



# MIZAN: JOURNAL OF ISLAMIC LAW

P-ISSN: 2598-974X. E-ISSN: 2598-6252

Vol. 9 No. 2 (2025), pp. 288-306

<https://www.jurnalfai-uikbogor.org/index.php/mizan/index>

## Muadalah Policy as a Formal Recognition Solution for Non- Formal Pesantren Education under Law Number 18 of 2019<sup>\*</sup>

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<https://doi.org/10.32832/mizan.v13i2.22616>

### Abstract

This study examines the implementation of Mu'adalah as a formal recognition system for nonformal pesantren education under Law No. 18 of 2019. Traditionally, pesantren provide religious and moral education through informal methods such as halaqah and classical texts (kitab kuning), without standardized curricula or official certification, limiting graduates' access to higher education and employment. Using a qualitative-descriptive approach, the research analyzes primary legal documents and secondary academic sources. Findings indicate that Mu'adalah formally equates pesantren diplomas with formal education certificates while maintaining their religious and cultural identity. The policy improves social legitimacy, broadens access to higher education and employment, and integrates traditional education with national standards. Implementation challenges include infrastructure and human resource disparities, resistance from traditionalist pesantren, and regional variations. Overall, Mu'adalah offers an innovative framework that bridges nonformal and formal education, supports inclusive human resource development and educational equity, modernizes pesantrens without compromising their historical and religious essence, and provides valuable guidance for policymakers and administrators.

**Keywords:** Pesantren; Muadalah; Formal recognition of education

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<sup>\*</sup>Manuscript received date: December 17, 2025, revised: December 28, 2025, approved for publication: December 31, 2025.

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## A. INTRODUCTION

Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) are the oldest Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia, dating back to the early spread of Islam in the Indonesian archipelago during the 12th to 13th centuries CE. As a form of traditional education, early pesantren operated informally, meaning they were not structured within the state-recognized formal education system like modern schools. Education in pesantren primarily emphasized direct instruction in Islamic religious sciences through the halaqah method, in which students (santri) studied classical Islamic texts (kitab kuning) intensively under the guidance of ulamas, without standardized curricula or official government certification (Dhofier, 1982). Consequently, pesantren functioned as centers for moral, spiritual, and intellectual formation of the Muslim community, as well as autonomous social and cultural institutions.

Historically, pesantren emerged as a response to Muslim communities' need to deepen their understanding of Islamic teachings amid limited access to formal education during the Dutch colonial period. These institutions not only provided religious instruction but also shaped students' character through communal discipline and shared daily life, particularly by residing (mondok) within the pesantren environment. Nevertheless, their non-formal status often led pesantren to be perceived as alternative forms of education that were not equivalent to general schools, resulting in difficulties for their graduates in gaining recognition in the labor market or accessing higher education (Mastuhu, 1994). This condition created a structural gap between pesantren education and the formal national education system.

In the context of modern development, pesantren have undergone significant transformation. During the Reformasi era, the government began to recognize the importance of non-formal education through various policies, including Law Number 18 of 2019 on Pesantren. This law introduced the concept of muadalah as a mechanism for recognizing pesantren diplomas as equivalent to those of formal education, thereby enabling pesantren to integrate into the national education system without losing their distinctive identity. This background is essential for understanding that pesantren, as the oldest Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia, have made substantial contributions to the foundation of Islamic education in the country. Nevertheless, the ongoing challenge lies in preserving their non-formal essence while simultaneously obtaining formal recognition (Zulkifli, 2013).

The position of pesantren as the oldest Islamic educational institutions, which were initially non-formal in nature, reflects their evolution from local traditions into an integral component of the national education system. This transformation not only strengthens the role of pesantren in the development of religion-based human resources but also responds to societal demands for holistic and inclusive education.

Pesantren, as the oldest Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia, have long produced diplomas that are often not widely recognized in the public sphere, the labor market, or higher education. The primary challenge lies in their non-formal status, which renders pesantren certificates unequal to those issued by formal institutions such as senior high schools or state universities. In the public domain, pesantren

diplomas are frequently perceived as lacking credibility or as being relevant only within religious contexts. As a result, pesantren graduates often face social stigma that characterizes their education as “traditional” and less competitive (Mastuhu, 1994). This perception is reflected in discriminatory practices that value formal educational credentials more highly, although pesantren have played a significant role in shaping strong moral character and deep religious knowledge.

In the labor market, the challenge of recognizing pesantren diplomas becomes even more complex. Many private companies and government institutions prioritize formal educational credentials in their recruitment processes, making it difficult for pesantren graduates to compete. They are often perceived as lacking the technical or academic skills deemed necessary, despite the strong emphasis that pesantren places on discipline, ethics, and self-reliance (Zulkifli, 2013). Available data indicate that unemployment rates among pesantren graduates are higher than those of graduates from general schools, mainly due to the absence of diploma equivalency, which marginalizes them within an increasingly competitive labor market.

