



A Model of Transformative Religious Education: Teaching and Learning Islam in Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor, Indonesia

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Abstract

This research aims to examine character education in pesantrens (Islamic boarding schools, also known as pondok pesantrens) as a model of religious education in transforming the attitudes of students in line with the values and culture of a diverse society. This study is based on documents related to the curriculum and student guidance system, which were confirmed through interviews with leaders and teachers, as well as observations at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor, Indonesia. The research findings indicate that Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor, Indonesia, has implemented a transformative education system. Students have undergone a transformation from traditional, fanatic, and closed values to modern, rational, disciplined, inclusive, independent, and responsible ones. The transformation in students' personalities occurs not only through classroom learning but also through reflective engagement in pesantren management, discussions, and public speaking exercises. The findings of this study imply that the religious education system in pesantrens should prioritize not only

the cognitive aspects of doctrinal religious knowledge, but also involve students in society, fostering open, tolerant, and rational characters.

Keywords: *Islamic Boarding School; Pondok Pesantren; Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor; Teaching and Learning Islam; Transformative Religious Education*

INTRODUCTION

The predominant inclination of Islamic education towards exclusivity in various Islamic educational institutions has resulted in alums who harbor inflexible and intolerant attitudes towards individuals from diverse social and cultural backgrounds. Islamic education has often been viewed as a potential source of radical teachings, aligning with the observed connections between perpetrators of terrorism and intolerance emerging from Islamic boarding schools (Rokhmad, 2012). In his research on the perspectives of Islamic boarding school leaders regarding jihad, violence, and power, Nurrohman (2019) discovered that certain Islamic boarding schools were identified as breeding grounds for the growth of radical movements. The International Crisis Group (ICG) identified analogous concerns related to the presence of Islamic boarding schools associated with Jamaah Islamiah, a radical Islamic organization with ambitions to establish an Islamic state (Prayoga & Sulhan, 2019). Once renowned for their steadfast commitment to fundamental Islamic principles, Islamic boarding schools have evolved into institutions emphasizing impenetrable Islamic distinctiveness, displaying limited adaptability to a pluralistic society (Pohl, 2006).

The secluded environment of certain Islamic boarding schools referred to as *pesantren*, has prompted Islamic education to grapple with diverse challenges, including inter-religious violence, inter-ethnic conflict, and intolerance (Pohl, 2006). Extensive research has been conducted on the Islamic education system within *pesantren*, exploring its dynamics in confronting external challenges. These studies delve into various aspects, including institutional history,

curriculum development, and learning strategies (Steenbrink, 1997; Hefni, 2012; Zarkasyi, 2013; As'ad, 2015). The radical tendencies within Islamic education are linked to incorporating religious doctrines as the foundational elements of the curriculum in Islamic boarding schools (Mujahidin, 2011; Novia, 2016; Asrori, 2017; Suryadi & Mansur, 2018). Concerning learning strategies, there has been a shift in the educational paradigm and learning models, urging Islamic boarding schools to modernize their approach, distinct from traditional indoctrination (Suheri, 2017; Shidiq, 2017; Ritonga et al., 2019). However, these studies have yet to deal with the issue of the relationship between *pesantren* and society. Our view is that in today's society, *pesantren* as an educational institution should represent the transformation of society from a traditional domain into a more modern one to ensure the *pesantren* sustainability.

This paper intends to present the outcomes of our investigation into the perspectives of *pesantren*, *kiyai* (headmaster), and teachers at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor (PDMG) regarding the role of the *pesantren* as a hub for fundamental Islamic instruction. Additionally, we elaborate on how *kiyai* and teachers implement their perceived transformative model to facilitate non-radical religious education. Consequently, we addressed the following research inquiries: (1) How is transformative value inculcation implemented in a *pesantren*? (2) How does a *pesantren* sustain its existence and independence? and (3) How does a *pesantren* effectively model transformative education through its educational system? The results of this study indicated a shift in the orientation of *pesantren* education from traditional teaching methods to transformative character education. This shift aims to instil values such as independence, entrepreneurship, tolerance, and societal engagement, in addition to imparting the values of faith. Scholars contend that imparting transformative values within *pesantren* occurs both in the classroom setting and through

direct interactions involving kyai, students, teachers, and staff with diverse character backgrounds.

The triumph of transformative education in pesantren is contingent upon students reflecting critically on their prevailing values, considering their diverse backgrounds. Given the study's focus on teachers' and students' learning of Islam in an Islamic boarding school, the theoretical framework will be aligned with adult learning theories. Transformative learning theory (TLT) will mainly guide and inform the study. This section provides detailed explanations of TLT, adult learning and critical reflection, religious education, and the Islam learning, along with an exploration of the role of TLT in pesantren.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Transformative Learning Theory

This paper presents the results of a study conducted in Indonesia examining the Islamic learning among teachers and students in an Islamic boarding school. In this section, we employ Mezirow's framework to contextualize the introduction of transformative education in Indonesia and set the stage for the study. According to Mezirow (1994, p.198), transformative learning is a theory of adult learning that aims to “describe and analyze how adults learn to make meaning of their experience.” Mezirow (2003) further defines transformative learning as “learning that transforms problematic frames of reference - sets of fixed assumptions and expectations (habits of mind, meaning perspectives, mindsets) - to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change.” (p.58). This view suggests that adults' way of thinking (frame of reference) can be influenced by their experiences, which can change through reflective practices. This frame of reference may include several aspects of our lives, such as interpersonal relationships,

political views, cultural bias, stereotyped attitudes and practices, moral-ethical norms and religious doctrine (Mezirow, 2003). With our study, this frame of reference may involve cultural bias, religious doctrine, and moral-ethical norms.

Critical reflection is one of the key concepts of Mezirow's TLT deployed in this study. Mezirow (1994, p.222) points out that:

Critical reflection and rational discourse are processes of adult learning emphasized by those cultures experiencing rapid social change in which old traditional authority structures have been weakened, and in which individuals must be prepared to make many diverse decisions on their own.

This statement indicates that in today's fast-changing society, adults are challenged to think critically and rationally about their personal and collective lives and must prepare to move from their old way of doing things to a new approach. In this process of thinking to make changes, adults will use their interpretation skills to make their experience meaningful and as a guide to their actions.

