

Religious Tolerance among Indonesian Islamic University Students: The *Pesantren* Connection

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Abstract

This study examines how *Pesantren* education shapes religious tolerance among students at Islamic universities in Indonesia. *Pesantren*, traditional Islamic boarding schools, offer a distinct educational experience that emphasizes religious, moral, and social development, setting them apart from formal education. Using a survey of 1,004 students from three Islamic universities in mid-2023, the study investigates key dimensions of religious tolerance through Welch's t-test. This statistical method was chosen for its ability to handle unequal variances across groups, making it suitable for comparing tolerance levels between *Pesantren* and non-*Pesantren* attendees. The analysis reveals that *Pesantren* attendance significantly enhances interfaith tolerance, particularly in promoting respect for diverse religious practices and fostering open-minded attitudes. These findings highlight the critical role of *Pesantren* in nurturing tolerant perspectives within Islamic academic environments. The study offers practical recommendations for integrating interfaith dialogue into Islamic education curricula and developing policies that support social cohesion in Indonesia's diverse society. Furthermore, by applying Social Identity Theory, this research illustrates how religious identity formation within *Pesantren* contributes to broader social harmony and tolerance. The findings have important implications for educators and policymakers seeking to create more inclusive and tolerant learning environments.

Keywords: Religious tolerance, *Pesantren* experience, Islamic universities, interfaith relations, Social Identity Theory

Introduction

Pesantren, as traditional Islamic boarding schools, have long been central to the development of religious and social identities among Indonesian Muslims. These institutions, which blend religious teachings with communal living, offer a unique environment that significantly shapes students' worldviews and attitudes. *Pesantren* provide a distinctive form of Islamic education, deeply embedded within the fabric of Indonesian society, where the community living experience reinforces a sense of group identity. This group identity, fostered through shared religious practices, contributes to how individuals perceive and interact with both members of their own faith and those from other religious groups. Despite the prominent role of *Pesantren* in Indonesian society, research that applies Social Identity Theory to explore the impact of *Pesantren* on religious tolerance remains limited.¹

Social Identity Theory, originally proposed by Tajfel and Turner, suggests that individuals derive part of their self-concept from their membership in social groups.² In educational environments like *Pesantren*, where students live and learn together, their shared experiences create a strong in-group identity. This can shape their attitudes and behaviors toward other groups, both within and outside their religion. The application of Social Identity Theory in this context is crucial because it helps explain how group dynamics within *Pesantren* influence students' views on religious tolerance, both intra-religiously (within Islamic sects) and inter-religiously (towards non-Muslim communities).

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¹ Jeremhy Menchik (2016), *Islam and Democracy in Indonesia: Tolerance without Liberalism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 1–214.

² Moh Asror Yusuf and Ahmad Taufiq (2020), "The Dynamic Views of Kiai in Response to the Government Regulations for the Development of *Pesantren*," *QLJIS: Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 1, pp. 1-32.

Kaplan and Flum argue that educational settings play a pivotal role in identity formation, emphasizing that identity is not a fixed construct but evolves through continuous interaction with the educational environment.³ This concept is particularly relevant in Pesantren, where students are immersed in Islamic teachings that may reinforce specific social and religious identities. The communal lifestyle in Pesantren will help create a deep sense of belonging to the Muslim community, which might influence how they think and view other members from other religious groups. Spruyt and Kuppens further indicate that educational experiences are of immense importance regarding the development of the political and social attitudes of an individual.⁴ Apparently, the learning environment, especially in settings with very close relationships, such as Pesantrens, might have a great influence on students' levels of tolerance, political participation, and social outlooks.

Extensive research has focused on the role of Pesantren in Islamic education, ranging from the famous dynamic responses of Kiais to government regulations as a shaper of educational practices⁵ to the historical evolution of Pesantren in fostering Islamic education from the colonial period up to the present.⁶ However, there still remains an important gap in knowledge with regard to how experiences within Pesantren shape and influence the development of religious tolerance. While these studies have valuable insights into the changing roles of Pesantren in Indonesian society, a deep understanding of how these institutions impact students' perceptions regarding religious tolerance through the lens of Social Identity Theory has not been well captured in literature. Understanding this dynamic is important for promoting greater social harmony in a diverse and multi-religious society like Indonesia.

This study, therefore, explored the relationship between experiences in Pesantren and religious tolerance attitudes among university students in Indonesia. The study employed Social Identity Theory in an attempt to gain an understanding of how such education in Pesantren influences students' views about intrareligious diversity—for example, between different Islamic groups—and their inter-religious tolerance—for instance, attitudes toward other people of non-Muslim communities. It also tried to determine the level at which attendance in Pesantren does influence the level of religious tolerance among students at an Islamic university, such as Universitas Islam Indonesia. This is especially important at a time when Indonesia needs to ensure that people practice religious tolerance as one sure way of fostering social cohesion among its highly religiously, culturally, and ethnically diverse population.

