



A Tolerant and Moderate Attitude Towards Differences in Fiqh: A Study of Students at The Bondok Buntet Islamic Boarding School

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Abstract

This research examined the levels of tolerance and moderation among pesantren (Islamic boarding school) students regarding differences in madhhab (schools of thought) and scholarly opinions within fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), while also analyzing the factors influencing these attitudes. The research was motivated by the urgency of addressing the increasing phenomena of intra-Islamic intolerance and sectarianism related to madhhab differences in Indonesia. Although studies on tolerance in Islamic contexts have generally focused on interfaith relations, research specifically examining intra-Islamic tolerance regarding fiqh schools of thought within pesantren communities remains limited in methodological and empirical aspects. This research employed a quantitative approach using a survey method involving 320 students from Buntet Islamic Boarding School, selected through stratified random sampling. Data were collected using a standardized questionnaire with verified validity and reliability. Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation analysis, and multiple linear regression. The results showed that 67.2% of students demonstrated high levels of tolerance and moderation. Comparative fiqh literacy ($\beta = 0.412$; $p < 0.001$) emerged as the strongest predictor of cross-madhhab tolerance, followed by the quality of kitab kuning (traditional Islamic texts) instruction ($\beta = 0.318$; $p < 0.001$) and the pesantren social environment ($\beta = 0.241$; $p < 0.01$). The study concluded that comparative fiqh curricula and the tradition of kitab kuning study contributed significantly to shaping students' tolerance toward madhhab differences. These findings support efforts to strengthen religious moderation within pesantren institutions.

INTRODUCTION

As the country with the world's largest Muslim population, Indonesia faces significant challenges in managing diversity among religious schools of thought (madhhabs) and scholarly opinions (Afdillah, 2025; Fitriani, 2023; Idris et al., 2024; Mukhlis et al., 2026). Data from the National Counter-Terrorism Agency (Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Terorisme [BNPT]) in 2022 indicated that one contributing factor to radicalization in Indonesia was intolerance within the Muslim community itself, including exclusive attitudes toward differences in fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) schools. The 2022 Religious Harmony Index issued by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, with a score of 72.39, suggested that although the overall condition of religious tolerance was relatively positive, intra-religious tolerance remained an area requiring further attention.

Pesantren (Islamic boarding schools), among the oldest and largest Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia, comprise 36,667 units and serve more than 4.9 million students (santri) (Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2022). These institutions play a strategic role in shaping the religious character of society (Baral, 2023; Douglas, 2024; Mala & Hunaida, 2023;

Onsarigo, 2025; Rashid, 2023). Historically, pesantren, particularly those affiliated with Nahdlatul Ulama, have been recognized for promoting the traditions of tasamuh (tolerance) and tawazun (balance) through the study of kitab kuning (classical Islamic texts), which contain extensive discussions of Islamic jurisprudence across various schools of thought. However, the influence of textual-formalist Islamic purification movements has increasingly entered some pesantren communities, creating tension between the tradition of jurisprudential diversity and more rigid sectarian perspectives.

Studies on tolerance within the Indonesian Islamic context have predominantly focused on inter-religious tolerance, while research on intra-Islamic tolerance, particularly among followers of different fiqh schools, has received comparatively limited empirical attention. Although previous studies, such as those by Aziz (2021), Hilmy (2022), and Rahman et al. (2023), have examined religious moderation in general, they have not specifically measured attitudes toward tolerance among different fiqh schools using psychometrically validated instruments. This research gap highlights the importance of the present study. Differences among fiqh schools of thought, including the Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, and Hanbali schools, as well as variations in scholarly opinions within each school, represent an inherent characteristic of Islamic intellectual tradition. Classical scholars expressed this principle through the maxim *ikhtilaf al-a'imma rahmah* (differences of opinion among the Imams are a mercy). However, the extent to which this principle is internalized in the daily practices of santri requires empirical investigation (Amrulloh & Nisa, 2025; Muzakki & Aziza, 2026; Yusuf et al., 2026).

The novelty of this study lies in its quantitative approach using a validated psychometric scale to measure madhhab tolerance, whereas previous research has largely relied on qualitative or normative approaches. This study also compared tolerance levels across salaf, khalaf, and combined-type pesantren and empirically identified the predictive influence of comparative fiqh literacy, kitab kuning instructional quality, and the pesantren social environment. In addition, the study provided a replicable instrument for assessing intra-Islamic tolerance that can be adapted for future research in similar educational contexts in Indonesia and other regions.