Accelerated changes in social structure, life orientation, and lifestyle in society encourage a paradigm shift in educational management from centralized to participatory models. Hence, there must be an effort to put education in the transformation process in the whole system of social change. Every educational effort must transform the relationship among teachers, students, and institutions. Education prepares qualified resources, occupies a central position in carrying out social change, and spearheads the changes society requires to survive in modern times and anticipate changing situations (Sujarwo, 2014). Humans need education in their lives, and education is a human effort to develop self-potential through learning. Education is a conscious and planned effort to realize the learning process for students to develop their potential and to have religious and spiritual strength, self-control, personality, intelligence, noble character, and skills entailed by themselves, society, nation, and state

(Sisdiknas, 2003). Learning is an interaction process of learners, educators, and all resources in a learning environment (Hanafy, 2014; Marbun, 2019). Transformative education is extensively linked with transformative learning, which will be discussed next.

The transformative learning theory (TLT) is a constructivist theory that attempts to explain how adult educators promote the transformation of the personal perspectives and beliefs their students hold (Williams, 2013). Transformative learning is a process of fundamental change in a person regarding appearances, characteristics, and perspectives. This change occurs after a person succeeds in understanding and critically interpreting his life experiences so that he becomes an inclusive person, accepts renewal of ideas, and develops to be better than before. Learning outcomes related to cognitive development are related to changes in student perspectives. Students in transformative learning are conditioned to reflect critically and improve their abilities according to their potential (Mezirow, 1978; Rosmilawati, 2017). Transformative learning involves critically reflecting assumptions that may occur in group interaction or independently. Testing the validity of a transformed frame of reference in communicative learning requires critical dialectical discourse (Mezirow, 1978; Taylor, 2008). Critical-dialectical discourse refers to creating dynamic relationships among teachers, students, and a shared body of knowledge to promote student learning and personal growth (White & Nitkin, 2014).

Transformative Learning Theory, Religious Education, and the Learning of Islam

Religious education serves as a guiding reference for individuals, influencing their religious values, and practices and shaping their thinking and behavior in society (Barnes, 2016). Religious education introduces goodness and humanistic values, particularly emphasizing religious values within the frame of

knowledge (Parker, 2014). Religious education represents an integration of intercultural studies and education, prioritizing human rights. This orientation leads to religious education learning emphasizing inter-religious dialogue (Gross, 2011). Within religious education, teachers and students engage in discussions to reinforce knowledge of previously applied religious values and practices (Rymarz & Belmonte, 2020). Religious education serves as a crucial avenue for transmitting religious values through an improved pedagogical curriculum, influencing the strengthening of faith (Reck, 2012; Koukounaras-Liagkis, 2019). However, it is not without weaknesses, as it may sometimes inadvertently encourage intolerance among individuals. Consequently, there is a recognized need for multi-religious education to foster social unity and mutual respect (Clayton & Stevens, 2018).

Religious learning in schools often aims at social harmony and tolerance among citizens through understanding civic beliefs and ethics to provide moral education so that students can treat others rightly (Clayton & Stevens, 2018). It is achieved through family, peers, and schools, which involves accepting values, standards, community habits, and adaptability in a larger social context (Gross, 2011). The socialization of religious identity involves three basic dimensions: (1) The content of teachings (elements of faith, sacred texts, sacred rituals, and religious rituals); (2) Structure (monolithic or pluralistic); and (3) Process (indoctrination through learning, repetition, memorization of sacred text, identification, exploration, and reflection) (Gross, 2010). Some difficulties identified in religious education studies include bad practice, low-class activity, weak resources, especially a shortage of qualified expert teachers, lack of articulation, and teachers needing more understanding of the conceptualization and objectives of educational goals (Moulin, 2015).

The Role of TLT in Islamic Boarding School (*Pesantren*)

Mezirow (1994) claims that transformation theory is a universal model for adult learning. This so-called 'transformative learning theory' (TLT) applies to the learning cultures of the Islamic boarding school. According to Mezirow (1994), learning is an 'interpretation of the meaning of one's experience as a guide to action.'

By blending the school curriculum with religious values, the Islamic boarding school offers a well-balanced education for students. The aim of *pesantren* is to prepare its students for the challenges of globalization to modernize the institution (Putro, Suyanto & Suryono, 2019). The *pesantren* offers a curriculum that combines modern technology with Islamic teachings, allowing students to fully grasp the principles and values of the religion (Huda et al., 2020). Ever since Kulliyatul Mu'allimin al-Islamiyah (KMI) was founded on December 19, 1936, coinciding with the 10th anniversary of PMDG, the international curriculum has been implemented at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor Ponorogo (PMDG) (Zarkasyi, 2005). As the founder of KMI and with his eleven years of *pesantren* education at Sumatra Thawalib, West Sumatra, Indonesia, KH Imam Zarkasyi played an influential role in the design and development of the curriculum. The *pesantren* has evolved into an international curriculum, so they have moved away from traditional learning approaches. As a modern Islamic school, KMI offers a six-year education program comprising three years of Junior High School and three years of Senior High School. The KMI provides Islamic and non-Islamic subjects, and the languages used for instruction and daily communication include Arabic and English (Zarkasyi, 2005). The *pesantren* has evolved into an international curriculum, so they have moved away from traditional learning approaches. The *pesantren*'s curriculum accentuates the Qur'an and Hadith values, creating intelligent, religious, well-mannered, competent

individuals (Arifin et al., 2018). The Islamic boarding school combines three paradigms of knowledge: (1) Paradigm of science or knowledge gained through reasons and senses such as Fiqh; (2) Logical paradigm or knowledge with abstract objects such as philosophy; and (3) Mystical paradigm obtained by taste (Syakroni et al., 2019). Furthermore, PMDG's bilingual (trilingual) learning environment and fully facilitated boarding contribute to its exclusive private school status (Efriзал, 2012; Vignato, 2012; Parker, Hoon, & Raihani, 2014).