Meanwhile, Raihani's work on multicultural education within Pesantren has made it a venue for interfaith dialogue and the instillation of social responsibility among its students.⁷ However, there has been a need for empirical research that precisely investigates the influence of experiences at Pesantren regarding the level of tolerance among students. This research filled that lacuna by conducting a robust analysis of how experiences at Pesantren influenced and shaped students' attitudes towards religious diversity within and outside Islam.

Based on the analysis of large-scale survey data collected from Islamic university students, some key findings were revealed about how education at Pesantren influences levels of tolerance. It was noticed that those students who had a Pesantren background held variant views regarding religious tolerance, shaped by the experiences of living in a communal religious setting and lessons taught under Islamic teachings. These findings develop the understanding of how religious education within Pesantren shapes social identities and attitudes toward religious diversity.

The research also added to the larger educational debate because it signified an understanding of how experiences in Pesantren may be put into use to raise a level of religious tolerance in Indonesian society. These findings would add to policy and practice development in education for inter-religious understanding and social harmony. In addition, the findings of this study have fundamental implications

³ Avi Kaplan and Hanoch Flum (2012), "Identity formation in educational settings: A critical focus for education in the 21st century," *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, Vol. 37, No. 3, pp. 171–175.

⁴ Bram Spruyt and Toon Kuppens (2015), "Education-based thinking and acting? Towards an identity perspective for studying education differentials in public opinion and political participation," *European Journal of Cultural and Political Sociology*, Vol. 2, No. 3–4, pp. 291–312.

⁵ Ali Maulida (2016), "Dinamika dan Peran Pondok Pesantren dalam Pendidikan Islam Sejak Era Kolonialisme Hingga Masa Kini," *Edukasi Islami: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, Vol. 5, No. 9, pp. 16–16.

⁶ Raihani (2012), "Report on multicultural education in pesantren," *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, Vol. 42, No. 4, pp. 585–605.

⁷ Raihani, *Ibid*

for policy and education leaders committed to developing inclusive education settings valuing and recognizing religious diversity in support of harmonious coexistence in multi-religious societies such as Indonesia.

Literature Review

Social identity theory provides an important framework that helps explain group interactions and the effect this might have in educational settings. The original theory, put forward by Tajfel and Turner, has been extended to include the role that social identity plays in shaping emotions, behaviors, and intra- and inter-group-level interactions.⁸ Interactions within education settings, such as those of pesantren or Islamic boarding schools, have higher demands for such interactions due to the nature of developing a sense of self and others in relation to theology and social belonging.⁹ This theory is behind the current study's emphasis on the relationship between the pesantren experience and inter-religious tolerance in Indonesian Islamic universities.

The pesantren represent long-standing fixtures in the Indonesian educational landscape, serving not only as centers of religious instruction but also as important localized spaces for the formation of social identity.¹⁰ History has shown that the pesantren have been instrumental in the moral and ethical development of Indonesian Muslims, while concurrently contributing to national development through the education of character and social outreach.¹¹ The duality of religious education and social engagement in effect makes pesantren potent institutions to develop students' social identities and their stance toward religious tolerance.

Furthermore, previous research has indicated that the environment within *pesantren*, which fosters a strong sense of in-group identity through communal living and shared religious practices, plays a significant role in reinforcing students' social identities.¹² These in-group dynamics, however, have the potential to both enhance and limit inter-religious tolerance, depending on the extent to which *pesantren* curricula incorporate inclusive values and interfaith dialogue.¹³ For instance, *pesantren* for middle-class Muslims may offer more inclusive educational programs, whereas others may remain more exclusive in their teachings, contributing to varied tolerance levels among students.¹⁴

In educational settings outside of the Islamic context, studies have demonstrated that social identity significantly influences classroom interactions and instructional communication.¹⁵ Research in second language programs, such as Canadian French immersion, shows that students develop strong social identities related to their language programs, which in turn affects their interactions with peers from different groups.¹⁶ These findings underscore the broader applicability of social identity theory in diverse educational contexts, including *pesantren*, where shared religious practices may similarly foster strong in-group identities.

Moreover, there is evidence from adolescent development studies that personal and social identities are interconnected, especially within the school context. For example, studies among adolescents point out that social identifications, such as with classmates or religious colleagues, play an important role in

⁸ Henry Tajfel and John Turner (1979), An integrative theory of intergroup conflict, *The social psychology of intergroup relations/Brooks/Cole*, pp. 33-47.

