1) religious value-based character education, 2) cultural value-based character education, 3) environmental-based character education and 4) self-potential-based character education (Chandra, 2020).

### **METHODS**

This research was conducted at the *Pesantren* Miftahul' Ulum online and offline due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It was carried out from March 2021 to April 2021. The subjects of this research consisted of *Pesantren* Miftahul' Ulum's *ustadz*, *santri*, and the board of directors. The researchers interviewed twelve (12) *ustadz*, fifty (50) *santri* comprised of twenty-five (25) male *santri* and twenty-five (25) female *santri*, and one (1) leader of *pesantren* (*kyai*). This number was decided based on the collection technique used and the needs of the researcher.

The data collection techniques used were observation, interviews, documentation, and online data searching. For observation, the researchers conducted a direct review of the research site to validate the data obtained. The researchers conducted interviews with *ustadz*, *santri*, and the leader of the *Pesantren* Miftahul' Ulum as research subjects. Documentation was to claim that the data was obtained as appropriate. Online data searches were also done due to the COVID-19 pandemic, so the researchers collected the data needed on social media or the *Pesantren* Miftahul' Ulum's website.

Two types of triangulation were utilized as the data validity techniques, triangulation of data sources and triangulation of methods. To get the truth of the data, the data that had been obtained were then compared to the other data. For example, the data that the researchers got from the *Pesantren* Miftahul' Ulum's *ustadz* were compared to the data obtained from the *Pesantren* Miftahul' Ulum's *santri*, and vice versa (Hadi, 2017). Various data collection methods were used to obtain the same data and as an effort to prove that the previously obtained data was truly valid. Therefore, the researchers used the triangulation method by digging up the data obtained and then looking for other data by a second party, third party, and using different methods to avoid subjective data (Rijali, 2018).

Data analysis techniques that researchers used were: 1) data reduction, 2) data display, and 3) data verification/conclusion. For data reduction, the researcher summarizes field notes so that they become more focused. The researchers made a graph or image to display the data so that the field data could be easily read. For data verification/concluding, the researchers took the objectivity, then compared the results to the theory and revealed the contents of the results to answer all the problem formulations that had been determined (Rukajat, 2018).

## RESULTS

Miftahul' Ulum Islamic Boarding School implements all formal and non-formal activities carried out face-to-face by following the rules of social distancing, wearing masks, and washing hands. Before the pandemic, this *pesantren* has been imposing a policy on environmental hygiene to create a healthy environment shown by the healthy menu, the activities of the residents such as sports and exercise, and ro'an (cleaning the dormitory) together every week.

Based on the interview, the head of the COVID-19 task force at the Islamic boarding school stated no positive cases in this institution. So far, no positive cases of COVID-19 found at Miftahul' Ulum Islamic Boarding School, Subang, West Java were found. In addition to obeying the strict health protocols, the residents were also asked to always pray to Allah, the owner of this disease, and continue to make an effort so that the residents will be able to stay safe from the COVID-19 until this pandemic ends.

The *pesantren*'s policy in maintaining face-to-face activities is based on the efforts of both the *pesantren* and the Regional Government, which also gives its support to *pesantren* in Subang, West Java. All activities were still the same before the pandemic. The only exception was that the learning activities during the formal education and Qur'an recital at *pesantren* were conducted by following the health protocols as follows: 1) limiting the time of the learning process, 2) limiting the number of the students in the classroom, and 3) maintaining physical distancing in all activities.

The interview results showed that more than 75% of respondents said that face-to-face learning was needed to maintain the values and characteristics of the *pesantren* culture, such as the *bandongan*, *sorogan* and *kempekan* methods. Some of the methods that characterize this *pesantren* are still conducted face-to-face by following the health protocols.

Miftahul' Ulum Islamic Boarding School uses books as teaching materials because students are taught to learn Arabic by interpreting, giving *harakat*, and understanding its contents which is more important than using other teaching materials. Moreover, students are living in Islamic boarding schools with a solid Islamic culture.