Concerning transformative learning theory, the PMDG's first paradigm can be linked to Mezirow's critical reflection, leading to significant personal transformation. Mezirow (1997) maintains that critical reflection is equally required to support, among others, a social, cultural and educational system. Further, Mezirow (1997) states that transformation in frames of reference or way of knowing occurs through critical reflection. This assertion indicates that in transforming points of view, it is essential for individuals to reflect both individually and socially.

In the context of *pesantren*, earlier studies have examined how the *kiyai* and teachers practice the reflection. For example, in their analysis of the implementation of the Sufism-based character education model in *pesantren* using Paulo Freire's transformative education theory (cited in Wajdi, Lubis, and Siregar (2019), Wajdi, Lubis and Siregar, (2019) found that daily Sufism rituals as a unique model of character education practiced by teachers and students are based on solid Sufism brotherhood. This study proves that *pesantren* has a vigorous role in implementing character education for transformative education in Indonesia. The study's limitation is that it focuses on clerics and teachers as central figures. Transformative education highlights students' independence and critical reflection. Therefore, critical reflection must be framed in a learning system that encourages critical reflection and independent learning at the *pesantren*.

Concerning radicalism, transformative learning is significant in preventing radicalism in *pesantren*. Radicalism means being fanatical to one opinion and negating the opinions of others, disbelieving other groups that disagree, and being textual in understanding religious texts without considering the essential purpose of shariah or *maqashid al-shari'ah* (Masduqi, 2013). The violent Islamic groups, demonstrating intolerance of differences and self-righteous and terrorizing behaviors, have contributed to social concerns, including education; these characteristics of Islamic groups indicate radical Islam. Moreover, in certain instances, Islamic groups openly advocate for the replacement of the state policy of *Pancasila* with a religious basis. Additionally, there are cases where individuals hastily label others as infidels, thaghut (to go beyond the measure), and heretics.

Moreover, the Middle Eastern's invasion of transnational Islam adopting violent Islamic ideology is immensely worrying for people and the government. Strategic approaches to eradicate radical Islamic ideology or deradicalization must be prepared in all areas or institutions. Students who are at risk of being exposed to radical Islam need to be educated in an educational institution as it is an ideal platform to develop students' understanding of moderate Islam. This is called preventive deradicalization (Rokhmad, 2012).

Tolerant and inclusive transformative education should be implemented in *pesantren* and other Islamic educational institutions. This type of education involves a teaching and learning process that prioritizes openness in responding to differences of opinion. It should be built on the character of students who prioritize humility, generosity, friendliness, and politeness in respecting others. Additionally, it emphasizes the importance of emotional control in addressing differences. Tolerant and inclusive Islamic education must also be rooted in a critical culture where students can reprimand and

advise if any member of society undermines the social code of ethics (Masduqi, 2013).

Pesantren plays a crucial role as an agent in fostering Islamic and Indonesian values, emphasizing a balanced understanding of Islamic teachings and the cultivation of religious moderation values. Promoting religious moderation is achieved through endeavours to harmonize the comprehension of Islamic teachings while incorporating the nation's noble values that evolve in society. This approach aims to ideologically establish a framework of consciousness that embraces diversity, encompassing aspects such as culture, tribe, ethnicity, and religion. The model of religious understanding within *pesantren* does not lean towards conservative attitudes resistant to the reality of national diversity. Simultaneously, *pesantren* does not emphasize a learning process that tends towards a liberal attitude, lacking responsibility for maintaining Islamic values. Instead, the moderate understanding model is chosen, aligning with *pesantren*'s scientific development tradition (Muhtarom & Fuad, 2020).

METHOD

Research Scope

This study aimed to build knowledge and understanding of how transformative learning was constructed in the context of PMDG. Mezirow's (2003) discussion on research methods in transformative learning theory refers to Habermas' (1981) two types of learning: instrumental and communicative. Mezirow (2003) asserts that qualitative research is often more suitable for communicative learning studies. Mezirow further asserts that communicative learning emphasizes analyzing a person's meaning when communicating with an interlocutor. Understanding communications emphasizes "rightness, sincerity, authenticity, and appropriateness rather than assessing a truth claim" (Mezirow, 2003, p. 59). This statement

indicates that someone's ways of thinking, frame of reference, or meaning structure are closely tied to their experiences, intentions, and beliefs and are not dictated by a predefined statement. In this qualitative approach, examining adults' reasoning about their beliefs aids researchers in reaching a possible judgement (critical-dialectical discourse). The development of someone's logic involves 'analogic-abductive inference', signifying that the reasoning of research participants contributes to the development of 'an abstract conceptualization' (Mezirow, 2003).

Research Design, Research Site, and Research Participants

Following Mezirow's (2003) statement above, we adopted a qualitative case study design in our research, a similar approach used by Zarkasyi (2005) where he utilized a transformative learning theory in the context of *pesantren* at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor Ponorogo (PMDG). PMDG has, for almost 100 years since its inception, defined itself as a modern *pesantren* that is not affiliated with any particular religious affiliations (Zarkasyi, 2005). The PMDG, located in Gontor, East Java, Indonesia, was opted as the research setting because of its availability and accessibility (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002; Yin, 2009), where the three Indonesian authors have access to the context through a *kyai*, the founder of PMDG, in the intended *pesantren*. The PMDG's founders, leaders, and teachers have different religious backgrounds and represent multi-ethnic groups. The *pesantren* founder is commonly known as *Kyai*. A *kyai* holds a strategic position, leveraging networks of relationships to facilitate the exchange of ideas and resources across local, regional, and international boundaries (Buresh, 2002). Similarly, PMDG's students are multinational, including Indonesian, Malay, Bruneian, and Thai. As an independent and modern *pesantren*, PMDG is academically and financially independent and is not legally obligated to follow the national curriculum (Zarkasyi, 2005).

This research focused on the overall educational process related to values, orientation, educational goals, and the learning system at PMDG. We conducted the study for two years, from February 2018 to January 2020, and collected the data from observations of daily, weekly and monthly student activities and annual activities such as orientation week (*khutbatul `arsy*) attended by all students.