⁹ Robert W. Hefner (2009), Islamic schools, social movements, and democracy in Indonesia. *Making modern Muslims: the politics of Islamic education in Southeast Asia*, pp. 55-105.

¹⁰ Mukhlis, M. (2021), "From instruction to consultative: Reposition of pesantren in the collaboration of religious radicalization policy in Indonesia," *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun*, Vol. 9, No. 1, p. 203.

¹¹ Hasse Jubba, Musatqim Pabbajah, Irwan Abdullah, and Juhsansar (2022), "Document-reorienting moral education for millennial Muslims-the changing role of Islamic Boarding Schools in Indonesia," *Islamic Quarterly*, Vol. 65, No.3, pp. 423-442.

¹² Ahidul Asror (2017), "Transformative propagation of Islamic boarding school in response to contemporary challenges," *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, Vol. 25, pp. 187-194.

¹³ Siti Nur Hidayah (2021), "Pesantren for middle-class muslims in Indonesia (between religious commodification and pious neoliberalism)," *Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 1, pp. 209-244.

¹⁴ Muh. Hanif, Mukhroji, H. Suwito, Afiq Chamim Mubaroq, and Abu Dharin (2024), "Pesantren Resistance to Indonesia's National Curriculum to Defend Its Curriculum Model," *Revista de Gestão Social e Ambiental*, Vol. 18, No. 7, pp. e05473-e05473.

¹⁵ M. Chad McBride, Erika L. Kirby, Karla Mason Bergen, Shawn T. Wahl, Stephanie Norander, and Tucker Robinson (2016), "14 Social Identities in the Classroom," *Communication and learning*, Vol. 16, pp. 339-376.

¹⁶ Hilary Walton (2022), "Investigating a new psychological variable in second language acquisition: Comparing social identity across Canadian French education programs," *Frontiers in Education*, Vol. 7, p. 874287.

personal identity formation.¹⁷ The insights mentioned above stress the requirement to examine how pesantren conditions—the particular social configuration and religious teaching—foster the development of students' personal and social identities and how these identities affect students' attitudes towards other religious groups. While the pesantren have conventionally been considered Islamic education centers, recent studies have focused on their role in dealing with contemporary social issues and social cohesion in increasingly diverse pluralistic societies.¹⁸

Methodology

This study conducted large-scale survey data for examining information on the level of association between Pesantren experience and tolerance attitudes among Islamic university students in Indonesia. The decision to make an online approach in this survey offers several advantages, which involve efficiency, minimizing errors, and enhancing the quality in data. The general belief is that electronic data collection methods are time and resource saving when compared to traditional paper-and-pencil surveys.¹⁹ The method is appropriate for the selected study because one can conveniently and inexpensively acquire data from a heterogeneous group of respondents. That said, the method's generalized limitations have to be acknowledged, particularly in regions like East Java, where access to the internet might differ and there is a possibility of disparities in technological literacy. Such differences could result in response bias, where those from more remote areas or with less technological access could be excluded. With this in mind, campus-based advertisements for the survey were used, and any students without computer access were given technical support.²⁰

The survey was conducted at three state Islamic Universities in East Java, Indonesia. These universities were chosen because of their significant roles in religious education and the diverse student body they represent, offering a comprehensive examination of Pesantren experiences in relation to religious tolerance. Despite these advantages, it is important to note that these universities may not fully represent all Islamic universities in Indonesia. The respondents were students from disciplines in religious studies, education and social humanities. Data collection took place over three months, from June to August 2023, with a total of 1121 respondents participating. Of these, 117 responses were incomplete and were excluded from the final analysis. Incomplete responses were handled by removing cases with significant missing data. To ensure that the exclusion of these responses did not introduce bias, sensitivity analyses were conducted to compare the demographics of excluded versus included responses. This confirmed that the removal of incomplete responses did not significantly affect the representativeness of the final sample, which consisted of 1004 valid survey responses.²¹

The data analysis followed a structured approach. First, the dataset was cleaned by removing incomplete or erroneous responses to maintain data integrity.²² Next, a comprehensive descriptive analysis was conducted to provide insights into the demographics of the participants. To capture a holistic view of tolerance, tolerance indexes were created by aggregating and standardizing relevant survey items that measured different aspects of tolerance.²³ These items were selected based on prior research and established measures of religious and interfaith tolerance.

Statistical tests were then performed to examine group differences. Levene's Test for Equality of Variances was used to check whether the assumption of equal variances was met. In cases where this assumption was violated, Welch's t-test, a robust test that does not assume equal variances, was employed. This allowed for reliable comparisons between students with and without Pesantren experience in terms of their tolerance levels.