## DISCUSSION

### 1. Miftahul Ulum *Pesantren*'s response to Impact of COVID-19

Strict health protocols are implemented to avoid the spread of COVID-19 in the *Pesantren* Miftahul' Ulum environment as stipulated in Government Regulation Number 21 of 2020 concerning Large-Scale Social Restrictions in the Context of Accelerating the Handling of COVID-19 issued by the President of the Republic of Indonesia. *Pesantren* residents are also asked to always pray to Allah SWT, the mighty creator of COVID-19, and continue to strive so that *pesantren* residents remain safe from COVID-19 until the pandemic ends. *Pesantren* Miftahul' Ulum's COVID-19 Task Force will enforce an independent isolation policy in the *pesantren* environment if there are positive cases of COVID-19 among *pesantren* residents policy has certainly been recommended by the government's COVID-19 task force center. The isolation room provided at the *pesantren* fulfills the regulation issued by The Ministry of Religious Affairs of The Republic of Indonesia to avoid the spread of COVID-19 in the *pesantren* environment.

The caregiver of the *Pesantren* Miftahul' Ulum did not enforce an online learning policy in the COVID-19 pandemic not because the technology was insufficient but the caregiver wanted to continue face-to-face learning activity because he tried to maintain the characteristics of *pesantren*. According to the caregiver, if the *pesantren* implemented learning online, the role of *pesantren* is not involved in shaping the character of *santri* to become *santri* who have good morals in society. Therefore, *pesantren* is a means to shape better human character according to Islamic teachings. During the COVID-19 pandemic, *pesantren* should strive to maintain face-to-face learning, with some effort to ensure that the learning

activities do not become a place where COVID-19 spread. Therefore, *pesantren* policies must be adjusted to the COVID-19 health protocol. *Pesantren* should jointly disseminate information to the surrounding communities to comply with government policies so that the COVID-19 pandemic can be resolved and end soon.

Due to the pandemic, some facilities need to be provided to implement health protocols appropriately. This situation impacts *pesantren*, and they are required to have the appropriate facilities so that the residents of Islamic schools are well-facilitated in complying with health protocols. These facilities are: 1) a place to wash hands with running water, 2) an empty room to be used at any time if there are *pesantren* residents who are exposed to COVID-19, and 3) a disinfectant liquid sprayer to sterilize a place that has been used to avoid contamination and the spread of COVID-19. The lack of *pesantren* facilities in preventing the spread of COVID-19 does not mean that *pesantren* is not ready to maintain its existence during the COVID-19 pandemic (Zamhari & Rahmayanti, 2021). However, the funds available to *pesantren* have been fully used to construct mosques before the COVID-19 pandemic hit Indonesia. The assistance received from the Subang Regency Government is not sufficient for long-term sustainability with productive *pesantren* activities every day.

All formal and non-formal activities are carried out face-to-face by complying with social distancing rules, wearing masks, and washing hands. Before the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia, *Pesantren Miftahul' Ulum*, Subang, West Java, had imposed a policy on environmental hygiene to create a healthy environment seen from selecting healthy food menus for the *pesantren* residents. Additionally, *pesantren's* residents have activities like doing sports and ro'an (cleaning the dormitory) together every week. Maintaining a clean environment, healthy eating patterns, and increasing body immunity are recommendations from the Ministry of Health of The Republic of Indonesia to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the surrounding environment.

The policy of *pesantren* to maintain face-to-face activities is based on the efforts of the *Pesantren Miftahul' Ulum* and the Regional Government, which also helps *pesantren* in the Subang, West Java to continue face-to-face activities. All activities are still the same as before the COVID-19 pandemic. However, there are some adjustments related to learning activities in classes and reading the Qur'an at *pesantren*. The adjustments made are 1) limiting the time for the learning process in the classroom, 2) limiting the number of *santri* in the classroom during the learning process, and 3) keeping a safe distance in all *pesantren* activities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## 2. Maintaining of values at Miftahul 'Ulum *Pesantren*

The learning atmosphere at the *Pesantren Miftahul' Ulum* today is undoubtedly different from the previous years. There are adjustments made to the learning process. This adjustment occurs due to the COVID-19 pandemic that is still

engulfing Indonesia and the world. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the students were active in the class during the learning process. The distance between the *ustadz* and the *santri* in the classroom was not far apart. Moreover, the *ustadz* and the *santri* could recognize each other because nothing covered part of their face. Also, the moral learning taught by the *ustadz* to the *santri* in the class is optimal, shown by the *santri* who always kiss the hand of the *ustadz* when they want to leave the class.

