

Religious Understanding Transformation in *Kitab Kuning* Studies: A Phenomenological Study on Reflection, Internalization, and Social Praxis of Congregants

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Abstract : The study of yellow books at the grassroots level plays a strategic role in shaping Islamic literacy, but its dynamics are often reduced to the mere transfer of external knowledge. This study aims to explore in-depth the experiences of congregations in transforming religious understanding through the study of yellow books. This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation from two kyai and five congregations in Pemalang Regency, which were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis. The results show that 1) the transformation of religious understanding begins with cognitive disorientation towards classical texts, which is analyzed through the dialogical pedagogical mediation of the kyai; 2) the process of critical reflection and negotiation of meaning facilitates the internalization of values, where teachings are no longer viewed as external doctrines but are incorporated into personal identity; and 3) this internalization is manifested in a substantial increase in the quality of ritual worship, changes in patterns of social interaction to be more moderate and inclusive, and increased psychological resilience. This study concludes that the study of yellow books functions as a transformative catalyst that revitalizes the Islamic intellectual tradition to respond to the challenges of polarization. These findings offer a crucial bottom-up perspective for strengthening religious moderation and developing a reflective religious education curriculum.

Keywords : religious transformation; yellow book study; phenomenology; internalization of values.

Abstrak : Kajian kitab kuning di tingkat akar rumput berperan strategis dalam membentuk literasi keislaman, namun dinamikanya sering kali direduksi pada transfer pengetahuan eksternal semata. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi secara mendalam pengalaman jamaah dalam mentransformasi pemahaman keagamaan melalui kajian kitab kuning. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain fenomenologis. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam,

observasi partisipatif, dan dokumentasi dari dua kyai dan lima jamaah di Kabupaten Pemalang, yang dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik reflektif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan 1) transformasi pemahaman keagamaan bermula dari disorientasi kognitif terhadap teks klasik yang diurai melalui mediasi pedagogis dialogis kyai; 2) proses refleksi kritis dan negosiasi makna memfasilitasi internalisasi nilai, di mana ajaran tidak lagi dipandang sebagai doktrin eksternal melainkan terinkorporasi ke dalam identitas personal; dan 3) internalisasi tersebut termanifestasi secara nyata dalam peningkatan kualitas ibadah ritual yang substansial, perubahan pola interaksi sosial yang lebih moderat dan inklusif, serta peningkatan resiliensi psikologis. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa kajian kitab kuning berfungsi sebagai katalisator transformatif yang menghidupkan tradisi intelektual Islam untuk merespons tantangan polarisasi. Temuan ini menawarkan perspektif bottom-up yang krusial bagi penguatan moderasi beragama dan pengembangan kurikulum pendidikan agama yang reflektif.

Kata kunci : transformasi keagamaan; kajian kitab kuning; fenomenologi; internalisasi nilai.

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INTRODUCTION

The study of Islamic texts at the grassroots level, particularly in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) and religious study groups (majelis taklim), is a fundamental pillar in preserving the tradition of Islamic scholarship and shaping the religious literacy of Indonesian society. However, amidst the increasingly sharp currents of modernity and religious polarization, textual, rigid, and exclusive religious understandings often trigger social friction and intolerance (Istikarani & Anwar, 2025). This phenomenon indicates a gap between the rich intellectual treasure of Islamic texts, which should be *rahmatan lil alamin* (blessing for all the universe), and the reality of the congregation's understanding, which tends to be partial and shallow (Muhlis, 2026). This problem is exacerbated by a study approach that often focuses on the authority of kyai (Islamic scholars) and a one-way transfer of knowledge, thus ignoring how the congregation actively interprets, reflects on, and internalizes these values into their life experiences (Ariani & Hanif, 2026). Therefore, examining the process of transformation of religious understanding from the perspective of the congregation's subjective experiences is urgently needed to map the root of the problem and uncover the potential for religious moderation hidden at the grassroots level.