¹⁷ Flavio Albarello, Elisabetta Crocetti, and Monica Rubini (2018), "I and us: A longitudinal study on the interplay of personal and social identity in adolescence," *Journal of youth and adolescence*, Vol. 47, pp. 689-702.

¹⁸ Asrizal Saiin, Pipin Armita, and Muh Rizki (2020), "Pesantren: an Islamic Education Institution to Prevent Social Conflict," *Millah: Jurnal Studi Agama*, Vol. 20. No. 1, p. 89.

¹⁹ Craig Leisher (2014), "A comparison of tablet-based and paper-based survey data collection in conservation projects," *Social Sciences*, Vol. 3, No. 2, pp. 264-271.

²⁰ Line Kuppens and Arnim Langer (2017), "The Prospects of Computer Assisted Self-Interviewing in Group Settings in Developing Countries: A Comparison Between a Tablet-and Paper-Based Survey Among Secondary School Teachers in Côte d'Ivoire and Kenya," *Survey Practice*, Vol. 10, No. 4.

²¹ Craig Lisher, *Op. Cit.*

²² Bet Caeyers, Neil Chalmers, and Joachim De Weerdt (2010), "A Comparison of CAPI and PAPI through a Randomized Field Experiment," Available at SSRN 1756224.

²³ Steven G. Heeringa, Brady T. West, and Patricia A. Berglund (2017), *Applied survey data analysis*, Chapman and hall/CRC.

Given the involvement of human participants, ethical considerations were carefully addressed throughout the study. Ethical approval was obtained from the institutional review boards (IRB) of the participating universities. Informed consent was collected from all participants before they completed the survey, and participants were assured that their responses would remain anonymous and confidential. Additionally, they were informed that their participation was voluntary, and they could withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

Result and Discussion

Respondent Descriptive Statistic

The study involved 1004 participants, with 32.27% (324) identifying as male and 67.73% (680) as female. The majority of participants, 78.21% (781), were of Javanese descent, while 21.79% (223) identified as non-Javanese. In terms of religious affiliation, 91.24% of participants held an affiliation with Nahdlatul Ulama, a major Islamic organization, while 8.76% had affiliations with other groups. Regarding parent economic backgrounds, 60.06% of the participants reported a “good” economic background, whereas 39.94% described their economic background as “impoverished.”

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics (n=1004)

Variables	Categories	Freq.	%
Gender	Male	324	32.27
	Female	680	67.73
Ethnicity	Java	781	77.79
	Non-Java	223	22.21
Islamic Group Affiliation	Nahdlatul Ulama	916	91.24
	Other	88	8.76
Parent Economic Background	Good	603	60.06
	Impoverished	401	39.94
<i>Pesantren</i> Experience	Yes	615	61.25
	Never	389	38.75

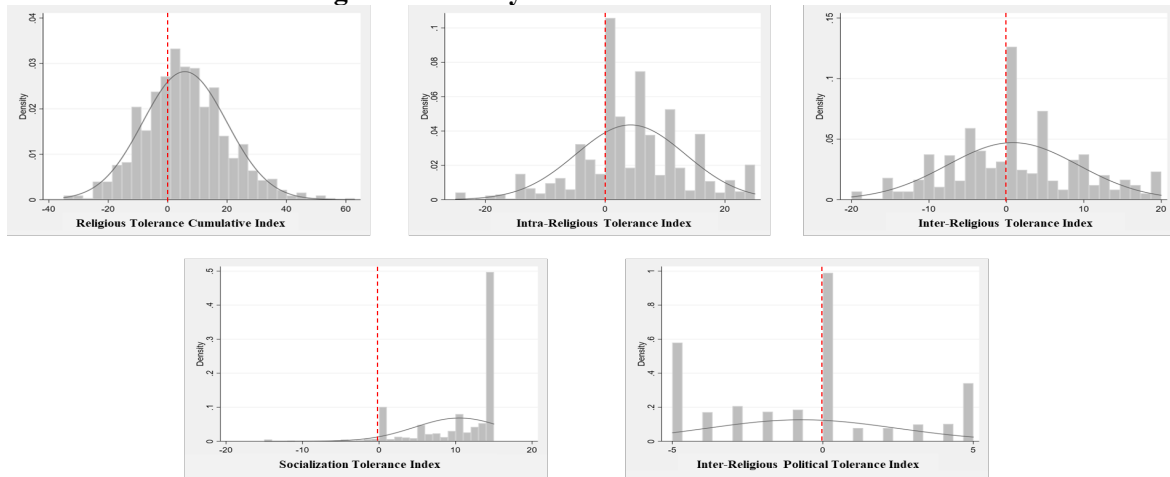
A significant portion of the participants, 61.25%, had *Pesantren* experiences, while 38.75% had never participated in *Pesantren* activities. The substantial number of participants with *Pesantren* experience provides a valuable opportunity to explore the potential impact of these experiences on inter-religious tolerance. These demographics provide valuable insights into the composition of the sample and set the stage for a comprehensive examination of the relationship between these factors and the influence of *Pondok Pesantren* experiences on inter-religious tolerance within the context of the study.