Against this background, this study aimed to: (1) describe the level of tolerance and moderation among santri at Buntet Pesantren regarding differences in fiqh schools and scholarly opinions; (2) identify the dominant factors influencing the formation of these attitudes; and (3) analyze the relationship between comparative fiqh literacy and students' attitudes toward tolerance and moderation. This study offered both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it enriched the discourse on religious moderation by shifting attention from interfaith tolerance to intra-faith tolerance and by extending the application of Social Cognitive Theory and Social Identity Theory within the pesantren context. Practically, the findings provided an empirical basis for curriculum development in pesantren, particularly in strengthening comparative fiqh and kitab kuning instruction. For policymakers and pesantren administrators, this research offered evidence-based insights to support deradicalization strategies, improve pedagogical approaches, and foster intellectual openness, ultimately contributing to social cohesion and the prevention of sectarian conflict in Indonesia.

METHOD

Research Design and Approach

This research employed a quantitative approach with a correlational survey design. This approach was selected because the study aimed to measure variable levels and examine relationships among variables within the target population. The study used a descriptive-analytical design to describe the variables and analyze the relationships between them.

Location, Population, and Sample

The research was conducted at six Pondok Buntet Pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) selected purposively to represent three categories: salaf (traditional), khalaf (modern), and combination-style pesantren. The six schools are: PP Nadwatul Banin, PP Al Inaaroh, PP Al-Hidayah Cilacap, PP Riyadussholihin, PP Nurul Arwani, and PP Al Bahjah.

The research population consists of all resident students (santri mukim) currently enrolled at the Wustha level (junior high school equivalent) or Ulya level (senior high school/MA equivalent), totaling 1,847 individuals. Sample size determination utilized Slovin's formula with a 5% margin of error, resulting in a minimum sample of 329 individuals. After excluding incomplete data, the final sample analyzed comprised 320 individuals. Stratified random sampling was employed, with strata based on: pesantren type, educational level (Wustha/Ulya), and gender.

Research Variables and Instruments

The dependent variable (Y) is "Tolerant and Moderate Attitudes toward Differences in Madhhab (Schools of Thought) and Scholars' Opinions." This was measured using the Madhhab Tolerance Scale (STM), developed by the researcher based on the Tripartite Model of Attitudes. The scale consists of 32 items covering cognitive (12 items), affective (10 items), and conative (10 items) components, utilizing a 5-point Likert scale.

The independent variables consist of: (X1) Comparative Fiqh Literacy, measured by a 25-item multiple-choice knowledge test; (X2) Quality of Kitab Kuning Instruction, measured by a 20-item questionnaire; and (X3) Pesantren Social Environment, measured by an 18-item questionnaire. Instrument validity was tested using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) with a factor loading value of ≥ 0.50 as the criterion, while reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding values of $\alpha = 0.87$ (STM), 0.81 (LTK), 0.83 (KPK), and 0.79 (LSP).

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted through the following stages: (1) classical assumption tests, comprising the normality test (Kolmogorov-Smirnov), multicollinearity test (VIF), and heteroscedasticity test (Breusch-Pagan); (2) descriptive analysis; (3) Pearson correlation analysis; and (4) multiple linear regression analysis to test the hypotheses. All analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics software version 27 with a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Characteristics

Of the 320 respondents, 54.7% ($n = 175$) were male and 45.3% ($n = 145$) were female. Regarding educational level, 47.2% ($n = 151$) were at the Wustha level and 52.8% ($n = 169$) were at the Ulya level. The duration of residence at the pesantren (Islamic boarding school) ranged from 1 to 7 years, with a mean of 3.4 years ($SD = 1.72$). Based on pesantren type: 41.3% were from salaf (traditional) schools, 30.0% from khalaf (modern) schools, and 28.7% from combination schools.