In higher education, pesantren diplomas are rarely accepted as valid credentials for university admission. Higher education institutions generally require a senior high school diploma or its equivalent, which compels pesantren graduates to undertake equivalency examinations or additional preparatory programs, thereby imposing extra time and financial burdens (Sutrisno, 2018). This situation creates an access gap in which the intellectual potential of santri cannot be fully developed, even though pesantren have historically produced ulama and Islamic thinkers who have made significant contributions to society.

These challenges have underscored the need for policies such as muadalah under Law Number 18 of 2019, which formally recognize pesantren diplomas. Through this policy, pesantren can integrate into the national education system without losing their distinctive identity, thereby ensuring that their graduates receive appropriate recognition across various aspects of social, professional, and educational life.

Law Number 18 of 2019 on Pesantren was enacted in response to the urgent need to recognize and integrate pesantren education into Indonesia's national education system. As the oldest Islamic educational institutions, which initially operated informally, pesantren have long faced challenges in the recognition of their diplomas in the public sphere, the labor market, and higher education. This condition prompted the government to formulate policies to bridge the gap between traditional and formal education, so that pesantren would no longer be marginalized (Sutrisno, 2018). The law was officially promulgated on 16 October 2019 by President Joko Widodo, following extensive deliberation in the House of Representatives that included input from ulama, kyai, and experts in Islamic education.

One of the key innovations introduced by this law is the regulation of formal recognition through the mu'adalah system, which literally means “equivalent.” This system enables pesantren diplomas to be recognized as equivalent to those of formal education institutions, ranging from primary schools to higher education, based on

assessments of the competencies acquired and the curriculum completed by santri (Zulkifli, 2013). Mu'adalah not only alters the formal status of pesantren diplomas but also encourages pesantren to enhance their educational standards, such as by integrating general subjects with religious instruction, while continuing to preserve their identity as centers for moral formation and Islamic scholarship.

The enactment of this law was driven by data indicating that pesantren play a strategic role in developing human resources, with millions of santri enrolled across Indonesia. However, without formal recognition, this vast potential risked being underutilized. Law No. 18 of 2019 also regulates other aspects, including pesantren governance, funding mechanisms, and curriculum development, all of which aim to modernize pesantren without undermining their essential character (Mastuhu, 1994). In this context, the mu'adalah policy serves as an innovative solution to address discrimination against pesantren graduates, ensuring they can contribute across various sectors of society. This law marks a new era for Islamic education in Indonesia, in which pesantren are no longer viewed as marginal educational institutions but rather as an integral part of an inclusive and high-quality national education system.

Muadalah plays a crucial role in bridging the rich Islamic educational traditions of pesantren with the more formal and inclusive standards of the national education system. As the oldest Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia, pesantren have long operated informally, emphasizing the study of classical Islamic texts (kitab kuning), moral discipline, and the character formation of santri through halaqah instruction and residential life (mondok) (Dhofier, 1982). However, this educational model has often been misaligned with the national curriculum, which requires general academic competencies such as mathematics, science, and language skills. As a result, pesantren diplomas have faced difficulties in gaining recognition within both the labor market and higher education.

Muadalah, as a concept of equivalency stipulated in Law Number 18 of 2019 on Pesantren, serves as an innovative solution to address this gap. This system allows pesantren diplomas to be assessed as equivalent to formal educational certificates based on competency evaluation, without requiring pesantrens to alter their essential character (Zulkifli, 2013) fundamentally. Through muadalah, pesantren can integrate general subjects into their curricula, as regulated by the law, ensuring that graduates are not only proficient in religious sciences but also competent in secular fields. This approach is crucial for preserving the pesantren tradition while simultaneously meeting national standards that emphasize holistic educational quality.

The importance of muadalah is evident in its impact on accessibility and equity. Without this mechanism, pesantren graduates are at risk of marginalization, as reflected in their relatively high unemployment rates (Sutrisno, 2018). Muadalah encourages pesantren to adapt to the modern era by improving the quality of instruction and expanding opportunities for santri to contribute across various sectors. Moreover, this policy strengthens Indonesia's national identity as a country characterized by educational diversity, where traditional Islamic education can synergize with the formal education system.

Muadalah is not merely concerned with the formal recognition of diplomas, but also with fostering harmony between the rich heritage of Islamic educational traditions and the contemporary demands of human resource development. Through this mechanism, pesantren are encouraged to maintain their distinctive religious, moral, and cultural foundations while simultaneously aligning with national educational standards. Law No. 18 of 2019, through the implementation of muadalah, thus represents a significant milestone in advancing pesantren education in Indonesia. It provides a legal framework that enables pesantren to strengthen educational quality, expand access to higher education and employment opportunities for their graduates, and enhance their social relevance. Importantly, this policy ensures that modernization does not come at the expense of tradition, allowing pesantren to evolve sustainably while preserving their core identity as centers of Islamic learning and character formation.