Following Mezirow et al.'s (1975) qualitative research design, we conducted four one-to-two-hour semi-structured in-depth interviews. The participants included the *kyai*, who holds the highest-ranking position in the leadership hierarchy of PMDG, the PMDG director, and two experienced teachers. The aim was to gain insights into how the personnel at PMDG perceive the overarching function of the pesantren as a center for fundamental Islamic teaching and how they construct transformative education. All interview participants were male, with the two teachers in their mid-fifties. The *kyai* and school director, aged in their seventies and sixties, held authoritative roles within the pesantren, while the two teachers served as classroom executors. All attendees were male, as the central PMDG is exclusively tailored for male students. The pseudonyms employed in this report were deliberated and consented to by the participants, except for KH Imam Zarkasyi, the founder, whose contributions to PMDG are extensively referenced in this study.

We observed classroom learning activities fostering shared discussions and public speaking training sessions. After some time in the field, we also acted as interviewers to gather information.

Data Triangulation

Our qualitative data were collected through documents, in-depth interviews, and research diaries. Document reviews were carried out to examine and analyze relevant documents. In analyzing the documents, we applied document analysis techniques, involving curriculum, program guides, PMDG magazines, books, journal

articles, and research reports. The PMDG magazine used was *Wardun: Warta Dunia Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor*. Books consisted of a biography of KH. Zarkasyi, and a management book entitled *Manajemen Pesantren: Pengalaman Pondok Modern Gontor (Pesantren Management: Experience of Pondok Modern Gontor)* written by KH. Abdullah Syukri Zarkasyi (the son of KH Imam Zarkasyi), and PMDG relevant books published by PMDG and their alums. Meanwhile, journal articles incorporated and research reports embraced. We deployed such documents in our study to find out all learning programs at the *pesantren* and triangulate data with the testimonies of alums and other researchers who have conducted studies at PMDG.

Data Analysis

Following Mezirow's transformative learning theory (TLT), we have employed the data analysis technique used by Mezirow et al. (1975). Their methodology and rationale chapter highlighted a descriptive analysis technique with explanatory and predictive value. In their methodology and rationale chapter, Mezirow et al. (1975, p.10) suggested a descriptive analysis technique as "one that would have explanatory and predictive value, of key qualitative factors that could be fashioned from insightful generalizations about evolving programs." Our understanding of this perspective is that engaging in descriptive analysis is a valuable practice for course or program designers. It enables them to acquire insights and make predictions by leveraging key qualitative factors derived from perceptive generalizations about the programs they are currently developing. This approach aligns well with our analysis of the PMDG as a center for Islamic teaching that strives to cultivate transformative learning to address the challenges posed by globalization. In our descriptive analysis, we employed selected and devised procedures to comprehend and generalize the evolving interaction processes among students, staff, and administrators at PMDG. Indeed, utilizing selected

and devised procedures in our descriptive analysis was crucial for explaining how transformative education programs operate at PMDG. It is important to note that, as suggested by the case study design used in our research, the results of this study expressly represent a case study of PMDG in the East Java province of Indonesia. Therefore, the findings can only be generalized to other contexts if those contexts exhibit similar characteristics in terms of situations and participants, as observed in this study.

While Mezirow et al. (1975) utilized the descriptive analysis technique in a comparative study involving fieldwork and survey methods, reflecting a mixed-method research design, it is essential to note that their data analysis technique differs from ours. Therefore, our analysis procedures encompass various steps, as advised by Miles et al. (2018), including raw data collection, partial data processing involving write-ups, transcriptions, commented-on versions, data coding, memos or researchers' reflections on the conceptual meaning of the data, search and retrieval records, data displays, report texts, and a general chronological log or documentation of data collection and analysis work, along with an index of all the materials mentioned above. We adhered to all the recommended procedures, analyzing the data collected from documents, interviews, and research diaries that encapsulated our observations throughout the two-year research period. We engaged in multiple data readings to comprehend their meaning and identify emerging themes. Subsequently, the data were analyzed and interpreted.

RESULTS

Based on our data analyses, three major themes emerged, which will be further discussed below. In the first section, the data analysis reporting is linked with the issue of PMDG's philosophical values,

followed by a discussion of the PMDG curriculum and the final section of the findings concerning the PMDG's learning strategy.

Philosophical Values

Our document review and in-depth interviews suggested that the PMDG education system has been built on the fundamental values formulated by its founders. These fundamental values are encapsulated in a motto, Panca Jiwa (Five Spirits), and Panca Jangka (Five Terms), as outlined in the book "Manajemen Pesantren: Pengalaman Pondok Modern Gontor (*Management of Pesantren: Insights from PMDG*)."

Besides, the core values of PMDG play an integral and comprehensive role in shaping all policies within the institution. The values and policies of PMDG are communicated to all students annually during the Khutbatul' Arsy event. The program serves as an orientation and introduction period designed to acquaint individuals with the entirety of the PMDG institution, ensuring they perceive PMDG with the attention and consideration it deserves (Zarkasyi, 2005).

PMDG's guiding principle is embodied in its motto, which focuses on developing individuals with solid ethics, physical wellness, extensive knowledge, and open-mindedness. A virtuous individual is of the utmost importance and represents spiritual growth. The concept of a healthy body is encapsulated in the phrase *al-'Aql al-Salim fi al-Jism al-Salim*, emphasizing that a sound mind resides in a healthy body. Having a wide range of knowledge means avoiding binary thinking, as PMDG does not acknowledge the division between religious and non-religious studies. Beyond mere knowledge acquisition, students cultivate methodology and engage in critical and rational thinking to fully comprehend new knowledge. Free thinking does not entail absolute freedom. Freedom, within the realm of thought at PMDG, does not negate the principles of religion and nation. In nurturing freedom of thought, the institution educates

students to evolve into *mujaddid* (reformers) who refrain from idolizing any individual, including a kyai. This is the last phase, which students can only enjoy after going through the previous three basic foundations (Zarkasyi, 2005).