Several previous studies have examined the dynamics of yellow book studies and their impact on society, but they tend to be fragmented within a single dimension. Studies by Sari et al. (2025) and Safitri (2026), for example, comprehensively examine the textual structure and scholarly authority of kyai (Islamic boarding school) within the pesantren tradition, but neglect the psychosocial dimensions and lived experiences of the congregation. Conversely, research by Fihri & Suwardi (2025) highlights religious moderation from a top-down perspective on policy and the role of large mass organizations, thus under-representing individual agency at the grassroots level.

Meanwhile, Bukhori (2025) measures the impact of religious studies solely through quantitative increases in cognitive knowledge. This gap in the literature indicates that no study has in-depth explored the lived experiences of congregations in transforming their understanding. Unlike these studies, the novelty of this research lies in the use of a phenomenological approach to uncover the process of reflection and internalization of values as a bridge between classical text literacy and manifestations of social behavior, offering a holistic, bottom-up perspective for understanding religious moderation.

Based on these theoretical and empirical gaps, this study aims to explore in-depth the experiences of congregations in transforming their religious understanding through the study of the yellow books, focusing on three main aspects: first, how congregations experience the process of changing their understanding; second, how reflection and internalization of values shape religious meaning; and third, how this transformation is manifested in religious practice and social life. The urgency of this research lies not only in its contribution to enriching the literature on the sociology of religion and Islamic education, but also in its practical implications for strengthening religious moderation in Indonesia. By revealing how the values of the yellow books are internalized and organically practiced by the community, this research provides a strong empirical foundation for stakeholders, including the Ministry of Religious Affairs and educational institutions, to formulate more humanistic, reflective, and sustainable strategies for religious development in the contemporary era.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of yellow books at the grassroots level plays a strategic role in shaping religious competence and Islamic literacy in a holistic manner. Religious understanding, particularly in the study of classical texts, requires an approach that not only measures cognitive mastery but also facilitates a continuous process of reflection and internalization of values (Muhlis, 2026). However, various studies and field practices indicate that the study of yellow books is often dominated by a one-way, doctrinal approach to knowledge transmission, reducing religious understanding to mere memorization of texts, and positioning the kyai (Islamic cleric) as the sole and absolute authority (Sukur & Budiyanto, 2025). This condition alienates the congregation from the essence of the text and fosters a rigid and exclusive understanding of religion. According to the phenomenology of religion approach, initiated by Edmund Husserl (1999) and developed in the study of religious experience, understanding becomes more meaningful when explored through the lifeworld of participants and interpreted subjectively and contextually. Therefore, an approach that centers on the congregation's experience is needed to uncover how this transformation of understanding occurs organically and profoundly.

The transformation of religious understanding is the process of changing the meaning schemes experienced by individuals when critically interacting with texts and contexts. This model is designed to create a learning ecosystem that is reflective, dialogical,

and oriented toward transformative learning (Mezirow, 2015). In its application, the study does not stop at literal translations but encourages the congregation to contextualize the values of the scriptures within social realities, so that they understand the precise relevance of the teachings to everyday life. In the study of the yellow books, the transformative approach is considered highly effective because classical texts have ethical and philosophical dimensions that require dynamic interpretation. According to Taran & Sunarya (2025), research and practice based on lived experience can reflect the meaning of religion in real contexts, not merely mastering the structures of fiqh or theology. Through this approach, kyai can facilitate a dialogue that maps the shift in congregational understanding from textual to substantive in a comprehensive manner, so that study is no longer reduced to information transfer but rather becomes a process of developing a holistic and meaningful character.

Internalization of values is a fundamental indicator for determining the success of the religious transformation process. According to Sönmez (2017), in the context of learning, internalization encompasses not only the cognitive domain but also the affective and psychomotor domains, which are integrated with each other. In the study of yellow books, these three domains closely intersect; congregants are not only required to understand the principles of fiqh or morals theoretically, but also to demonstrate them in their worship practices and reflective social interactions (Afif et al., 2022). The low quality of religious manifestations is often caused by a disconnect between the texts studied and the congregation's reality, resulting in the resulting values being unable to lead to specific behavioral improvements. Phenomenological reflection presents a solution to this problem because it provides an interpretive framework based on the gap between normative understanding and actual experience (van Manen, 1990). Through experience-based qualitative matrix analysis, researchers can precisely identify the stage at which congregants experience critical reflection, allowing the process of internalizing values to be designed in a differentiated and targeted manner.