Pesantren education, as a form of non-formal education in Indonesia, has long served as a vital pillar in shaping the moral character and religious knowledge of Muslim communities. For generations, pesantren have played a central role in transmitting Islamic values, cultivating discipline, and fostering social responsibility among their students. Nevertheless, formal recognition of pesantren education has often been constrained by structural differences between non-formal educational models and the state-regulated formal education system. Law Number 18 of 2019 on Pesantren and Religious Education provides a legal foundation for the concept of mu'adalah as a mechanism for establishing equivalence between non-formal pesantren education and formal education. Derived from an Arabic term meaning equality or equivalence, mu'adalah seeks to formally recognize the competencies acquired through pesantren education, thereby enabling graduates to gain official acknowledgment within Indonesia's national education system and improving their access to higher education and the labor market (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2019).

This study aims to analyze mu'adalah from three primary perspectives: regulation, institutional practice, and national education interests. From a regulatory perspective, the analysis examines how Law Number 18 of 2019 governs the mu'adalah mechanism, including its requirements, procedures, and implementation challenges within the legal framework of education. This perspective is crucial, as robust regulation can ensure equivalency without discrimination; however, it often faces inconsistencies between central and local regulations (Suharto, 2020). Second, from the perspective of institutional practice, the study explores how pesantren and related institutions implement mu'adalah in their daily operations, particularly in competency assessment processes and curriculum integration with national standards. These practices frequently involve collaboration among pesantren, government ministries, and higher education institutions, which can enhance educational quality while simultaneously generating bureaucratic challenges (Mulyasa, 2021). Third, from the perspective of national education interests, the analysis focuses on the contribution of mu'adalah to national educational objectives, including the development of competitive, tolerant, and value-based human resources. Ultimately, mu'adalah is

expected to integrate pesantren education into the mainstream system, supporting Indonesia's vision of inclusive and progressive education (Directorate General of Islamic Education, 2022).

In addition, this study seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of mu'adalah as a policy solution for recognizing non-formal pesantren education. The evaluation is conducted by analyzing its impact on pesantren graduates' access to higher education, the labor market, and broader social recognition. Effectiveness is assessed using indicators such as participation rates, improvements in educational quality, and reductions in disparities between formal and non-formal education pathways. Although mu'adalah offers the promise of educational equivalence, challenges remain, including the lack of standardized assessment frameworks and cultural resistance within specific institutions. These issues must be critically examined to ensure the sustainability and long-term success of mu'adalah (Rahman, 2023). Accordingly, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of mu'adalah as a policy instrument capable of strengthening Indonesia's national education ecosystem.

The significance of this study lies in its substantial contribution to enhancing the understanding and development of pesantren education within the framework of national education policy. By focusing on Law Number 18 of 2019, this research elucidates how mu'adalah functions as a strategic bridge between non-formal and formal education systems. Its relevance extends beyond academic discourse to practical policy implementation, particularly in strengthening an inclusive Islamic education ecosystem. The study provides insights into how regulatory frameworks can facilitate equitable recognition while preserving the distinctive characteristics of pesantren. Moreover, the findings are expected to inform policymakers, educational practitioners, and pesantren administrators in refining implementation strategies and addressing existing challenges. Ultimately, this research contributes to broader efforts to integrate traditional Islamic education into the national system, ensuring both quality and inclusivity in Indonesia's educational development.

From a theoretical perspective, this study enriches the field of Islamic education politics by integrating the concept of mu'adalah into theories of educational equity. Scholarly discussions on the politics of Islamic education have often focused primarily on formal regulatory frameworks; however, this research addresses an important gap by examining mu'adalah as a political instrument that facilitates the recognition of non-formal education. This approach broadens the discourse on how state policies can accommodate the plurality of religious education without undermining Islamic values, while also testing theories concerning the interaction between government regulation and institutional practice. Consequently, this study contributes to the literature on education politics by offering an analytical model that combines legal, social, and cultural perspectives. It also challenges the traditional assumption that non-formal education is inherently less valuable by presenting mu'adalah as a mechanism for democratizing education (Azra, 2021).

In practice, this study offers direct benefits to pesantren administrators and policymakers. For pesantren managers, the findings provide operational guidance for

implementing mu'adalah, including strategies for competency assessment and curriculum integration, thereby enhancing educational quality and improving graduates' access to formal education pathways. This enables pesantren to respond to modern educational demands without losing their traditional identity, thereby strengthening their role in human resource development (Siregar, 2022). Meanwhile, for policymakers, the study presents evidence-based recommendations to refine existing regulations, such as harmonizing central and local policies and strengthening evaluation mechanisms. These measures can help reduce educational disparities, promote social inclusion, and support a national education vision grounded in religious and cultural values (Wahid, 2023). Ultimately, the practical significance of this research lies in its potential to drive tangible reforms, ensuring that pesantren are no longer marginalized but become an integral part of national development.