The situation is different now, where learning is adjusted to the COVID-19 health protocols. *Ustadz* and *santri* must wear masks, keep a safe distance and sterilize hands with hand sanitizers. The adjustments make the learning atmosphere in the classroom limited, both in terms of interactions built by *ustadz* and the learning activities. The learning methods *ustadz* at the *Pesantren Miftahul' Ulum* in the COVID-19 pandemic were *bandongan* (*ma'nani*), *sorogan*, and reading the Qur'an using the *kempekan* method. The learning method is implemented based on adjustments to the COVID-19 health protocols, which requires keeping a safe distance during the learning activities in *pesantren*. There are only two learning methods in Islamic boarding schools, called *sorogan* and *bandongan*, which have long been practiced by Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia (Dhofier, 2019).

a. *Bandongan* or *Ma'nani* Method

*Bandongan* or *ma'nani* is a teaching method where the *ustadz* reads, interprets, gives *harakat*, and explains the meaning of the verses or sentences read. Then, the *santri* write, give *syakal*, and pay attention to what is conveyed by the *ustadz* in class (Wahyono, 2019). The *bandongan* method is carried out when studying the *kitab kuning*. For these learning activities, four classes are provided: 1) first grade, which is attended by new *santri*, 2) second grade, which is attended by the first-grade *santri* who pass the exam and continue to second grade, 3) third grade, which is attended by second-grade *santri* who pass the exam and continue to third grade and 4) fourth grade, which is filled by *santri* who enter the Madrasah Tsanawiyah level at their formal school and continue to the Madrasah Aliyah level at *pesantren* so that they go straight to fourth grade. Implementing the *bandongan* method at the *Pesantren Miftahul' Ulum* is similar to that of other *pesantren*. *Ustadz* are the sources of knowledge in the classroom, and *santri* focus on giving meaning, giving *syakal*, and comprehending when the *ustadz* reads, provides meaning and explains the contents of the sentence to *santri*. *Ma'nani* (giving meaning to the book) is commonly used by *pesantren* around the Pantura area of West Java. However, it is different in pronunciation but remains the same in meaning, so *ma'nani* is generally *bandongan*.

b. *Sorogan* Method

The *Sorogan* method comes from the Javanese term *sorog*, which means to thrust, where *santri* brings books that have been given meaning and studied and then reads them aloud to their *ustadz* independently (Wahyono, 2019). The *sorogan* method is carried out after the *fajr* prayer in the congregation. In this



method, the *santri* are also divided into three classes as in the *bandongan* method. Implementing the *sorogan* method at the *Pesantren* Miftahul' Ulum is that the *santri* become the center of knowledge because the *santri* have to show the results of their independent learning directly to the *ustadz*. Independent learning done by *santri* is by interpreting, giving *syakal* for a chapter or sentence in the *kitab kuning*. Later the *santri* are required to present the book's meaning to train *santri* to read the *kitab kuning* correctly and adequately.

c. Read the Qur'an with the *Kempekan* Method

The *kempekan* method applied at the *Pesantren* Miftahul' Ulum was carried out during the Al-Qur'an learning after the Maghrib prayer in the congregation. There are three classes for *kempekan*: 1) Juz' Amma class filled by new *santri* who are not yet fluent in reading the Qur'an, 2) Al-Qur'an class is filled by *santri* who are fluent in reading the Qur'an, and 3) Al-Qur'an memorization class is filled by *santri* who have completed the Qur'an Bin Nadzri (reading the Qur'an with a book) who is guided directly by the caregiver. This method follows the teaching method of reading the Qur'an applied by *Pesantren* Kempek Cirebon, West Java, and this method is one of the most famous methods used by *pesantren* in Indonesia.

*Pesantren* Miftahul' Ulum certainly has to learn to cope with obstacles in the COVID-19 pandemic. These obstacles are the limited teaching and learning activities in *pesantren*. The *pesantren* also consider external and internal factors to carry out the learning process (Muspawi & Vahlepi, 2021). The essential thing in an educational institution is the ongoing teaching and learning activities that need to be fulfilled. Therefore, if the teaching and learning process is limited, the teaching and learning process cannot take place optimally.