Various previous studies have examined the implementation and impact of the study of yellow books, but most still focus on textual, historical, and descriptive-normative approaches. Research by Sari et al. (2025) and Safitri (2026), for example, primarily analyzes the textual structure and scholarly authority of kyai (Islamic boarding schools) without exploring the dynamics of meaning construction at the congregation level. On the other hand, the study by Fihrisi & Suwardi (2025) describes religious moderation normatively without analyzing how the values of yellow books are transformed into everyday social practices. Meanwhile, research by Bukhori (2025) discusses the impact of religious studies as an entity separate from the cycle of personal reflection and internalization. This gap in the literature indicates that there has been no in-depth study that explores how the transformation of understanding is operationalized qualitatively through a phenomenological lens—from the experience of disorientation, negotiation of meaning in dialogue, to its manifestation in social life. Based on this study, this research aims to fill this gap by offering a new perspective on the dynamics of holistic religious transformation centered on the experiences of the congregation.

In addition to an appropriate pedagogical approach, the success of this transformation is also greatly influenced by contextual factors, the cleric's communicative competence, and the social dynamics of the environment. Vygotsky & Cole's (1978) social constructivism theory emphasizes that effective learning must consider social and cultural interactions, with the cleric acting as a facilitator, providing scaffolding based on the congregation's experiences and doubts. In practice, in religious study groups (Majelis Taklim), clerics often face challenges in the form of rigid traditional methods that do not always align with the characteristics and needs of modern congregations. This can lead to overly rigid material delivery and unresponsiveness to contemporary issues. Therefore, pedagogical flexibility and the support of dialogue spaces are needed to enable congregations to adapt classical values to local contexts without compromising the essence of the teachings. Studying the yellow books implemented with a participatory and reflective approach will create a humanistic learning atmosphere, reduce resistance to change, and ultimately improve the overall quality of religious moderation.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design to deeply understand the lived experiences of congregants in participating in the study of the yellow book and how these experiences are interpreted as a process of transformation of religious understanding. The choice of phenomenology is based on the focus of the research which is not solely to measure the increase in religious knowledge, but to explore the experiences, perceptions, reflections, and meanings of congregants regarding changes in how they understand and practice Islamic teachings. In phenomenological research, experiences are understood through the lifeworld of the participants and are analyzed iteratively to discover the meaning inherent in these experiences (Finlay, 2013). The study was conducted in a religious study community in Pemalang Regency that regularly holds yellow book studies. Informants were selected purposively by considering the informants' direct involvement and experience with the phenomenon being studied. The informants consisted of two kyai/study leaders (T1 and T2) as key informants and five congregants (J1-J5) as primary informants. This selection was intended to obtain diverse perspectives between those who deliver and manage the learning process and those who directly experience the learning process and the transformation of religious understanding. The selection of informants took into account their experience participating in the study, the intensity of their attendance, their involvement in the learning process, and their ability to provide reflective information regarding changes in religious understanding and practice. This approach aligns with qualitative research design principles, which prioritize participant experience and depth of information as the basis for determining the suitability of data sources for the phenomenon being studied (Creswell & Poth, 2024). Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation. Interviews focused on the congregation's experiences before and after participating in the study, the process of understanding the contents of the scriptures, reflective experiences during the learning process, and changes in religious meaning and practice. Observations were used to capture patterns of kyai-congregant interaction, the method of presentation,

congregational responses, discussion dynamics, and the connection between the scriptures and daily life. Documentation served as supporting data to strengthen the information obtained from the interviews and observations.