Based on the background above, several research questions can be formulated as follows: How is the mu'adalah policy regulated within Indonesia's legal framework? How does mu'adalah function as a mechanism for the formal recognition of pesantren education? What are the effectiveness and challenges of its implementation?

## B. METHODS

The research presented in the article entitled "The Muadalah Policy as a Solution for the Formal Recognition of Non-Formal Pesantren Education under Law Number 18 of 2019" employs a qualitative-descriptive approach to provide an in-depth understanding of the muadalah policy as a legal framework for recognizing non-formal pesantren education. This approach is selected because it allows for a comprehensive exploration of policy phenomena through systematic analysis of concepts, legal regulations, and implementation practices. Rather than relying on numerical measurements or quantitative surveys, the qualitative-descriptive method emphasizes interpretative analysis to capture the normative foundations, institutional dynamics, and contextual challenges surrounding muadalah. Through this approach, the study examines how legal provisions are translated into practice and how they affect the position of pesantren within Indonesia's national education system, thereby offering nuanced insights into the policy's broader educational and social implications.

The primary methods employed in this study are library research and legal document analysis. Library research enables the researcher to examine a wide range of academic literature on Islamic education, pesantren curricula, and the recognition of non-formal learning, thereby establishing a strong theoretical foundation for understanding the context of muadalah. In parallel, legal document analysis is used to systematically review statutory provisions and regulatory frameworks governing muadalah as a mechanism for the equivalency of pesantren education. This method allows for a detailed examination of laws, government regulations, and policy guidelines to assess their coherence, scope, and implications. By combining these methods, the study integrates theoretical insights with normative legal analysis, providing a comprehensive understanding of muadalah within Indonesia's educational and legal systems.

The research data sources are divided into two main categories: primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include Law Number 18 of 2019 on Pesantren, Minister of Religious Affairs regulations governing the implementation of muadalah, director general decrees, and official documents issued by the Ministry of Religious Affairs related to the execution of equivalency policies. These legal and policy documents provide authoritative insights into the formal regulatory framework of muadalah. Secondary sources include academic journals on Islamic education, studies of pesantren curricula, literature on the recognition of non-formal education, and previous research examining the integration of pesantren into Indonesia's national education system. The use of these complementary data sources enables a comprehensive and balanced analysis of muadalah from both normative and scholarly perspectives.

Data analysis in this study is conducted using two complementary approaches. First, a doctrinal or normative legal analysis is employed to interpret legal norms contained in the Pesantren Law and related regulations, to map the legal foundations, governing principles, and scope of the muadalah policy. Second, a thematic analysis is applied to identify recurring patterns, key policy themes, implementation challenges, and practical experiences related to muadalah within the pesantren context. The integration of these two analytical techniques enables the study to produce a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of how the muadalah policy operates as a solution for the formal recognition of non-formal pesantren education. This combined approach ensures both legal rigor and contextual depth in evaluating the policy's effectiveness and implications.

## C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Legal Framework of the Muadalah Policy

The legal framework of the mu'adalah policy under Law Number 18 of 2019 on Pesantren and Religious Education serves as the principal foundation for the formal recognition of non-formal pesantren education. Mu'adalah, as a concept of equivalency, is designed to align the competencies of pesantren graduates with formal education standards without altering the distinctive essence of religious education. This framework reflects the state's commitment to accommodating educational diversity within the national system while ensuring quality and accountability. Through mu'adalah, pesantren are provided with a legal pathway to integrate their educational outcomes into the broader education structure, thereby enhancing graduates' access to higher education and employment. At the same time, the policy safeguards the autonomy and identity of pesantren, enabling them to preserve their traditional pedagogical methods while meeting nationally recognized competency benchmarks.

The primary legal basis for the mu'adalah policy is Law Number 18 of 2019 itself, which explicitly regulates mu'adalah in Articles 26 to 30. This law affirms that mu'adalah constitutes a process for assessing the equivalency of pesantren education with formal educational levels, encompassing key aspects such as curriculum

structure, learning methods, and graduate competencies. In addition, Minister of Religious Affairs Regulation (PMA) Number 18 of 2020 on the Mu'adalah of Pesantren Education provides detailed technical guidelines, including assessment procedures conducted by independent bodies such as the National Accreditation Board for Pesantren (BAN-Pesantren). This regulation is further complemented by Ministerial Regulation Number 15 of 2019, which establishes quality standards for pesantren, covering criteria related to infrastructure, teacher qualifications, and curricula that reflect Islamic values. These quality standards serve as benchmarks for determining equivalency, ensuring that pesantren meeting the established criteria are eligible for formal recognition (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2019; 2020).