The external factors come from outside the *pesantren*, and they need to be considered carefully to maintain feasible learning activity during the pandemic. This pandemic changes old learning patterns into new learning patterns and forces people to follow health protocols (Dwivedi, et al., 2020). The policy taken by the *Pesantren* Miftahul' Ulum is to limit teaching and learning activities such as 1) limiting the learning time, 2) limiting the number of *santri* in the classroom, and 3) limiting *ustadz* communication during the learning process. The *pesantren* took this as a form of prevention to spread COVID-19 in the *Pesantren* Miftahul' Ulum Subang, West Java. These limitations are an implementation of the policy issued by The Ministry of Religious Affairs of The Republic of Indonesia regarding learning in *pesantren* that are ready to carry out face-to-face learning.

Internal factors that optimize the teaching and learning process are limited due to policies from the central government to implement strict health protocols, maintain distance, wear masks, and sterilize hands using hand sanitizers or other antiseptics. *Pesantren's* residents should be properly protected from the spread of COVID-19 (Herdayati et al., 2021). Thus, they must comply with

*pesantren's* new policy so that all residents are safe during the teaching and learning process.

### 3. Internalization of Moral Values at Miftahul' Ulum *Pesantren* during COVID-19 Pandemic

Based on the data from interviews and field observations, it can be seen that in the *Pesantren* Miftahul' Ulum environment, character education and moral education have the same meaning. They are considered a trait embedded in each individual's soul and encourage people to act without thinking. Moral education in Islam is essential to teach, following a hadith saying that the perfection of a person's faith depends on his morals. In the *pesantren's* environment, the values of character education (Baharun, 2017) that are taught include all human activities in all areas of life (Putro & Suryono, 2019).

According to one of the *ustadz* at *Pesantren* Miftahul' Ulum, in addition to being taught about the Qur'an and Al-Hadith and the noble values of Pancasila, he also taught several books containing valuable materials (Khafidah et al., 2020). The delivery of the material has certainly been adapted to the developmental ability of *santri's* thinking. The education system implemented at the *Pesantren* Miftahul' Ulum is correct, proven by the *santri*, who have good personalities and characters. In developing the morals of the *santri*, it is certainly not easy. Everything needs clear processes and stages. A good personality must be formed directly by the *pesantren* environment.

The *pesantren* has a *Kyai* figure who is highly respected by the *santri* and the surrounding communities because of his scientific abilities and charisma (Rahawarin, 2019; Melani, 2021). In *Pesantren* Miftahul 'Ulum environment, character education will be taught directly by a *Kyai* by always practicing moral values in everyday life, such as always advising students after Maghrib prayers in the congregation. Then this was also done by the *ustadz*, who always set an example to come to the mosque on time during the five daily prayers, always dress neatly, and speak good words in communicating with others. This *Kyai* will undoubtedly have a significant impact on character education for *santri*.

More than 80% of respondents stated that the internalization of values/characters was carried out not only by learning that emphasized the cognitive understanding of students at specific values. The habituation of values in students' daily activities is a form of internalized values that effectively instill these values in students' lives. The application of punishment for students who violate the rules of the *pesantren* is also an effort to internalize specific values (Suud et al., 2020).

The *Kyai's* role as a role model in daily activities in the *pesantren* effectively facilitates the internalization of student character values. *Kyai's* daily activities become a real example for students carrying out almost all their daily worship and social activities. This reality follows what Julaeha (2019) conveyed that the internalization of values to students requires several ways, namely the delivery

of information, appreciation, and practice of values in students' daily lives (Lickona, 1991).

## CONCLUSIONS

Miftahul Ulum *pesantren's* response to the impact of COVID-19 is to organize a face-to-face learning process by paying attention to several aspects; adjusting to the COVID-19 health protocol as follows: 1) limiting learning time in class, 2) limiting the number of students in the class and 3) limiting the interaction of *ustadz* with students in the classroom. Another policy is self-isolation in a special room in the *pesantren* environment if residents of the *pesantren* Miftahul' Ulum are exposed to people who are tested positive of COVID-19. To maintain the noble values, *Pesantren* Miftahul Ulum continues to implement the learning methods characteristic of the *pesantren*, called the *bandongan*, *sorogan*, and *kempekan* methods. These methods can be effectively implemented because they are carried out face-to-face while still complying with health protocols. This *pesantren* also internalizes noble values to its students by teaching them, strengthening the values in students' personalities, and applying them in students' lives. *Kyai* plays an important role in internalizing values in students' lives because *Kyai* acts as a role model for actualizing values.

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