Tolerance Levels of Islamic State University Students in East Java

From our extensive survey involving 1004 valid respondents from three Islamic State Universities in East Java, we have been able to construct religious tolerance indices. As illustrated in Figure 1, the data we collected yielded a mean score of 5.77 for the religious tolerance cumulative index. This mean score signifies a moderate level of religious tolerance among the participants. However, the relatively high standard deviation of 14.14 and a variance of 200.05 suggest a significant degree of variation in the respondents’ responses. The positively skewed distribution with a skewness of 0.34 indicates that a higher number of students tended to report elevated levels of religious tolerance. Yet, a kurtosis of 3.45 reveals that the data exhibits heavier tails than a normal distribution, suggesting the presence of outliers or extreme responses within the sample.

In addition to the overall cumulative indices, this study places particular emphasis on four distinct subsets of tolerance: inter-religious tolerance, intra-religious tolerance, socialization tolerance, and inter-religious political tolerance. The subsequent sections will provide in-depth insights into our discoveries pertaining to these four facets of tolerance.

Figure 1: Density Curve of All Tolerance Indices



Intra-religious tolerance, which evaluates factors like the acceptance of individuals from different Islamic groups as prayer leaders or lecturers, yielded a moderately rated mean score of 4.24. While there is some variability, the nearly symmetrical distribution indicates a generally balanced attitude. On the other hand, inter-religious tolerance, gauged by factors such as allowing individuals from different faiths to engage in discussions or establish places of worship, resulted in a lower mean score of 0.82. While there is some variability, the near-symmetrical distribution also suggests a balanced overall attitude. When examining religious tolerance in daily socialization, considering factors like forming friendships or engaging in business activities, we obtained a high mean score of 10.50. Although some variability exists, the negatively skewed distribution implies a propensity towards elevated levels of tolerance. Lastly, exploring inter-religious tolerance within the political sphere, specifically the willingness to vote for individuals from different religions for local government positions, revealed a mean score of -0.70. The relatively low standard deviation indicates responses clustered around this mean, and the positively skewed distribution suggests somewhat negative sentiments towards this facet of inter-religious tolerance.

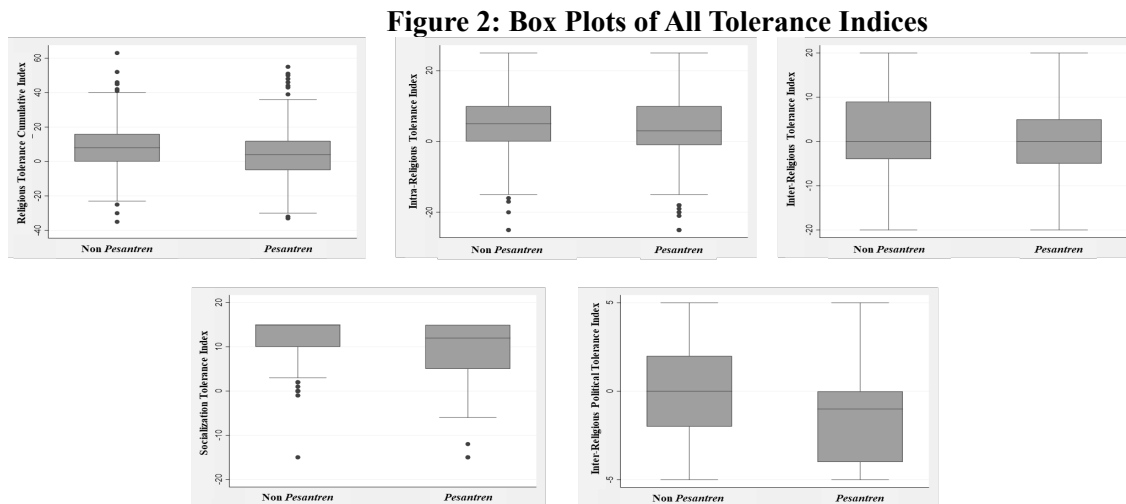
Tabel 2: Comparison of Mean and Standard Deviation Values for Tolerance Indices between Students with and Without *Pesantren* Experience