Data analysis was conducted interactively and continuously from the beginning of the data collection process, through the stages of data condensation, data presentation, and drawing and verifying conclusions, as developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014). In the initial stage, all interviews were transcribed and read repeatedly to gain a comprehensive understanding of each informant's experience. Statements directly related to the experience of participating in the study of the yellow book, changes in understanding religious teachings, the process of reflection, internalization of values, and changes in religious practice were then coded and grouped into substantive categories. Next, categories were compared across informants to identify recurring and distinct patterns of experience, which were then developed into themes that represented the meaning structure of the phenomenon. The phenomenological analysis process was conducted reflectively and iteratively so that researchers did not stop at describing behavior but could uncover the meanings given by congregants to these transformational experiences (Finlay, 2013). Subsequent data presentation was used to demonstrate the relationship between experience, reflection, internalization, and religious practice, resulting in a construction of findings that addressed the three research focuses. In developing themes, researchers paid attention to the coherence between empirical data and interpretations so that themes were not simply groupings of topics but rather patterns of meaning constructed from the entire data (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Data validity was strengthened through triangulation of sources and techniques, namely comparing the cleric's statement with the congregation's experience and matching interview findings with observation and documentation. The triangulation strategy was used to obtain a picture of the phenomenon from more than one source and technique so that interpretations did not rely solely on a single perspective (Ilhami et al., 2024). Furthermore, interpretation results were reconfirmed with the informants through member checking on sections requiring clarification to ensure that the meaning formulated by the researcher remained consistent with the informants' intended experiences. Informants' identities were disguised using codes T1, T2, and J1-J5 to maintain confidentiality and comply with the ethical principles of qualitative research.

Table 1. Research Informants

Code	Status/Role	Selection Criteria	Information Focus
T1	Kyai/Study Instructor	Primary instructor of <i>kitab kuning</i> studies who is directly involved in delivering the material and interacting with the congregation.	The objectives of the study, <i>kitab</i> materials, teaching methods, processes of interpreting religious teachings, patterns of interaction with the congregation, and observed changes in the congregation's understanding.
T2	Kyai/Study Instructor	Kyai who is actively involved in guiding and mentoring the congregation and understands the dynamics of religious learning.	Strategies for delivering the material, congregational responses, processes of dialogue and reflection, and changes in religious understanding and practice.
J1	Congregation	Regularly attends the study	Experiences in attending the study

	Member	sessions and has experience participating in <i>kitab kuning</i> .	sessions and changes in ways of understanding Islamic teachings.
J2	Congregation Member	Actively participates in question-and-answer sessions, discussions, or interactions during the study sessions.	Experiences of dialogue and reflection, and the process of constructing religious meaning.
J3	Congregation Member	Regularly attends the study sessions and demonstrates the application of the study material in everyday life.	The process of internalizing religious values and changes in religious practices.
J4	Congregation Member	Has diverse educational or religious backgrounds and actively participates in the study sessions.	The role of prior knowledge and experience in the process of transforming religious understanding.
J5	Congregation Member	Actively participates in the study sessions and is able to reflect on changes in social and religious life.	Manifestations of transformed understanding in worship practices and social life.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Congregation Experiences in Transforming Religious Understanding

Congregants' initial experiences when confronted with classical texts are often marked by profound cognitive confusion and a highly textual understanding. Before engaging in intensive study, the majority of participants felt alienated from the Islamic intellectual heritage. This was clearly revealed when J1 stated, "I initially felt the book was too complicated and irrelevant." Similarly, J2 admitted, "My previous understanding was very rigid and literal." This condition was exacerbated by a lack of context, leading J3 to complain, "I just memorized without understanding the underlying meaning." This empirical phenomenon demonstrates that without proper guidance, classical texts actually create a psychological distance between congregants and their scholarly traditions. The gap between the bare Arabic texts and contemporary realities leads to a disorientation of meaning. However, this disorientation is precisely the crucial starting point for the participants' later transformation into a deeper, more comprehensive, and more meaningful religious understanding. This demonstrates that textual literacy requires an interpretive bridge. This bridge is vital for them to absorb the essence of the teachings in a complete and comprehensive manner without losing their original context in today's modern society, sustainably and meaningfully.