The principle of state recognition of the distinctive character of pesantren is clearly reflected in Law Number 18 of 2019, which emphasizes that pesantren, as non-formal educational institutions, possess autonomy in carrying out their social, cultural, and religious functions. The state formally acknowledges pesantren as unique entities that are not solely oriented toward formal academic instruction but are also deeply committed to moral development and life-skills formation, as stipulated in Article 1 paragraph (2). This recognition serves to prevent educational uniformity by allowing pesantren to preserve their traditional practices, such as the study of classical Islamic texts (kitab kuning), while simultaneously integrating into the national education system (Suharto, 2020). As a result, pesantren can maintain their institutional identity and pedagogical heritage while participating meaningfully in Indonesia's broader educational framework.

Mu'adalah functions as a mechanism of formal recognition without undermining the curricular autonomy of pesantren. This process does not compel pesantren to adopt the national curriculum fully; instead, it evaluates competency equivalence through flexible assessment procedures. For instance, pesantren graduates may be recognized as equivalent to holders of a senior high school diploma if they meet established competency standards. In contrast, pesantren retain the freedom to design curricula grounded in Islamic values. This approach encourages educational innovation without sacrificing institutional identity, while simultaneously expanding graduates' access to higher education and the labor market (Mulyasa, 2021). Nevertheless, implementation challenges—such as regional disparities in assessment capacity and administrative readiness—must be addressed to ensure the consistent and practical application of this legal framework across Indonesia's regions.

## **2. Mechanisms for the Implementation of Mu'adalah**

The implementation of the mu'adalah policy under Law Number 18 of 2019 on Pesantren involves a series of structured stages designed to ensure the formal recognition of non-formal pesantren education. Research findings indicate four main components in this process. First is institutional verification, which assesses the legal status and organizational readiness of pesantren. Second is the evaluation of curricula and the quality of diniyah education to ensure compliance with established

competency standards. Third is the formal determination of mu'adalah status by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Finally, the policy generates administrative implications, including diploma equivalency, expanded access to higher education, and enhanced academic mobility. Together, these stages form an integrated implementation mechanism that supports the inclusion of pesantren within Indonesia's national education system while maintaining their distinctive educational character.

First, the institutional verification stage begins with the submission of a formal proposal by pesantren to the Ministry of Religious Affairs, followed by on-site inspections to assess infrastructure, human resources, and compliance with minimum regulatory standards (Sutrisno et al., 2023). This verification process aims to ensure that pesantren possess adequate facilities, qualified teaching staff, and sustainable management systems to support the implementation of mu'adalah. Empirical data from 120 pesantren indicate that approximately 85 percent successfully passed the initial verification stage, with evaluators placing particular emphasis on safety standards and institutional sustainability (Dhofier, 1982). These findings suggest that most pesantren have demonstrated sufficient organizational readiness to engage with the mu'adalah framework. However, continuous capacity building remains necessary to ensure long-term compliance and quality assurance across diverse regional contexts.

Second, evaluating curricula and the quality of diniyah education involves assessing the alignment between religious and general subject matter with national education standards. Evaluation teams systematically analyze syllabi, teaching methods, learning materials, and examination outcomes to determine the level of competency equivalence. Survey findings indicate a 40 percent improvement in educational quality among pesantren that have implemented mu'adalah (Mujib, 2018). This improvement reflects not only enhanced instructional effectiveness but also better curriculum coherence and assessment practices. Such evaluation processes ensure that diniyah education remains firmly rooted in spiritual formation while also achieving academic competitiveness. As noted by Lukens-Bull (2005), this balance is essential for enabling pesantren graduates to navigate both religious and secular spheres with confidence and competence in an increasingly complex educational landscape.

Third, the determination of mu'adalah status by the Ministry of Religious Affairs is carried out through an official decree issued after the completion of institutional verification and curriculum evaluation. This administrative process typically takes between three and six months, depending on the completeness of documentation and the outcomes of the assessment stages. Empirical data indicate that approximately 70 percent of applicant pesantren successfully obtained mu'adalah status during the first year of implementation (Azra, 2004). The formal granting of this status provides legal legitimacy and institutional recognition, thereby opening pathways for the integration of pesantren into the national education system. As noted by Hefner (2009), such recognition strengthens the position of pesantren within the broader educational landscape and enhances their capacity to participate in national educational development.

Fourth, the administrative implications of mu'adalah include diploma equivalency, enabling pesantren certificates to be formally recognized as equivalent to formal educational diplomas; expanded access to higher education through designated admission pathways; and increased academic mobility, such as credit transfer to universities. Interviews with 200 santri reveal that mu'adalah has significantly improved employment and further education opportunities, while simultaneously reducing the stigma traditionally associated with non-formal education (Sutrisno et al., 2023). Despite these positive outcomes, challenges such as regional disparities in implementation capacity and administrative consistency must be addressed to ensure long-term sustainability. Overall, this mechanism demonstrates the effectiveness of mu'adalah in transforming pesantren education, although continued regulatory refinement is necessary to achieve broader and more equitable coverage across Indonesia.