Tolerance Indices	Non <i>Pesantren</i>		<i>Pesantren</i>	
	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d.
Religious Tolerance Cumulative Index	7.946	14.646	4.389	13.651
Intra-Religious Tolerance Index	5.201	9.156	3.626	9.126
Inter-Religious Tolerance Index	2.013	8.669	0.073	8.259
Socialization Tolerance Index	11.799	5.009	9.672	6.156
Inter-Religious Political Tolerance Index	0.085	3.13	-1.193	3.079

A comprehensive comparison of mean and standard deviation values for religious tolerance between students with and without *Pesantren* experience is presented in Table 2. Students without *Pesantren* experience display a mean score of 7.946 in the Religious Tolerance Cumulative Index, indicating generally positive religious tolerance levels. However, the relatively high standard deviation of 14.646 suggests a wide range of responses within this group. In contrast, students with *Pesantren* experience have a lower mean score of 4.389 and a standard deviation of 13.651, indicating slightly narrower variability and, on average, lower religious tolerance levels. Moving to the Intra-Religious Tolerance Index, students without *Pesantren* experience show a mean score of 5.201 and a standard deviation of 9.156, indicating a moderate level of intra-religious tolerance with some variation. Conversely, students with *Pesantren* experience exhibit a mean score of 3.626 and a standard deviation of 9.126, suggesting slightly lower intra-religious tolerance levels. The Inter-Religious Tolerance Index showcases students without *Pesantren* experience with a mean score of 2.013 and a standard deviation of 8.669, pointing to relatively low inter-religious tolerance with considerable variation. Conversely, students with *Pesantren* experience have an even lower mean score of 0.073 and a standard deviation of 8.259, indicating lower inter-religious tolerance levels than their counterparts.

Shifting to the Socialization Tolerance Index, students without Pesantren experience score a mean of 11.799 and a standard deviation of 5.009, signifying relatively high socialization tolerance with moderate variability. Students with Pesantren experience present a slightly lower mean score of 9.672 and a standard deviation of 6.156, suggesting slightly lower socialization tolerance compared to their peers without such experience. Lastly, the Inter-Religious Political Tolerance Index shows students without Pesantren experience with a mean score of 0.085 and a standard deviation of 3.13, indicating low political inter-religious tolerance with some variation. In contrast, students with Pesantren experience have a mean score of -1.193 and a standard deviation of 3.079, demonstrating even lower levels of inter-religious political tolerance compared to their peers without such experience.

It's worth highlighting that, although students with Pesantren experience generally attain lower scores, the disparities between the indexes remain quite marginal. This implies that, when it comes to various dimensions of tolerance, the indexes for both groups are remarkably similar. Adding to this, a significant observation is that the majority of these indexes reflect positive values, signifying a consistent presence of moderate levels of tolerance in both groups. This insight underscores the notion that, despite some variations, all students exhibit a moderate degree of tolerance across the dimensions under scrutiny. This trend becomes evident when examining the box plot on Figure 2, where all the indices consistently indicate predominantly positive levels of tolerance.



It is noteworthy that, while the scores are generally lower for students with *Pesantren* experience, the differences between the indexes are relatively small, indicating that, across all tolerance aspects, the indexes are almost identical. Furthermore, the majority of these indexes are positive, pointing to a moderate level of tolerance in both groups. This suggests that, despite the variations, all students exhibit moderate levels of tolerance in the examined dimensions. As presented in the box plot, all indices indicate that the level of tolerance mostly positive.

Comparative T-Test Analysis Findings

The results of Levene's Test for Equality of Variances are critical in assessing the validity of our statistical analyses. The test reveals that there is a significant difference in the variances of the Inter-religious Socialization Index (p-value = 0.000) and the Inter-religious Political Tolerance Index (p-value = 0.052). A p-value below 0.05 for the Inter-religious Socialization Index indicates a strong violation of the assumption of homogeneity of variance, suggesting that the spread of scores for this variable is significantly different between groups. Although the p-value for the Inter-religious Political Tolerance Index is slightly above 0.05, it is very close to the threshold, which implies that the variances may not be equal, raising concerns about the reliability of subsequent analyses.

In contrast, for the Intra-religious Tolerance Index, the Inter-religious Tolerance Index, and the Religious Tolerance Cumulative Index, the p-values exceed 0.05. This finding confirms that the assumption of homogeneity of variance holds for these three indices, meaning the distributions of scores among students with and without Pesantren experience are similar.