The turning point in the transformation occurred when the kyai implemented a dialogical method that contextualized classical texts with modern realities. Based on participant observation, the study atmosphere shifted from passive to highly interactive, with the congregation beginning to boldly critique and directly connect the material to current issues. This shift was positively responded to by participants. J4 stated, "The kyai's way of explaining made me realize how relevant religion is." J5 echoed this sentiment, saying, "This discussion opened my eyes to the complexity of Islamic law." This intensive

interaction facilitated the deconstruction of rigid old understandings. The kyai did not simply transfer knowledge but also provoked the congregation's critical thinking to explore the *maqasid sharia* (Islamic principles) behind the texts. This process demonstrated that internalization of values does not occur automatically but rather through highly effective pedagogical mediation. The support of an egalitarian learning environment allows the congregation to feel safe exploring their doubts, allowing cognitive transformation to occur organically, deeply, and meaningfully for their daily spiritual lives on an ongoing basis. This aligns with the principle of andragogy, which places experience as the basis for learning. This experience is crucial for them in building a solid and rational foundation of faith amidst the increasingly complex currents of modernity.

After experiencing a cognitive shift, the congregation entered a phase of deep reflection to integrate new values into a framework of personal meaning. This process required them to evaluate their previous religious practices. J1 realized, "I now understand that worship is not just a ritual, but also a social awareness." This reflection extended to aspects of *muamalah* (religious transactions), as J2 expressed, "I am now more careful in my economic transactions and avoid usury." Furthermore, J3 added, "I have learned to restrain myself and not easily judge others." This reflective impact also influenced how they interact with differences, as J4 admitted, "I have become more tolerant of differing political choices." These four quotes confirm that the transformation in understanding does not stop at the intellectual level but permeates affect and behavior. Internalizing the values of the yellow books has successfully formed a new *habitus* that is more moderate, inclusive, and reflective. The congregation no longer views religion as a rigid doctrine, but rather as a dynamic, blessed, and highly relevant guide to life for them in facing the various challenges of daily life in a very wise and highly responsible manner in the midst of a modern society that is increasingly complex and full of increasingly difficult challenges of the times.

In the final stage, the transformation of the congregation's religious understanding has crystallized into a new, more mature and balanced religious identity. They are no longer easily polarized by provocative religious issues. J5 asserted, "I am now calmer and less easily provoked by divisive issues." This maturity is also evident in the way they practice *sharia*. J1 explained, "I perform my worship more devoutly and consciously, not because of a pact." Furthermore, J2 added, "Religion is now a source of inner peace, not just restrictive rules." These three statements confirm that the study of yellow books has succeeded in shifting the congregation's religious paradigm from one that is exclusive and rigid to one that is inclusive and substantial. This transformation is not merely a cognitive change, but a complete reconstruction of meaning. As a result, the congregation is able to present the face of Islam as a blessing for all creation in their daily social interactions. This study's contribution to grassroots religious moderation is significant, tangible, and sustainable for the wider community, fostering genuine harmony and peace amidst the differences that exist within society as a whole and comprehensively in the increasingly complex digital era.

Reflection and Internalization of Religious Values in the Congregation's Experience

The congregation's reflection process begins when they begin to question religious understandings they previously considered established. This starting point is often triggered by exposure to classical texts that demand a reinterpretation of old beliefs. J1 stated, "After listening to the kyai's explanation, I began to question why I had always

understood religion in a piecemeal way." Similarly, J3 acknowledged, "I felt that my understanding was incomplete and needed to be deepened." This reflection process did not occur instantly, but rather through intense inner struggle. T1 observed this phenomenon and stated, "The congregation began to ask many fundamental questions they had never considered before." This reflective moment served as a crucial catalyst because it forced the congregation to step out of their cognitive comfort zone. J2 added, "I felt like I was awakened from a long sleep, realizing that many things I was doing without a complete understanding." These four statements confirm that reflection is not simply an intellectual activity, but rather an existential experience that shakes old frameworks of meaning and opens up space for the formation of new, more authentic and profound understandings.

