

Gender as a moderator in the relationship between interest in learning religion and religious discipline toward pesantren regulations

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to analyze the relationship between religious learning interest and religious discipline of Islamic boarding school students in obeying Islamic boarding school regulations, by including gender as a moderator variable. A total of 127 Islamic boarding school students were selected through cluster random sampling technique. Data collection was conducted using two psychological instruments. Religious learning interest was measured using the Attitudes Toward Religion Scale (Wang et al., 2019) which consists of 10 items with two factors, namely Interest and Position, and has a Cronbach's alpha reliability between 0.75 and 0.85. Religious discipline was measured using the Measure of Islamic Religiousness (Raiya et al., 2008) which consists of 60 items on seven subscales covering three dimensions, with a Cronbach's alpha value above 0.70 indicating strong internal consistency. Moderated Regression Analysis (MRA) showed that interest in religious learning significantly influenced religious discipline ($\beta = 0.68$, $p < 0.001$), and gender moderated the relationship ($\Delta R^2 = 0.04$, $p < 0.05$). The effect of this relationship was stronger for female students, indicating that they tend to have higher levels of religious discipline when their interest in religious learning is also high. MANOVA results confirmed a significant effect on seven discipline subscales, especially on prayer discipline and participation in Islamic boarding school activities ($p < 0.001$). These findings implied that pesantren-based educational strategies should consider gender-responsive approaches to foster religious discipline, particularly by enhancing learning interest through tailored pedagogical and mentoring methods.

INTRODUCTION

Pondok Pesantren, as one of Indonesia's oldest and most significant educational institutions, plays a vital role in the nation's intellectual and developmental progress (Azizah et al., 2023; Ningsih et al., 2023). Originating from a tradition of Muslim communities gathering to study religious teachings, the concept evolved to include dedicated accommodations for students, now known as Pondok Pesantren (Dalimunthe et al., 2023; Mala et al., 2023). As a formal educational body, pesantren enforce strict regulations to cultivate discipline and character among their students, known as santri, ensuring they remain focused on their religious and academic pursuits (Kawakip & Sulanam, 2023; Mustaqim & Atabik, 2024).

Our nation currently faces a concerning moral crisis where religious teachings are often disregarded as a foundation for behavior. Pondok Pesantren are expected to serve as a moral bastion, producing knowledgeable santri who embody Islamic values (Huda, 2024; Hasanah, 2025). However, many pesantren, including Pondok Pesantren Al-Munawwir, show varying levels of disciplinary issues. Based on an interview with the head of security management and several female students on June 6, common violations include returning late, leaving the premises without permission, and skipping mandatory activities like Quran recitation, congregational prayers, and extracurriculars (Martin et al., 2014; Unstad & Fjørtoft, 2021). These behaviors highlight a fundamental problem of suboptimal discipline among santri.

Existing studies on pesantren mostly emphasize the institution's role in moral education, character building, or community development (Setinawati et al., 2025; Uyuni & Adnan, 2024). However, there is a dearth of empirical research that specifically examines the relationship between santri's interest in learning religion and their compliance with pesantren rules. This gap indicates a lack of understanding regarding how psychological factors (learning interest) directly influence a student's adherence to discipline within the pondok environment.

Theoretically, learning interest (interest in learning religion) can be explained through motivational frameworks such as the Self-Determination Theory and Expectancy-Value Theory (Hardy et al., 2022; Neyrinck et al., 2010). These theories posit that individuals engage more persistently in learning activities when they perceive personal value, intrinsic enjoyment, and alignment with their self-concept. In the religious learning context, this means that when santri find meaning and personal relevance in studying Islam, their intrinsic motivation increases, leading to greater engagement and persistence in religious practices. Furthermore, interest serves as a psychological energy that directs attention and effort toward learning goals (Renninger & Hidi, 2020; Malone & Lepper, 2021), which in pesantren life translates into more consistent participation in religious study and worship routines.

This study aimed to bridge this gap by quantitatively analyzing the correlation between religious learning interest and santri's discipline in following regulations at Pondok Pesantren Al-Munawwir. Unlike previous descriptive studies, this research offers a new perspective by providing empirical evidence through statistical analysis. By doing so, it seeks to offer a deeper understanding of the connection between a student's internal motivation (learning interest) and their external behavior (discipline) within the pesantren context. In addressing violations, administrators and mentors at the Pesantren use punishments, known as 'ta'ziran,' to remind santri to adhere to the rules. However, some santri still struggle to fulfill their obligations (Rahmatullah & Baharun, 2023; Zaenurrosyid & Sholihah, 2025). This can be seen in their lack of participation in mandatory activities like Madrasah Diniyah and Sorogan.

Madrasah Diniyah is a structured and progressive religious education system within the Pesantren (Sholihuddin & Nidak, 2023). It focuses on subjects such as fiqh, tafsir, hadith, and akhlaq to deepen the santri's religious knowledge (Tasya & Mahariah, 2024). Unfortunately, some santri are frequently absent or late and fail to pay attention during lessons, disrupting the learning process. Similarly, Sorogan is an individual learning method where santri read and translate Arabic texts one-on-one with an ustadz (Anggraeni & Karnubi, 2023). This practice is designed to improve fluency and comprehension. However, a few santri do not actively participate, arriving late or skipping the activity entirely, which diminishes its effectiveness.