Given the violation of the homogeneity assumption for some of the variables, we will employ Welch's t-test for our comparative analyses. The Welch t-test is advantageous because it does not require equal variances, making it a robust alternative for assessing differences between group means when variances are unequal. This method will provide more reliable results in comparing the tolerance levels of students with and without Pesantren backgrounds.

Table 3: The Results of Levene's Test and Welch's T-Test of All Tolerance Indices

Variables	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		Welch's t-test		
	F	P-value	T	df	P-value (2-tailed)
Religious Tolerance Cumulative Index	1.989	0.159	3.849	784.071	0.000***
Intra-religious Tolerance Index	0.031	0.861	2.658	825.272	0.008***
Inter-religious Tolerance Index	2.472	0.116	3.518	797.536	0.000***
Inter-religious Socialization Index	37.915	0	5.992	942.956	0.000***
Inter-religious Political Tolerance Index	3.791	0.052	6.337	817.325	0.000***

The Welch t-tests performed for analysis of the impact of the Pesantren experience upon each of these various facets of tolerance really denote some interesting different patterns across students with and without a background in such institutions. Take, for instance, the Religious Tolerance Cumulative Index, which gives a t-statistic of 3.849 with a p-value of 0.0001, indicating that there is actually a very significant difference between these two groups of students in perception regarding religious tolerance. This may mean that those students with Pesantren experience bring a different perspective in understanding religious tolerance compared to those without any experience.

Along the same line, the Intra-religious Tolerance Index, with a t-statistic of 2.658 and a p-value of 0.008, insinuates that students with Pesantren education might think differently about tolerance toward different interpretations within their faith. This supposition teaches caution in how they shall perceive and respect the various Islamic interpretations, probably influenced by teaching and norms set in their place of learning.

Besides, the average value of the Inter-religious Tolerance Index is hugely significantly different among all responding students with a history of experience in Pesantren, with the t-statistic at 3.518 and a p-value of 0.0005. It would mean that tolerance for diverse religious beliefs in students with Pesantren experience may well turn out precisely in ways different from those who do not have such experience. It is further supported that the Inter-religious Socialization Index and the Inter-religious Political Tolerance Index revealed that students who had Pesantren experience showed some particular patterns in their social interaction and political attitude toward other religious groups.

These results confirm that the experiences gained within Pesantren will significantly shape diverse understanding of tolerance among students. Within a school with such a distinguished societal value, although these experiences may foster specific aspects of tolerance, they can nurture alternative perspectives that shape how people engage with religious diversity at large. This layer of complexity is a call for education that would not only reinforce in-group solidarity but also promote openness and understanding toward out-groups.

Discussion

The development of SIT in various educational contexts provides an important framework in which to test the attitudes and behaviors of students undergoing both a unique religious and communal experience. The Pesantren, or the Islamic boarding school in Indonesia, functions not only as a religious

education facility but also as a social environment that molds the identity of its students. This research develops an understanding of how experiences in Pesantren shape attitudes of tolerance by drawing on aspects of Social Identity Theory to analyze different dimensions of tolerance among Islamic university students. The findings point out unique perspectives and ways in which students with and without experiences in Pesantren hold views of inter-religious and intra-religious tolerance.

Social Identity Theory explains that the identity of people is derived from group membership, and these identities are an important modulator of behaviors and perceptions of others. In Pesantren, shared experiences in communal living and Islamic education make students very socially bonded to each other, giving a strong sense of community within the group. This is congruent with prior research, which has illustrated how social identities within educational settings contribute to the shaping of students' attitudes towards both in-group and out-group members. For example, the students from Pesantren will more likely be for the values and norms imposed by their religious group, even though this may come at a certain cost. It may increase intra-group solidarity but also at the expense of how they view religious diversity. This shared identity appears to influence the slightly lower levels of inter-religious tolerance exhibited by students with Pesantren experience compared to non-Pesantren students.

The study's findings suggest that Pesantren experiences play a complex role in shaping tolerance. While Pesantren fosters in-group solidarity and religious mindfulness, it may also lead to relatively lower openness toward religious out-groups. This mirrors the observations of previous studies that examined how Pesantren education influences students' engagement with the broader society. Like Raihani's findings on multicultural education in Pesantren, this study shows that while Pesantren students may develop strong communal ties, their experiences do not necessarily translate into full-fledged inter-religious openness. However, this should not be interpreted as intolerance; rather, it reflects a nuanced form of tolerance shaped by religious teachings and in-group identity. These students demonstrate a willingness to engage with other groups, but their participation in broader social networks may be framed by the values they acquire within their Pesantren education.