As an Islamic institution, PMDG plays a significant role in shaping values, and the shared values within the PMDG environment include sincerity, modesty, independence, *ukhuwwah Islamiyah* (Islamic brotherhood), and freedom, thus so-called *Panca Jiwa*, meaning the five values (Zarkasyi, 2005) as elaborated in the PMDG document:

Panca Jiwa represents the moral values that form the foundation of the character of individuals associated with PMDG, including students, teachers, kyai, and even the kyai's family. Sincerity, the fundamental essence of all values, entails engaging in actions without seeking specific benefits or personal gain. The founders of PMDG exhibit sincerity by generously donating the entire PMDG asset, except for the kyai's private residence. Modesty permeates the ethos of life at PMDG, creating a harmonious atmosphere. Instances of modesty are evident in the kyai's private life, from how he dresses and eats to his overall behavior, serving as a role model for students to embrace a modest lifestyle. Self-sufficiency or independence is the capability to assist oneself. A self-reliant individual is capable of learning and attending to all their needs without consistently relying on others. A self-reliant institution can thrive based on its capabilities and does not consistently depend on external assistance.

Nevertheless, PMDG does not rely on support from external sources to foster its development. The foundation for interactions within the PMDG system is built upon Islamic brotherhood, involving students, kyai, and teachers. The essence of brotherhood cultivates a readiness to share both joys and sorrows. This sense of sharing is anticipated not just during their tenure at PMDG but is intended to evolve into a lasting trait for students upon their reintegration into society. The spirit of freedom is intertwined with the autonomy of choices, as evidenced by PMDG's liberty in shaping its curriculum and academic programs. (Zarkasyi, 2005).

Curriculum

Kulliyatul Mu'allimin al-Islamiyah (KMI), the Islamic Teachers College, is the institution responsible for overseeing the academic pursuits of PMDG students. The grading system comprises both regular and intensive programs. The PMDG teacher, Budi, said:

The regular program is designed for those who have completed six years of Elementary School, covering grades 1-6 consecutively. In this program, grades 1-3 at KMI are equivalent to Junior High School, and grades 4-6 are equivalent to Senior High School. On the other hand, the intensive program at KMI is a four-year track for High School graduates, encompassing grades 1, 3, 5, and 6. Intensive classes are conducted explicitly in grades 1 and 3, labeled as Intensive Class 1 and 3. Grade 5 follows the regular program, accommodating graduates of Elementary School who have progressed to grade 5. (Budi/05/18).

Regarding curriculum, in his discussion on the PMDG, Zarkasyi, the PMDG founder, said, "The curriculum at KMI strikes a balance between religious and non-religious content, featuring textbooks compiled by KH. Imam Zarkasyi, the founder of PMG." (Zarkasyi, 2005). The KMI curriculum integrates 100% religious lessons and 100% non-religious lessons, emphasizing that non-religious knowledge holds a pivotal position equal to religious knowledge, considering them both essential components. The KMI curriculum encompasses eight areas of study: (1) Arabic language, (2) *Dirasah Islamiyah* (Islamic studies), (3) *Al-tarbiyah wa al-ta'lim* (education and teaching), (4) English language, (5) Mathematics, (6) Natural Sciences, (7) Social Sciences, and (8) Indonesian Language and Civic Education. Intensive language instruction is reinforced by delivering lessons in either Arabic or English. *Fiqh* (jurisprudence) lessons in specific classes are conducted in Arabic, considering that students comprehend the language. The *Fiqh* lesson comprises straightforward and uncomplicated material. First-grade students study the *Fiqh* of worship in Indonesian. From second to sixth grade, students delve

into Fiqh subjects such as *mu'amalat* (economy), *munakahat* (marriage), and *jinayah* (criminal), with instruction delivered in Arabic, referencing standard Arabic textbooks (Zarkasyi, 2005).

Our research diaries indicated that observations of classroom learning revealed a mandatory use of Arabic and English in daily conversations for students within six months of their arrival at PMDG.

I observed that students are urged to employ spoken and written Arabic and English in everyday conversations. In their extracurricular programs, conducted three times a week, both in the morning and evening, students are prompted to speak in Indonesian, Arabic, and English. Speaking practice aims to nurture self-confidence, refine language skills, and create materials relevant to national and international issues. Twice a week, one-hour classroom sessions are dedicated to activities focused on enhancing vocabulary and engaging in conversations with teachers and students. The goal is to promote students' oral communication skills. (RD/09/18)

As mentioned in "Manajemen Pesantren: Pengalaman Pondok Modern Gontor," the KMI enhances language skills through various activities, including book discussions, pilgrimage training, writing scientific works, teaching practice, economic study tours, and conducting debrief sessions for students before completing their studies at KMI. *Fath al-kutub* is a practice for reading books, particularly classical ones, to develop and assess students' proficiency in Arabic. Students are assigned specific discussion tasks related to issues in faith, jurisprudence, hadith, interpretation, and morals. Students must present a written report detailing the outcomes of their discussions to their supervisor. Students in grades 5 and 6 engage in this collective activity for one week. *Fath al-mu'jam* involves fifth graders in the practice of using an Arabic dictionary. *Al-rihlah al-iqtishadiyah* is a direct study of business and entrepreneurship (Zarkasyi, 2005).

Learning Strategy

PMDG employs educational strategies to achieve its educational objectives, following a learning and teaching program outlined by Hisham, the Director of PMDG, as indicated in his statements below: The resources of PMDG, including kyai, teachers, students, and staff, along with its infrastructure, are dedicated to fostering an ideal educational environment. PMDG welcomes students from diverse Islamic backgrounds, including those affiliated with organizations like Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah. The guiding principle embraced by the Trimurti (Three founders of PMDG) is "Berdiri di atas dan untuk semua golongan" (Standing above and for all groups). Therefore, PMDG accommodates all Muslims who aspire to study there without discrimination based on their various Islamic affiliations. (Hisham/02/19) The PMDG students from various backgrounds of Islamic affiliations learned a tolerance attitude towards diversity, as said by Syam:

Students enjoy the freedom to explore diverse perspectives (khilafiyah) and articulate their opinions with robust arguments. One approach to fostering tolerance for disagreement involves teaching khilafiyah, utilizing *Bidayat al-Mujtahid*, a book dedicated to addressing differences of opinion. PMDG leaders maintain strict guidance, particularly concerning khilafiyah issues, and students who deviate from the directions of PMDG caregivers are held accountable. (Syam/10/18) Budi said that PMDG requires students to practise self-management.