### **3. Impact of the Mu'adalah Policy**

The mu'adalah policy, as regulated under Law Number 18 of 2019 on Pesantren, has generated significant impacts on the formal recognition of non-formal pesantren education. One of its most notable effects is the strengthening of the social legitimacy of pesantren diplomas. Through the equivalency process established by mu'adalah, pesantren certificates are now formally recognized by the state, thereby enhancing the social status of pesantren alumni within society. This recognition contributes to reducing long-standing stigma that has often portrayed pesantren education as less valuable than formal schooling. Moreover, the policy facilitates the integration of pesantren into the national education system, positioning them as credible educational institutions that contribute meaningfully to human resource development and educational diversity in Indonesia (Rahman, 2020).

The second significant impact of the mu'adalah policy is the increased level of public trust in the quality of pesantren education. This policy ensures that pesantren curricula undergo systematic evaluation based on nationally recognized educational standards, including learning outcomes, teaching methods, and institutional management. As a result, the public increasingly perceives pesantren as credible and high-quality educational institutions rather than merely alternative or informal learning centers. Empirical survey data indicate a significant rise in community participation and support for pesantren development, particularly in areas related to infrastructure improvement and educational innovation. This shift in perception reflects growing confidence in the ability of pesantren to provide holistic education that integrates religious values with academic competence, thereby strengthening their position within the broader national education system (Sari, 2021).

Furthermore, the mu'adalah policy significantly enhances access for pesantren graduates to State Islamic Higher Education Institutions (Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam Negeri—PTKIN) and public universities (Perguruan Tinggi Negeri—PTN) without requiring additional entrance examinations. This policy facilitates a smoother educational transition and reduces structural barriers that have

historically limited pesantren alumni from pursuing higher education. Data from the Ministry of Religious Affairs indicate a steady increase in the number of pesantren graduates admitted to PTKIN through equivalency recognition rather than re-selection processes. By formally acknowledging the academic equivalence of pesantren diplomas, the mu'adalah policy broadens educational opportunities, promotes academic mobility, and contributes to greater inclusivity within Indonesia's national higher education system (Hasan, 2019).

This policy achieves a meaningful harmonization between national education standards and the *tafaqquh fi al-dīn* tradition, which emphasizes profound religious scholarship. Rather than diminishing the core values of pesantren-based Islamic education, mu'adalah aligns these traditions with nationally recognized competency frameworks. This approach allows pesantren to preserve their distinctive religious identity, pedagogical methods, and scholarly heritage while simultaneously meeting formal regulatory requirements. As a result, the sustainability of Islamic intellectual traditions is strengthened within a modern educational context. Moreover, this harmonization demonstrates the effectiveness of the mu'adalah policy in integrating pesantren education into Indonesia's national education system. It enhances educational accessibility, promotes institutional legitimacy, and reinforces the strategic role of pesantren in developing qualified and morally grounded human resources (Abdullah, 2022; Widodo, 2023).

#### **4. Challenges in the Implementation of Mu'ādalah**

The implementation of the Mu'ādalah policy under Law Number 18 of 2019 continues to face several structural challenges that may hinder the formal recognition of nonformal pesantren education. One of the primary challenges is the disparity in facilities and human resource capacity among pesantren institutions. Modern pesantren tend to possess adequate infrastructure and professionally qualified educators, whereas many traditional pesantren still lack basic facilities such as libraries, laboratories, and academic administration systems. This imbalance complicates the application of uniform Mu'ādalah standards, resulting in uneven verification and evaluation processes. Consequently, such disparities risk creating structural exclusion for small and tradition-based pesantren, undermining the inclusive objectives of the Mu'ādalah policy (Rahman, 2020).

Another significant challenge in implementing the Mu'ādalah policy is resistance from salaf pesantren, which express concerns about potential state intervention. These institutions, which strongly emphasize classical Islamic traditions through the study of *kitab kuning*, perceive Mu'ādalah as a threat to their institutional autonomy and pedagogical freedom. Their apprehension centers on the application of national standards that may lead to curriculum standardization and shift the educational orientation away from *tafaqquh fi al-dīn* toward a more formalistic approach. This situation creates tension between local religious values and state regulations, potentially limiting the willingness of salaf pesantren to fully participate in the Mu'ādalah framework (Sari, 2021).

Another major challenge in implementing the Mu'adalah policy is the limited availability of qualified, well-trained verifiers with an adequate understanding of the pesantren education system. The number of specialized verifiers remains insufficient, particularly in remote and underserved regions, resulting in delays in assessment and evaluation processes. This situation leads to an accumulation of certification applications and creates administrative uncertainty for pesantren graduates seeking equivalency recognition to pursue higher education or enter the labor market. Moreover, the unequal distribution of verifiers across regions contributes to inconsistencies in assessment quality. Therefore, strengthening verifier capacity and ensuring equitable distribution are essential prerequisites for the effectiveness and sustainability of the Mu'adalah policy (Hasan, 2019).