Furthermore, intra-religious tolerance among Pesantren students reflects their unique perspective on internal diversity within Islam. The study finds that students with Pesantren experience tend to have a more cautious approach to accepting diverse interpretations within their own faith, possibly due to the doctrinal teachings of their specific religious groups. Previous research highlights how religious education in Pesantren reinforces specific doctrinal views, leading to varying levels of acceptance toward internal differences. This tendency contrasts with the findings of studies on non-Pesantren students, who may exhibit higher tolerance levels due to their exposure to diverse environments without strict religious structuring.

While the findings suggest that Pesantren experiences shape tolerance in both positive and restrictive ways, it is essential to address potential counterarguments. Pesantren education, though contributing to a strong religious identity, can also lead to exclusivity in some cases, as seen in instances where Pesantren students exhibit lower inter-religious political tolerance. Studies such as those by Yusuf & Taufiq highlight the dynamic responses of religious educators in Pesantren who may resist external influences, preferring to maintain traditional religious boundaries. This perspective could explain why some Pesantren students are less open to political diversity involving different religious groups. However, these limitations should be framed within the context of the Pesantren system, which, while fostering group cohesion, also emphasizes religious preservation.

Moreover, it is necessary to acknowledge that Pesantren experiences vary greatly. Different Pesantren emphasize different aspects of religious education, and their curricula can range from conservative to progressive. Previous studies, such as those by Ali, have demonstrated that Pesantren are not homogenous, with some adopting a more inclusive and dialogic approach to interfaith relations, while others maintain a more insular focus. This diversity in Pesantren education must be considered when generalizing the study's findings, as not all Pesantren will produce the same tolerance outcomes among students.

The implications of these findings for educational practices and policy development are significant. Given that Pesantren play a pivotal role in shaping religious and social attitudes, there is an opportunity to integrate more inclusive educational practices within these institutions. For example, interfaith

dialogue programs and broader discussions on religious diversity could be incorporated into the Pesantren curriculum to foster a more balanced approach to tolerance. The insights provided by this study align with the recommendations of previous research on multicultural education in Islamic schools, emphasizing the importance of exposing students to diverse perspectives without compromising their religious identity.

Finally, this study opens avenues for further research. Future studies could explore how different types of Pesantren (ranging from traditional to modern) influence students' tolerance levels over time. Additionally, longitudinal research could examine how these tolerance attitudes evolve as Pesantren alumni engage with broader social and political environments in Indonesia. Comparing the tolerance levels of Pesantren students to those from other Islamic educational institutions may also provide deeper insights into how religious education impacts social cohesion and inter-religious harmony.

This study significantly contributes to the growing body of literature on religious education and tolerance by demonstrating the nuanced role of Pesantren experiences in shaping students' attitudes toward both intra- and inter-religious diversity. While Pesantren students exhibit strong in-group solidarity and a measured approach to tolerance, there are opportunities for enhancing their engagement with broader religious and political diversity through targeted educational reforms.

Conclusion

This study reveals that Pesantren experiences do not necessarily foster higher levels of inter-religious and political tolerance, challenging the common assumption that religious education in Pesantren always leads to broader social openness. The study revealed that on all these counts, students from a Pesantren background exhibit lower tolerance levels compared to other students with no such experiences. This would then imply that the different social identities created in Pesantren, due to communal living and religious teachings, play complex roles in the way students perceive and interact with other religious groups.

This contributes to two literatures on religious education and Social Identity Theory by bringing nuanced visions of the ways in which experiences shape students' tolerance during Pesantren. This indicates that on one hand, while Pesantren education enhances in-group solidarity and religious identity, the latter may decrease openness towards out-groups, particularly within political and inter-religious contexts. This perspective opens up new vision on the conventional view of religious education solely for the purpose of fostering tolerance and gives valuable insights into how the wider social context of Pesantren influences students' attitudes. These findings are important to educators and policymakers working in the development of educational programs that aim at inter-religious understanding and social harmony in diverse societies.

Nevertheless, this study has some limitations. First, this research targets students from three Islamic universities, a population that is not representative of the various experiences at Pesantren across Indonesia. Second, the investigated study had a cross-sectional aspect, which was deprived of the analysis of how tolerance levels change across the period. Future research should further investigate how different types of Pesantren—from traditional to modern—modalities build attitudes of tolerance across time. This understanding would further be enhanced through comparisons involving students from different educational backgrounds, in respect to religious education's impact on social cohesion and inter-religious harmony.

Acknowledgement

This research was supported through a grant from the “*Penelitian, Publikasi Ilmiah, dan Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat (LITAPDIMAS)*” program, by the Rector of UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, numbered 672, year 2023, and dated March 2, 2023.

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