The congregation's reflection deepened as they engaged in critical dialogue with the kyai and fellow participants. This dialogical space allowed them to test the validity of the new understandings they were developing. J4 explained, "Discussions with the kyai made me realize that the texts have extraordinary depth of meaning." This dialogical process also facilitated connections between classical texts and the life issues they faced. J5 added, "I always connect every study material to the problems I experience daily." The kyai's mediation in this process is crucial because they not only provide textual interpretations but also guide the congregation in discovering the personal meaning of each teaching. T2 asserted, "My job is not just to explain the contents of the book, but to help the congregation find its relevance in their lives." These three quotes demonstrate that the internalization of values does not occur in a vacuum, but rather through intensive social interaction. Dialogue becomes a space for negotiating meaning where the congregation actively constructs their own understanding, rather than simply passively accepting doctrine. This process is what distinguishes authentic internalization from one-way indoctrination.

After going through the reflection and dialogue phase, the congregation enters the internalization stage, where the values of the yellow book begin to integrate with their religious identity. This process is marked by changes in how they view themselves and the world around them. J1 stated, "The values I learned are now part of how I think and make decisions." This internalization also impacts the affective dimension, as J3 expressed, "I feel closer to God and more at peace in my life." These changes are not only individual, but also affect how they interact with others. J2 added, "I now forgive more easily and am less quick to judge people who disagree with me." From the perspective of the study facilitator, T1 observed that "The most obvious transformation is seen when the congregation begins to apply the values of the book in their social interactions without feeling forced." These four statements confirm that internalization has successfully crossed cognitive boundaries and seeped into the affective and conative dimensions. The values of the yellow book are no longer viewed as a foreign, external entity, but have metamorphosed into an integral part of the congregation's self. This process aligns with the concept of internalization in social construction theory, where objective reality (text) is transformed into subjective reality (personal meaning) through a continuous process of reflection and interaction.

The internalization mechanism that occurs in congregations can be understood as a cyclical process involving four interrelated phases: (1) engagement with classical texts through listening and reading; (2) critical reflection triggered by cognitive dissonance; (3) dialogical negotiation of meaning through interactions with kyai and fellow congregants;

and (4) embodied internalization, where the tested values become integrated into the new religious habitus. These four phases do not proceed linearly, but are iterative—congregants continually return to the reflection phase when faced with new challenges in their lives. This cyclical process explains why the transformation of religious understanding among congregations studying yellow books is enduring and resistant to superficial change. The internalization that occurs is not merely a superficial change, but rather a profound reconstruction of the framework of meaning (frame of reference) they have used to interpret religious reality.

Figure1. Model of the Transformation Cycle of Religious Understanding through Reflection and Internalization of the Values of the Yellow Book



Manifestations of Transformation in Religious Practice and Social Life

The findings of this study indicate that the transformation in the congregation's religious understanding is clearly manifested in changes in the quality and orientation of their daily ritual worship practices. Congregants no longer perform worship merely as a mechanical obligation, but rather as a contemplative effort to draw closer to God with full awareness. This change was expressed by J1, "My prayers are now more devout because I understand the meaning of each recitation, not just to fulfill an obligation." Similarly, J2 stated, "I have become more diligent in giving alms because I understand that entrusted wealth must be purified." This change in orientation to worship also extends to the aspect of fasting, as J3 explained, "My fasting is no longer just about abstaining from hunger, but also about guarding my tongue and thoughts from negative thoughts." The cleric's observation of this change was confirmed by T1, "I see that congregants now perform sunnah worship on their own initiative, not because they are told to." These four statements indicate that the internalization of the values of the yellow books has shifted the congregation's orientation of worship from a formalistic to a substantial approach. Worship is no longer viewed as a ritual burden, but rather as a spiritual necessity that provides inner peace and shapes better character.

Beyond ritual worship, this transformation in understanding is also significantly manifested in the social interaction patterns and practices of congregational transactions in society. The values of moderation and inclusivity learned from the yellow books are implemented in an attitude of respect for differences and a prioritization of social ethics. J4

stated, "I now find it easier to get along with neighbors who have different political views without feeling disturbed." J5 echoed this sentiment, "In business, I am now more honest and less dishonest because I fear social sin." Kyai T2 observed this social impact firsthand: "Congregants who used to easily blame others now become mediators when conflicts arise in the community." This change in social behavior reflects a shift from exclusivity to inclusivity, where religion functions as a social glue. To visualize how the internalization of values transforms into concrete and sustainable social practices, the following is a conceptual model of the manifestation of religious transformation in community life.