In a commitment to support students throughout their academic journey at PMDG, a student-managed organization named "Organisasi Pelajar Pondok Modern Students (OPPM)", or the "Organization of Modern Islamic Boarding School", has been established. This organization operates under PMDG's supervision and support, preparing students with real-life societal experiences. (Budi/05/18)

Zarkasyi elucidates that the scouts at PMDG play a pivotal role in education, contributing to shaping personality, mental development, and the cultivation of noble morals. The mandatory scouting activity for all PMDG students has been instituted under the name "Bintang Islam" since the inception of PMDG (Zarkasyi, 2005). The student dormitories at PMDG, commonly called 'rayon,' are autonomously managed by the students. This hostel organization operates under the structural oversight of OPPM, the caretaker of the student activity center. Established in July 1967, OPPM has been a platform for nurturing and facilitating students' creativity to gain practical experiences. Administrators of OPPM are democratically elected students from the final grade (grade 6). The election for the chairman and board of OPPM takes place annually. OPPM encompasses divisions overseeing various student activities, including education, information, health, sports, arts, libraries, cooperatives, student canteens, languages, laundry, photography, and environmental hygiene. 6th graders handle OPPM, while 5th graders manage *rayon* organization with the assistance of 3rd and 4th graders. In the cadre method, the selection of board members in dormitories follows a democratic management process that includes a defined job description and organizational rules. (Zarkasyi, 2005).

Mushi, another teacher, noted:

The assignment of students to dormitories is temporary. Students do not remain in one room or dormitory throughout their tenure at PMDG. Annually, a dormitory exchange takes place, allowing students to move from one dormitory to another. Every semester sees a rearrangement of rooms within a dormitory. This practice is implemented to offer students diverse life experiences, encompassing aspects of friendship, culture, and traditions.

Furthermore, PMDG places a strong emphasis on student discipline to bolster the learning system. One of the methods employed by PMDG to instil discipline is through *tabkir*, which is the obligation for students to enter classes on time. This staff carry out KMI activity by controlling

students' access to dormitories, kitchens, and other student areas to help them develop their time management skills. (Mushi/02/19)

Our research diaries' notes indicate that the learning schedule is structured into two sessions (morning and evening). Morning lessons are scheduled from 07:00-12:50, with two breaks (08:30-09:00 and 11:15-11:30). The study time is distributed across six teaching slots, each lasting 45 minutes. Additionally, 1st to 4th graders are required to attend classes from 14:00-15:00. In additional classes, the instructional material comprises the core content of each curriculum, aiming to provide students with a more profound understanding of specific subjects. Furthermore, 4th and 5th graders are allocated afternoon lessons for teaching practicum opportunities. An afternoon lesson supervisor supervises afternoon class teaching. The daily schedule for afternoon lessons mirrors that of the KMI staff, requiring teachers to arrive in classes punctually, prepare teaching materials, and assess their teaching. This includes overseeing classrooms and student dormitories. Weekly teacher coaching sessions, referred to as *Kemisan*, occur every Thursday, involving PMDG leaders and KMI directors. This serves as a platform to align perspectives and communicate crucial information about weekly PMDG activities and the development and evaluation of teaching and learning. PMDG has implemented a supervision system for teachers, where they prepare their teaching materials before lessons, and this preparation is reviewed and approved by supervisors or senior teachers. The teaching materials encompass lesson planning, incorporating subject matter, presentation stages, teaching methods, and evaluation components.

Table 1

Participation of PMDG Students and Teachers in the Cultivation of Noble Values.

Philosophical Values (The Five Spirits)	Role Model and Values Learnt	Transformative Values
Sincerity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Kyai</i> contributes to PMDG's assets, including those from their personal properties. - <i>Kyai</i> and teachers do not receive a nominal salary; however, PMDG ensures their welfare. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diligence Sincerity Responsibility Discipline
Modesty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -There is no distinction in the quality of living quarters between <i>Kyai</i> and the PMDG building, emphasizing equality. -There is no differentiation between rich and poor students. -The construction of PMDG buildings follows the principle of fulfilling essential needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confidence Concern Humbleness
Self -Sufficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -PMDG is self-reliant and does not depend on external assistance. -PMDG students manage various aspects of their needs, including shops, canteens, kitchens, finances, secretariats, dormitories, sports, and courses. -PMDG students actively maintain cleanliness across various areas of the institution, including dormitories, courtyards, mosques, classrooms, and offices. - Students at PMDG collaborate under supervision in the construction of PMDG buildings, contributing to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Independence Responsibility Criticality Professionalism Confidence

	developing and maintaining the institution's infrastructure.	
Islamic Brotherhood	-Students at PMDG share their joys and sorrows, fostering a sense of community and mutual support within the institution. -Students collaborate in activities such as managing organizations, participating in sports, night guarding, engaging in speech training, and contributing to scouting activities at PMDG.	Nationalism Inclusiveness Rationality Tolerance
Freedom	-The PMDG independently formulates its curriculum and academic programs, free from external influence or control. -The PMDG remains unaffiliated with any specific mass organizations or political parties, maintaining its autonomy and independence.	Criticality Reflection Transformation Creativity Democracy Inclusiveness Tolerance

Source: Primary data.

Educational Goals and System for Assessing Achievements

In the book *"Manajemen Pesantren: Pengalaman Pondok Modern Gontor (Management of Pesantren: Insights from PMDG)"* and according to our observations as documented in our research diaries, KMI conducts learning assessments for 1st to 6th graders using three formats, which include daily exams, mid-year exams, and year-end exams. The 6th graders are mandated to undergo mid-year exams encompassing all subjects studied from grades 1 to 5, and a concluding final exam is administered in their last academic year. In 6th grade, students must undergo various assessments, including a practical test, to qualify as an imam for Friday prayers and a preacher at Jami Mosque. Additionally, they are evaluated on their ability to lead

prayers in student rooms through tests and practical exercises in collaboration with KMI staff overseeing education and teaching. Next, the teaching practice exam (*al-tarbiyah al-'amaliyah*) for 6th graders is conducted in 1st - 5th grader classrooms under the supervision of senior teachers (Zarkasyi, 2005).