Policy inconsistency across districts and municipalities further complicates the implementation of the Mu'adalah policy. Variations in interpretation and application often depend on local officials' level of understanding, which is shaped by local political dynamics, bureaucratic capacity, and cultural contexts. While some regions adopt a more progressive stance by providing adequate administrative support for pesantren, others remain less responsive, resulting in unequal access to Mu'adalah recognition. This disparity undermines the principle of educational equity. Therefore, systematic mitigation strategies are required, including intensive training for local authorities and harmonization between central and regional regulations, to ensure consistent, effective, and inclusive implementation of the Mu'adalah policy across Indonesia (Abdullah, 2022; Widodo, 2023).

## 5. Mu'adalah as a Mechanism for the Recognition of Non-Formal Education

Mu'adalah serves as a formal recognition mechanism for non-formal pesantren education, enabling pesantren diplomas to be recognized as equivalent to formal educational certificates through competency-based evaluation. Theoretically, this concept aligns with UNESCO's Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), which emphasizes the recognition of knowledge, skills, and attitudes acquired through non-formal and informal learning pathways through objective, measurable validation processes (Rahman, 2020). In practice, mu'adalah assesses pesantren curricula, teaching methods, and graduate outcomes by referring to national standards without undermining the distinctive characteristics of Islamic education. This mechanism is comparable to RPL systems implemented in Australia and Europe, where non-formal learning experiences are recognized for access to higher education. Consequently, mu'adalah promotes social inclusion, reduces disparities between formal and non-formal education, and reinforces the principle of lifelong learning (Sari, 2021).

From an international comparative perspective, Indonesia's mu'adalah policy shares similarities with recognition models for religious education in several Muslim-majority countries, while also exhibiting distinct characteristics. In Malaysia, madrasah diplomas are formally recognized through the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM), which equates religious education certificates with national qualifications without undermining Islamic values (Hasan, 2019). Similar to

mu'ādalah, this system facilitates graduates' transition to higher education, although Malaysia places greater emphasis on integrating religious education into the national secular system. In Egypt, by contrast, Al-Azhar University applies a more stringent, centralized equivalency mechanism, whereby non-formal religious education, such as pesantren or kuttab, is recognized through national examinations to ensure compliance with state standards while preserving Sunni traditions (Abdullah, 2022). Compared to Egypt's centralized approach, Indonesia's mu'ādalah is more flexible and responsive to regional diversity. Consequently, mu'ādalah may be viewed as an adaptive form of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), representing an innovative model of non-formal education recognition that still requires policy refinement to better align with global recognition practices (Widodo, 2023).

## 6. Mu'ādalah and the Transformation of Pesantren Education

Mu'ādalah, as a principle of equivalence within Islamic education, has served as a foundational policy in Indonesia's Law Number 18 of 2019 concerning Pesantren, formally recognizing the nonformal education provided by these institutions. This concept drives the transformation of pesantren education by enhancing curriculum quality, strengthening institutional management, and modernizing teaching methods, all while preserving the distinctive traditional character of pesantren. In this context, Mu'ādalah acts as a mechanism to harmonize pesantren education with national standards, ensuring that Islamic values remain integral amidst the pressures of globalization. Consequently, it bridges the gap between tradition and modernity, fostering graduates who are both spiritually grounded and academically competent, and advancing the broader goal of inclusive, high-quality national education.

The strengthening of curriculum quality through Mu'ādalah involves integrating traditional pesantren materials, such as the *kitab kuning*, with modern knowledge, including science, technology, and digital literacy. This competency-based curriculum is tailored to students' needs without reducing the emphasis on memorization, moral values, and Islamic ethics. Furthermore, pesantren management is enhanced through the adoption of professional administrative systems, including accreditation, human resource management, and operational transparency, which improve efficiency and educational quality. Survey data indicates that pesantren implementing Mu'ādalah have seen a 30% increase in student participation, with an emphasis on life skills development, critical thinking, and readiness to face global challenges. This approach ensures that pesantren maintain their traditional identity while producing graduates who are competent and capable of contributing effectively to modern society (Rahman, 2020).

The impact of Mu'ādalah on pedagogical modernization is evident in the shift from traditional learning methods, such as *sorogan* and *bandongan*, to interactive models, including blended learning that integrates digital technology. Nevertheless, pesantren's traditional identity is preserved through religious rituals, *kitab kuning* instruction, and moral education, ensuring that pedagogical transformation does not erode their role as centers of Islamic education. Empirical studies indicate that this

approach enhances student motivation, engagement in learning, and academic achievement while maintaining a balance between tradition and innovation (Sari & Hasan, 2021). The main challenge is resistance from traditionalist communities, which can be mitigated through continuous teacher training and active collaboration with the government and other educational stakeholders.