Figure 2. Model of Manifestation of Religious Values in Social Practices and Transactions



The image above illustrates the transformation process in which the values internalized from the study of the yellow books (such as inclusivity, honesty, and peace) are actualized into three dimensions of practice: harmonious social interaction, ethical transactions with integrity, and participatory conflict resolution. The end result is the formation of social cohesion and religious moderation at the grassroots level. Further manifestations of religious transformation are seen in the increased active participation of the congregation in social activities and concern for the environment. Understanding the concept of *rahmatan lil alamin* encourages them to focus not only on their own safety but also on providing tangible benefits to others. J1 stated, "I now regularly participate in community service and help sick neighbors because it is part of my religious teachings." J3 added, "I have started separating organic and non-organic waste at home as a form of responsibility for maintaining cleanliness as taught in the book." This positive impact was also acknowledged by J5, "I more often set aside some of my sustenance for the mosque fund and disaster relief without being asked." These three quotes emphasize that transformative religious understanding can encourage congregants to take on a more proactive social role. Religion is no longer positioned privately, but rather becomes an intrinsic motivation to contribute to the public good and environmental sustainability.

Psychologically, the transformation in religious understanding is also manifested in increased mental resilience and spiritual resilience among congregants in facing life's challenges. The values of *tawakkul* (religious trust), patience, and contentment (*qana'ah*) learned from the yellow books become effective coping mechanisms when they face calamities or economic pressures. J2 explained, "When my business suffers a loss, I no longer complain excessively because I understand that it's a test and that there's a lesson in

it." J4 added, "I've become more patient in dealing with family problems by praying, not with anger." T1 observed this mental shift from the outside: "Congregants who used to be easily stressed and hopeless now appear more resilient and optimistic in living life." These three statements demonstrate that internalizing the values of the yellow books serves as a solid psychological foundation. This transformation demonstrates that the study of the yellow books not only enriches the intellectual treasury but also provides emotional and spiritual strength essential for the well-being of the congregation amidst the stressful dynamics of modern life.

Discussion

The most important findings of this comprehensive study reveal that the study of the yellow books is not simply a transfer of textual knowledge, but rather a transformative catalyst that shifts the congregation's religious understanding from a rigid and exclusive paradigm to a contextual, inclusive, and reflective framework of meaning. This process begins with cognitive disorientation when confronted with classical texts, which is then unraveled through the dialogic and interactive pedagogical mediation of the kyai. The congregation no longer mechanically memorizes doctrines but successfully internalizes the values of the maqasid sharia into their personal identities and daily social practices. This transformation is clearly visible in the improved quality of ritual worship, which has become more devout, as well as changes in social behavior that are more moderate, tolerant, and environmentally conscious. These findings confirm that literacy in classical texts at the grassroots level, when facilitated with appropriate methods, can produce authentic and sustainable religious moderation. Thus, the study of yellow books functions as a vital spiritual and social incubation space in responding to the challenges of religious polarization in the modern era, proving that the Islamic intellectual tradition has high relevance and adaptability to the dynamics of contemporary society.

This phenomenon of transformation in religious understanding can be comprehensively explained through the lens of Jack Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory combined with Pierre Bourdieu's concept of Habitus. Mezirow (2015) states that transformative learning occurs when individuals experience a disorienting dilemma that triggers critical reflection on their basic assumptions, much like what congregations experience when confronted with the complexity of the yellow book text. This critical reflection, facilitated by dialogue with the kyai, allows congregations to reconstruct their meaning schemes to be more inclusive (Dahlan, 2018). Furthermore, the process of internalizing values that leads to changes in social practices aligns with Bourdieu's concept of habitus in Costa & Murphy (2015), where new cognitive structures are gradually incorporated into bodily dispositions and everyday actions. The values of moderation are no longer merely intellectual discourse, but have become second nature or second nature that automatically directs the behavior of congregations in social interactions (Ta'rifin et al., 2025). The integration of these two theories demonstrates that religious transformation is not a one-way, linear process, but rather a complex dialectic between cognitive reflection, social negotiation, and physical incorporation. This theoretical perspective

enriches the sociology of religion literature by demonstrating how classical texts are reactivated to shape a moderate religious habitus in modern society.