DISCUSSION

Transformation of Values

The results of our data analysis indicated that PMDG establishes a model of character transformation education for students in Indonesian Islamic boarding schools, fostering independence in internalizing noble values of religion and culture. PMDG formulates core philosophical values by critically reflecting on religious values and addressing various social issues. The independence of PMDG is initiated through efforts to distance itself from the Indonesian government. PMDG does not adhere to the national education curriculum established by the government. Instead, it has developed a comprehensive curriculum and institutional management system to implement educational programs that prioritize the development of student characters alongside a thorough understanding of the subject matter.

The PMDG addresses social conflicts within the Indonesian community arising from ideological and religious differences by emphasizing the value of Islamic brotherhood (*ukhuwwah Islamiyah*) without making distinctions based on Islamic affiliations. The cultivation of a critical and moderate character, centered amidst various religions, religious schools, and cultures, is imparted to all students at PMDG. The PMDG adopts the motto "Stand above and for all groups". The *Kyai* and PMDG teachers serve as role models in character education for students because they are not affiliated with specific religious organizations. PMDG imparts all students a critical

and moderate character by encouraging them to stand amid diverse religions, religious schools, and cultures.

PMDG meets society's requirements for a robust, healthy, open-minded, and progressive generation with its motto, highlighting the development of high order thinking, physical well-being, knowledge, and free-thinking Muslim believers. This ethos is personified through foundational values known as Panca Jiwa (Five Spirits), encompassing sincerity, modesty, independence, ukhuwwah Islamiyah, and freedom. These values are consistently socialized, practiced, and enforced within the education system by all education components of PMDG. The value of Islamic brotherhood, devoid of considerations of race and ethnicity, is consistently demonstrated in students' learning patterns. The students are organized based on their hometowns, called consulates, but they are encouraged to expand their daily interactions beyond peers of the exact origin. Each room is composed of students hailing from diverse hometowns. Their allocation to these rooms is flexible, as they are periodically rotated, allowing PMDG students to engage with a diverse array of culturally heterogeneous peers.

Integrating inclusive and non-fanatical religious principles in the PMDG learning system aims to emphasize the mastery of Arabic, enabling students to refer to the sources of religious texts directly. Students in grades 5 and 6 are equipped with the capability to study various classical religious references. Fifth graders are also encouraged to foster open-mindedness by studying *Bidayat al-Mujtahid* on *Fiqh* or Islamic law, which involves comparing Islamic affiliations and understanding their arguments. Engaging in critical learning and thinking about religion can prevent students from developing fanatical exclusivity, transforming them into tolerant and inclusive individuals. The PMDG students are given numerous opportunities to reflect on social issues beyond the confines of PMDG

and respond appropriately to these diverse challenges. They have undergone training in delivering speeches in three languages: Indonesian, English, and Arabic. They take turns delivering speeches in front of their peers on specific themes related to real social issues. Outside classroom activities stimulate critical thinking and foster the courage to express opinions publicly.

PMDG's decision to stand amidst diverse religious affiliations was historically a critical reflection of national issues. During that period, Indonesian Muslims faced a potential division between reformer and traditionalist groups. When PMDG was established in 1926, the reform movement gave rise to religious organizations like Persis and the Muhammadiyah. The reformist movement triggered the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) response, which defended cultural traditions. The intersection of reformist and traditionalist groups eventually resulted in conflict among Indonesian Muslims (Noer, 1982). This critical reflection shaped the personalities of the founders of PMDG, known as *Trimurti*, namely KH. Ahmad Sahal, KH. Imam Zarkasyi, and KH. Zainudin Fananie, making them open-minded and non-fanatical toward any particular religious affiliations. The three brothers had experiences in Dutch government public schools and religious education in traditionalist and modernist Islamic boarding schools.

Ensuring the Continuity of PMDG

An independent and critical stance often raises suspicions and may lead to tensions with the government. Criticizing government policies can be viewed as opposition to the state. Educational institutions may be required to align with all values set by the state to conform to government programs. To sustain the principles of values and character, Islamic boarding schools need to maintain positive relations with the government to ensure that the government's direction does not solely dictate changes.

PMDG instils the value of independence by reinforcing internal institutions with the principle of 'Berdikari' (standing on one's own feet) in management, nurturing, learning, and funding. PMDG cultivates financial independence, avoiding dependence on government or private assistance. PMDG establishes diverse initiatives to bolster its funding while instilling entrepreneurial values in students. Senior students who are members of the Organisasi Pelajar Pondok Modern (OPPM; Students Organization of Modern Islamic Boarding School) and scouts manage various business units. These initiatives, including student cooperatives, student shops, and canteens, aim to impart the values of independence and entrepreneurship. The practical application and internalization of the value of independence ultimately contribute to transforming students' personalities.

PMDG's connection with society is evident through its cultivation of solid relationships with alums, viewing them as family and representatives of PMDG in society. Although not affiliated with specific religious affiliations or community organizations, PMDG does not restrict its alums from actively participating in community and religious organizations beyond the *pesantren*. The PMDG founder, Zarkasyi, mentioned that PMDG alums have assumed leadership roles in prominent Islamic organizations, including KH. Dien Syamsudin served as the Chairman of Muhammadiyah from 2005 to 2010 and from 2010-2015, and KH. Hasyim Muzadi served as the Chairman of Nahdlatul Ulama from 1999 to 2004 and 2005 to 2009. The active involvement of PMDG alums aligns with the founders' message, which encourages students to engage in community activities based on their backgrounds, be it Nahdlatul Ulama or Muhammadiyah, upon graduation.

Moreover KH. Additionally, KH. Idham Khalid, a PMDG alumnus who served as the Chairman of Nahdlatul Ulama from 1956

to 1984 and as Deputy Prime Minister of Indonesia in the Ali Sastroamidjojo II Cabinet and Djuanda Cabinet, emphasized in his testimony, "We are from NU family and still members of NU after studying in Gontor. We are the alumni whom *Kyai* and teachers of Gontor hope. We are good NU members forever and not blind fanatics." (PMDG, 1996).