Levels of Tolerance and Moderation among Santri

Based on the descriptive analysis, the distribution of tolerance and moderation levels among the santri (students) is as follows:

Table 1. Distribution of Santri's Levels of Tolerance and Moderation Regarding Differences in Madhhab (N = 320)

Category	Score Range	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Very High	129 – 160	58	18,1

Category	Score Range	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
High	97 – 128	157	49,1
Moderate	65 – 96	81	25,3
Low	33 – 64	21	6,6
Very Low	< 33	3	0,9
Total	-	320	100,0

Source: Primary data processed (2026)

The data in Table 2 indicate that the majority of santri (67.2%) possess high to very high levels of tolerant and moderate attitudes. This serves as a positive indication that the pesantren tradition successfully maintains the character of tasamuh (tolerance) when addressing differences in madhhab (schools of Islamic jurisprudence). However, the 7.5% of santri falling into the low and very low categories cannot be overlooked, as this group has the potential to become agents of intra-Islamic intolerance.

When analyzed by component, the cognitive component yielded the highest mean score ($M = 41.8$; $SD = 6.2$ out of a maximum of 60), followed by the affective component ($M = 33.4$; $SD = 5.8$ out of a maximum of 50) and the conative component ($M = 32.7$; $SD = 5.4$ out of a maximum of 50). This suggests that while santri generally possess adequate cognitive knowledge regarding the legitimacy of differing madhhabs, the translation of this knowledge into affective attitudes and tolerant behavior is not yet fully optimal.

Differences in Tolerant Attitudes Based on Pesantren Type

One-way ANOVA analysis reveals significant differences in tolerant attitudes among santri from different types of pesantren ($F(2, 317) = 14.83$; $p < 0.001$). Tukey post-hoc tests indicate that santri from salaf (traditional) pesantren have significantly higher mean scores for tolerant attitudes ($M = 108.4$; $SD = 14.2$) compared to those from khalaf (modern) pesantren ($M = 97.6$; $SD = 15.8$; $p < 0.001$) and combination pesantren ($M = 103.1$; $SD = 16.3$; $p = 0.021$).

These findings are somewhat surprising but can be explained theoretically. Salaf pesantren, which engage in intensive study of classical fiqh (jurisprudence) texts from various madhhabs through the bandongan and sorogan traditions, actually expose santri more extensively to the richness of scholarly differences of opinion across different madhhabs. This fosters a frame of reference that is more inclusive of differences in fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) compared to pesantren khalaf, which tend to adopt a single fiqh approach or utilize more simplistic modern fiqh texts.

The Relationship between the Independent Variable and Tolerant Attitudes

Table 2. Pearson Correlation Coefficients between Independent Variables and Attitudes of Tolerance toward Madhhab

Variable	Pearson r	Sig. (2-tailed)	Interpretation
Comparative Fiqh Literacy (X1)	0,521**	0,000	Strong positive correlation
Quality of Kitab Kuning Instruction (X2)	0,448**	0,000	Moderate positive correlation
Pesantren Social Environment (X3)	0,367**	0,000	Moderate positive correlation

Note: ** $p < 0.01$

Source: Primary data processed (2026)

Multiple Regression Analysis

Table 3. Results of Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p
Constant	24,17	8,43	-	2,867	0,004
Comparative Fiqh Literacy (X1)	1,84	0,27	0,412	6,81	<0,001
Quality of Kitab Kuning Instr. (X2)	1,27	0,24	0,318	5,29	<0,001
Pesantren Social Environment (X3)	0,89	0,21	0,241	4,24	<0,001

$R^2 = 0.417$; $F(3,316) = 75.43$; $p < 0.001$

Source: Primary data processed (2026)

The regression model yielded an R^2 of 0.417, indicating that the three independent variables collectively explain 41.7% of the variance in attitudes toward tolerance regarding madhhab (schools of Islamic jurisprudence). This value is considered moderately high for research in the socio-religious field. Comparative fiqh literacy ($\beta = 0.412$) emerged as the dominant predictor, followed by the quality of kitab kuning (traditional Islamic text) instruction ($\beta = 0.318$) and the pesantren social environment ($\beta = 0.241$). All three predictors were significant at the $p < 0.001$ level.

Classical assumption tests indicated: (1) the data were normally distributed (KS = 0.041; $p = 0.200 > 0.05$); (2) there was no multicollinearity (VIF < 3.5 for all variables); and (3) there was no heteroscedasticity (Breusch-Pagan test: $\chi^2 = 4.23$; $p = 0.238 > 0.05$). The regression model is deemed valid and suitable for interpretation.