The novelty of this research lies in its focus on the process of value internalization as a bridge between classical text literacy and social behavioral manifestations, a process often overlooked in previous studies. Previous research tends to be fragmented along a single dimension. For example, studies by Sari et al. (2025) and Safitri (2026) focused solely on textual analysis and teaching methods for the yellow books, without addressing the psychosocial impact on congregations. On the other hand, research on religious moderation, such as that conducted by Fihri & Suwardi (2025), focuses more on top-down policies or the role of large mass organizations, neglecting grassroots agency. Meanwhile, Bukhori's (2025) study, which examined the impact of religious studies, only measured increases in cognitive knowledge quantitatively. Unlike those five studies, this research offers a phenomenological approach that uncovers the lived experiences of congregations, proving that the most robust religious moderation arises from personal reflection and the organic internalization of values, not indoctrination. This novelty fills a gap in the literature by demonstrating that the yellow books are not merely artifacts of the past, but rather living media capable of holistically transforming religious habitus, offering a bottom-up perspective crucial for the sustainability of religious moderation in Indonesia.

The findings and novelty of this research have strategic policy implications for the government, particularly the Ministry of Religious Affairs, as well as educational institutions such as madrasas and schools. First, the government needs to formulate policies that promote religious moderation not only through seminars or slogans, but also by integrating the dialogical and reflective methods typical of yellow book studies into the formal religious education curriculum in schools and madrasas. Second, the Ministry of Religious Affairs should provide regulatory and funding support to grassroots study communities and Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) as strategic partners in the religious moderation movement, as they have proven capable of organically internalizing values. Third, for educational institutions, these findings imply the need for a paradigm shift in religious teaching from doctrinal memorization to a phenomenological approach that encourages students to reflect on their spiritual experiences. Training religious teachers to master dialogical facilitation methods is urgently needed. This policy is crucial to ensure that religious education produces not only theologically intelligent individuals but also inclusive moral and social resilience. By proactively addressing these findings, the state can strengthen social cohesion and curb radicalism through the most effective cultural and educational channels.

CONCLUSION

This research concludes that the study of the yellow books serves as a transformative catalyst, shifting the congregation's religious understanding from a rigid textual paradigm to a contextual, inclusive, and reflective framework of meaning. This transformation

begins with cognitive disorientation, unraveled through dialogical pedagogical mediation, triggering critical reflection on old religious assumptions. This reflective process then metamorphoses into a profound internalization of values, where teachings are no longer viewed as external doctrines but are instead incorporated into the congregation's religious identity and habitus. The concrete manifestations of this internalization are manifested in three main dimensions: an increase in the quality of ritual worship, making it more substantial and devout, changing patterns of social interaction to be more moderate, tolerant, and ethical, and increasing psychological resilience in facing the dynamics of life. Thus, the study of the yellow books at the grassroots level has proven to be more than just a space for the transfer of classical knowledge, but a vital medium for revitalizing the Islamic intellectual tradition to respond to the challenges of polarization and ground religious moderation authentically, organically, and sustainably in a complex and dynamic modern society, while strengthening overall social cohesion across all levels of Indonesian society today.

The findings of this study enrich the sociology of religion literature by offering a bottom-up perspective on tradition-based religious moderation. However, this study was limited to a single community in Pematang Liris with a phenomenological approach, making statistical generalization of the findings impossible. Therefore, further research is recommended to adopt a cross-regional comparative design or use a mixed-methods approach to comprehensively and in-depthly measure the impact of this transformation across diverse socio-religious contexts in Indonesia and globally, and to provide more concrete policy implications for the development of Islamic religious education curricula in today's digital era in a highly sustainable manner.

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