The independent nature of PMDG, unaffiliated with specific religious schools of thought, coupled with the substantial contributions of its alums across various organizations – religious and non-religious, private, and governmental – ensures the enduring strength and relevance of PMDG over time. PMDG alums, actively engaged in diverse sectors, naturally embody the PMDG mission and serve as institutional support, contributing to maintaining consistency in values and the education system. This tradition is particularly crucial amidst the cultural and political pressures stemming from the Indonesian government's dynamic landscape of national education policies (Steenbrink, 1997; Hefni, 2012; Zulfikri, 2017).

Islamic Boarding School as a Model for Transformative Education

The shift in paradigm within Islamic boarding school education, transitioning from a focus on cognitive academic achievements to an emphasis on character building, has positioned this Islamic education institution as a model for transformative character education. The objective of education extends beyond academic excellence, aiming to establish a set of noble values for students. These values include indicators such as independence, discipline, responsibility, cooperation, piety, tolerance, nationalism, and respect for others. The emphasis is on developing students who excel in mastering various subjects and possess noble characters, enabling them to live harmoniously and contribute productively to a pluralistic society.

PMDG has effectively positioned students as agents of societal change. Character values are not merely memorized but are also

actively discussed and put into practice. The Islamic education system adopts a participatory approach, encouraging students to address social issues and fostering positive character development to advance the nation, state, and religion. Students gain valuable experiences through discussions on various national issues, delivering speeches in three languages. The incorporation of daily social events into learning materials becomes a potent method for building student character, given that it supports their active involvement (Quillinan et al., 2019).

The character of students at PMDG, marked by tolerance, open-mindedness, and rationality, aligns with religious moderation requirements in confronting radicalism's dangers. A tolerant disposition enables students to coexist in a diverse society, fostering respect for religious and cultural differences. The belief in and practising religious truths should facilitate an appreciation for religious and cultural diversity. As highlighted by Masduqi (2013), the implementation of transformative education to instil tolerant and inclusive values is crucial in pesantren and Islamic education in general, as it acts as a preventive measure against the emergence of radicalism. Radicalism often arises from a narrow-minded stance toward a particular religious affiliation and the rejection of diverse religious perspectives. Additionally, radicalism may stem from a literal interpretation of religious texts without considering the overarching purpose behind establishing religious laws.

Despite implementing a transformative education system, the values deeply embedded as references within pesantren are primarily the doctrines of the institution. The founders meticulously formulated these values after extensive reflections and experiences related to socio-cultural and national issues during the establishment period. Students embrace these values as the foundational principles of pesantren. However, due to their isolated living conditions without significant interactions with the surrounding community, discussions

on social issues in forums and speech training sessions, conducted in turns every week, need to reach the level of deep reflection. Consequently, the student's reflections on national and social issues must align with transformative learning involving community engagement (Quillinan et al., 2019) due to their isolated living environment within the pesantren.

The independent nature of Gontor, without affiliation to specific Islamic groups, and the substantial contributions of its alums across various sectors—religious and non-religious, private, and governmental—serve as a conduit for connecting the pesantren's character education system with the broader community. Gontor alums, actively engaged in diverse fields, inherently carry forward Gontor's mission and can provide institutional support to ensure the consistency of its values and education system. This sight becomes crucial in navigating various cultural and political pressures, including the dynamic landscape of national education policies the Indonesian government sets (Steenbrink, 1997; Hefni, 2012; Zulfikri, 2017).

The autonomy of Islamic boarding schools is a crucial necessity because schools under government ministries or specific religious organizations often tend to stagnate in the development of character education. The rigid application of values within the government education curriculum can lead to a disconnection from the social dynamics of society. Such an education system focuses solely on students' academic achievements, rendering them objects in character-building without opportunities for active participation and reflection. This deficiency in character education within schools has repercussions, weakening students' competencies in addressing the progressively complex problems they encounter (Jeynes et al., 2019; Parker et al., 2010; Snyder et al., 2009).

This independent, transformative, and critically oriented Islamic boarding school models the relationship between private education institutions (civil institutions) and the government (state). Not confined to the dominant government ideology, the Islamic boarding school's independence from the state does not imply the promotion of unpatriotic values. Instead, this autonomy is realized in establishing the standard of learning values by incorporating dynamically evolving societal values while upholding nationalist principles. Consequently, it avoids adopting a radical perspective, as it is inherently participatory, critical, and inclusive (Kloubert, 2020; Rödl, 2020).

CONCLUSION

Pesantren Gontor implements a transformative education, giving precedence to character development over academic knowledge. The institution establishes philosophical values that form the foundation of its independent learning and parenting system. Gontor independently develops its educational curriculum, which is distinct from the national curriculum. Students are regarded as representatives of their regions, expected to return and contribute to the empowerment of their local communities. The educational approach facilitates a transformation from entrenched and insular traditional values to modern, rational, disciplined, inclusive, independent, and responsible ones. This transformation is achieved through classroom learning, active participation in management, engaging in discussions, and practising public speaking. One drawback of transformative education in Gontor is that students live in isolation within the pesantren and may need more interaction with the surrounding community. The founders formulated internalized character values and then disseminated them to the students as a guiding doctrine. The students' reflections on tolerance and openness

are showcased privately within the pesantren as an integral part of the learning process. Nevertheless, students are not entirely isolated from the external world. Alums have the potential to serve as ambassadors for the pesantren, participating in various community programs and socioreligious organizations.

Additionally, they can act as a bridge connecting the pesantren with the broader community. Students, in turn, have the opportunity to actualize and contextualize character values disseminated through alums and other sources of information. The research, highlighting the education system in PMDG as a transformative model, carries implications for the religious learning system in pesantren. It emphasizes that religious education is not solely doctrinal about fundamental religious values but also involves critical reflection, transforming students' character into inclusive, modern, and critical. This character transformation prevents pesantren alums from adopting exclusive and radical attitudes. This article proposes that the examination of Islamic boarding schools should extend beyond their Islamic affiliations. Non-religious factors such as culture, economy, and politics have contributed to determining the formation of Islamic educational institutions. Therefore, the perspective that Islamic boarding schools are autonomous educational institutions with noble missions for social transformation should be employed in academic research.

Author Contributions

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Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent for this study was obtained through verbal agreement before interview.

Data Availability Statement

The data presented in this study are available upon request from the corresponding author.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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