The findings of this study both confirm and elaborate upon the results of previous research. The relatively high level of tolerance regarding madhhab (67.2% falling into the high and very high categories) aligns with the identity of pesantren as moderate institutions, as demonstrated by Dhofier (1999) and Bruinessen (1994). However, the 32.8% of santri (students) exhibiting moderate to very low levels of tolerance represent a significant concern requiring a systemic response.

The dominance of comparative fiqh literacy as a predictor ($\beta = 0.412$) supports Al-Zuhayli's (1986) argument that an understanding of fiqh muqaran (comparative jurisprudence) inherently fosters an awareness of the legitimacy of differing ijtiḥad (legal reasoning) outcomes. Santri (Islamic boarding school students) accustomed to studying texts such as Al-Mizan al-Kubra (Al-Sha'rani), Bidayat al-Mujtahid (Ibn Rushd), or Fath al-Qarib—along with their comparative commentaries—tend to internalize the view that differences between madhhabs (schools of thought) are natural products of differing ijtiḥad methodologies, rather than contradictions requiring resolution at the expense of one party.

The influence of the quality of kitab kuning (traditional Islamic text) instruction ($\beta = 0.318$) confirms Rumadi's (2022) findings, which indicate a significant correlation between the intensity and quality of kitab kuning study and tolerant attitudes regarding fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence). Ustaz (teachers) who not only convey material but also model acceptance of differing opinions are shown to have a profound impact on shaping students' attitudes, aligning with predictions from Bandura's (1977) Social Cognitive Theory.

The finding that pesantren salaf (traditional boarding schools) exhibit higher tolerance scores than pesantren khalaf (modernized boarding schools) offers a critical counterpoint to the common assumption that the modernization of pesantren education automatically fosters

tolerance. It appears that reducing the curriculum's emphasis on multi-school fiqh texts in pesantren khalaf may actually narrow students' comparative perspectives. This aligns with Hilmy's (2022) concerns regarding the negative impact of adopting the single-school fiqh approach associated with Islamic purification movements.

From a theoretical perspective, this study demonstrates that within the pesantren context, the cognitive component of attitude (fiqh literacy) exerts a more decisive influence on affective and conative components than socio-environmental factors alone. This modifies the Social Identity Theory assumption that group affiliation (madhhab) automatically generates in-group bias; with adequate fiqh literacy, such bias can be overcome through an intellectual understanding of the legitimacy of differences.

CONCLUSION

This study successfully addressed the three established objectives. First, the level of tolerance and moderation among Buntet Pesantren students regarding differences in madhhab and scholarly opinions in fiqh was found to be generally positive, with 67.2% of students categorized as having high or very high levels of tolerance. However, 7.5% of students demonstrated low or very low levels of tolerance, indicating that moderate attitudes had not been fully internalized by all students. Second, the dominant factors influencing students' tolerance were comparative fiqh literacy ($\beta = 0.412$), the quality of kitab kuning instruction ($\beta = 0.318$), and the pesantren social environment ($\beta = 0.241$), which collectively explained 41.7% of the variance in tolerance. Third, a strong positive correlation was identified between comparative fiqh literacy and tolerance toward madhhab differences ($r = 0.521$; $p < 0.001$), confirming that a deeper understanding of diversity among madhhabs contributes significantly to fostering intra-Islamic tolerance.

Based on these findings, several recommendations are proposed. First, pesantren should strengthen comparative fiqh (fiqh muqaran) curricula and improve the quality of kitab kuning instruction, as these factors were identified as strong predictors of tolerant attitudes. Second, pesantren administrators and ustaz should foster a social environment that encourages respectful discussion of scholarly differences and provides role models who demonstrate moderate and open perspectives. Third, targeted interventions, such as mentoring, halaqah (study circles), and habituation programs, should be developed for the 7.5% of students who demonstrated low tolerance to reduce the potential development of intra-Islamic intolerance. Fourth, policymakers, particularly the Ministry of Religious Affairs and BNPT, should consider integrating these empirical findings into national religious moderation and deradicalization strategies. Finally, future research should replicate this study across diverse pesantren contexts, including institutions outside the Nahdlatul Ulama tradition, and incorporate qualitative approaches to gain deeper insights into how tolerant attitudes are developed and internalized among santri.

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