Mu'adalah plays a crucial role in transforming pesantren into more inclusive, adaptive, and competitive educational institutions, thereby significantly contributing to the development of human resources grounded in Islamic values. The implementation of this policy not only strengthens the legitimacy of pesantren education but also promotes curriculum modernization, improved teacher quality, and enhanced educational facilities. To ensure the effective and equitable application of Mu'adalah, consistent policy support and harmonization between central and regional governments are essential to prevent disparities between modern and traditional pesantren. Furthermore, collaboration with higher education institutions and other stakeholders can expand access for pesantren graduates to formal education and the workforce while ensuring the continuity of Islamic values in a modern context (Ahmad, 2019).

## 7. Social and Policy Implications of Mu'adalah in Pesantren

Mu'adalah, as a principle of equality in Islam, carries significant social and policy implications for pesantren education, as stipulated in Law Number 18 of 2019. This principle not only formally recognizes nonformal pesantren education but also promotes social transformation by reducing educational disparities among students. The role of Mu'adalah in bridging educational gaps is evident in efforts to equalize access between traditional and modern pesantren. By integrating pesantren curricula into the national education system, students from low-income backgrounds can obtain officially recognized diplomas, reducing social stigma and enhancing social mobility. Survey data indicate that implementing Mu'adalah has decreased dropout rates among pesantren students by up to 25% in rural areas, while emphasizing gender inclusion and accessibility for students with disabilities (Rahman, 2020). Overall, Mu'adalah demonstrates how legal recognition can drive social equity, empower marginalized students, and strengthen the role of pesantren in national development and human capital formation.

The contribution of Mu'adalah to national human resource development is evident in the cultivation of students' skills that combine Islamic values with modern competencies. Pesantrens that implement this principle produce graduates who are prepared to contribute to the creative economy, technology, and entrepreneurship, while maintaining Islamic ethics and morality. This approach aligns with the national development vision of building a highly skilled workforce, positioning pesantrens as agents of social change capable of addressing the challenges posed by urbanization and globalization. Empirical research indicates that implementing Mu'adalah has increased student participation in vocational programs, thereby reducing youth unemployment by up to 15% (Sari & Hasan, 2021). Overall, Mu'adalah strengthens the integration of

religious education with practical skill development, enhancing the relevance and impact of pesantren graduates in Indonesia's socio-economic development.

To enhance its impact, policy recommendations include standardizing pesantren curricula through national accreditation, providing professional training for teachers and ustaz to adopt modern pedagogical methods, and providing continuous guidance from the government and non-governmental organizations to pesantrens. Effective implementation also requires adequate funding and regular monitoring to ensure educational equivalency without compromising the unique identity of pesantren. Regional disparities and varying institutional capacities can be addressed through cross-sector collaboration, ensuring that Mu'adalah functions as an effective instrument for social inclusion and sustainable development. By integrating traditional Islamic education with national standards, this policy framework strengthens the role of pesantren in shaping competent, ethical, and socially responsible graduates (Ahmad, 2019).

#### D. CONCLUSION

Mu'adalah has proven to be an effective formal mechanism for recognizing nonformal pesantren education under Law Number 18 of 2019. This principle of equivalency allows pesantren, which traditionally operate independently, to receive official state recognition and integrate Islamic values with national education standards. Its implementation demonstrates that Mu'adalah not only elevates the status of pesantren as legitimate educational institutions but also fosters harmony between tradition and modernity. Empirical data indicate that this formal recognition has significantly increased student participation in the national education system. Pesantren that have adopted Mu'adalah report up to a 40% improvement in accreditation outcomes and diploma recognition, reflecting enhanced institutional credibility and broader opportunities for graduates in higher education and the workforce. This policy underscores the transformative potential of Mu'adalah in bridging nonformal and formal education in Indonesia.

Formal recognition through Mu'adalah has significantly enhanced academic mobility and educational equity for pesantren students across Indonesia. With diplomas officially recognized by the state, students can pursue higher education or enter the workforce more easily, helping reduce socio-economic disparities. This impact is particularly evident in the increased access of students from remote and underprivileged areas to universities, as well as the reduction of discrimination against Islamic education. Empirical studies highlight that Mu'adalah fosters social inclusion, ensuring that female students and those from low-income families receive more equal opportunities. By bridging the gap between traditional pesantren education and formal national standards, Mu'adalah not only empowers individual students but also strengthens human resource development based on fairness, justice, and inclusivity, reinforcing the role of pesantren in the nation's educational and socio-economic advancement.

However, the effectiveness of Mu'adalah still requires strengthening in terms of systemic support, quality standards, and regulatory backing. Challenges such as regional disparities in pesantren quality and limited technological infrastructure necessitate government interventions through curriculum standardization, regular training for pesantren administrators, and adequate budget allocations. Without these reinforcements, implementation gaps could hinder Mu'adalah's potential as a transformative educational tool. Policy recommendations include national monitoring, collaboration with international institutions, and continuous evaluation to ensure sustainability. Overall, Mu'adalah holds significant promise for creating a more inclusive and equitable future for pesantren education, provided it is supported by strong regulatory commitment and coordinated efforts across all levels of governance.

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