The disciplined behavior of santri is directly influenced by their interest in religious learning, their understanding of the potential consequences of their actions, and their self-awareness

about studying at the Pesantren. When santri have a genuine interest in religious studies, they are more enthusiastic and engaged in Pesantren activities, viewing them as essential for their success (Asnani et al., 2024; Carter et al., 2012; Onah et al., 2020; Vazsonyi & Jenkins, 2010; Zarzycka et al., 2021). This intrinsic motivation makes them more likely to follow the rules consciously.

According to self-regulation and social learning theories (Bandura, 1991; Bandura & National Inst of Mental Health, 1986; Zimmerman, 1983), disciplined behavior emerges when individuals internalize external rules into personal standards through observation, reflection, and reinforcement. Discipline is thus not merely compliance but a form of self-regulated behavior driven by internal motivation and goal orientation. In the context of Pesantren, santri who internalize religious values are more capable of self-monitoring, evaluating their behavior, and aligning their actions with the institution's moral expectations.

Cultivating a strong interest in religious learning is crucial for fostering discipline (De Soto et al., 2018). Early exposure to religious concepts and practices, such as praying with parents or discussing religious topics at home, tends to build this interest from a young age (Abo-Zena & Midgette, 2019; Bornstein et al., 2017; Brooks et al., 2022; Prehadini et al., 2021; Smith, 2023). This foundation not only boosts motivation to acquire knowledge but also strengthens the internalization of moral values and religious practices in daily life. In the context of modern Indonesian society, there is a growing demand for individuals with high levels of innovation, skill, and strong morals rooted in religious teachings (Alfaiz et al., 2025; Fauziah et al., 2024; Harimawan et al., 2024; Katni, 2024; Muhammad et al., 2024). By cultivating a high interest in religious learning, individuals can gain both advanced knowledge and noble character.

The Islamic Pesantren is uniquely positioned to achieve this goal. The disciplined adherence to rules and the cultivation of a sincere interest in learning are fundamental to the success of individual santri and the broader goals of the institution. This study is important because it will examine how the interconnectedness of religious learning interest and discipline contributes to the formation of a santri's character and their success within the Pesantren's educational environment. Based on this, the study hypothesizes that santri's interest in religious learning and their adherence to Pesantren regulations are generally at a moderate to high level. The conceptual framework of this study positions religious learning interest as an independent variable, religious discipline as a dependent variable, and gender as a moderating variable that influences the strength and direction of the relationship. Accordingly, the study proposes the following hypotheses: Hipotesis 1: There is a significant positive relationship between religious learning interest and religious discipline among Islamic boarding school students. Hipotesis 2: Gender moderates the relationship between religious learning interest and religious discipline, such that the effect is stronger among female students. Hipotesis 3: Religious learning interest significantly affects specific subscales of religious discipline, particularly prayer discipline and participation in Islamic boarding school activities.

METHODS

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional correlational design to examine the relationship between students' interest in religious learning and compliance with Islamic boarding school regulations (Kline, 2023). The population comprised 200 female students (santri) of Al-Munawwir Islamic Boarding School aged 14–25, enrolled in madrasah diniyah classes from preparatory to class V. A cluster random sampling technique was applied at the class level to select respondents, following Creswell & Creswell (2022) guidelines. Based on Isaac and Michael's sample

size table with a 5% significance level, a total of 127 santri were selected, proportionately representing the population of 200.

The data collection method was quantitative using a research scale instrument. In this study, there are two research scales. Interest in Religious Learning was measured with the Attitudes Toward Religion Scale (Wang et al., 2019), consisting of 10 items across two factors: Interest (e.g., “I am interested in learning about religions recognized by the state”) and Position (general attitudes toward religion). Cronbach’s α ranged from 0.75 to 0.85, indicating good reliability. Religious Discipline was measured using the Measure of Islamic Religiousness (Raiya et al., 2008), consisting of 60 items across seven subscales representing students’ participation in religious activities. Reliability values (Cronbach’s α) exceeded 0.70, indicating sufficient to high internal consistency.

Data were collected using self-administered questionnaires distributed in the selected classes. Respondents completed the instruments under the supervision of the researcher to ensure accuracy. Data were analyzed with Simple Linear Regression (SLR) to examine whether interest in religious learning (predictor) could predict students’ religious discipline (outcome). Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was employed to test the effect of interest in religious learning on the seven subscales of religious discipline. Furthermore, Moderated Regression Analysis (MRA) was conducted to examine the interaction effect of demographic variables particularly gender on the relationship between interest in religious learning and religious discipline. This approach allows for a more comprehensive understanding of whether the strength of the relationship differs across groups, thereby extending the analysis beyond a simple correlational model. Statistical assumptions were checked prior to analysis. All analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics 25 (Rustamov, 2021).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the collected data, the scores for interest in learning religion and discipline in adhering to Pesantren regulations will be categorized according to the normal distribution. The researcher will classify the subjects into three categories. Data, categorization of religion learning interest can be seen in Table 1 and categorization of Pesantren regulation discipline in Table 2.

Table 1

Categorization of Religion Learning Interest

Interval	f	%	Categorization
$X < 105,616$	10	7,94 %	Low
$105,616 \leq X < 131,364$	105	82,54 %	Medium
$131,364 \leq X$	12	9,52 %	High

Table 2

Categorization of Pesantren Regulation Discipline

Interval	f	%	Categorization
$X < 86,113$	24	19,05%	Low
$86,113 \leq X < 105,667$	77	60,32 %	Medium
$105,667 \leq X$	26	20,64 %	High

Normality Test of Distribution

The normality test of distribution was conducted using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov Test (KSZ) statistical technique. The guideline used is that if $p > 0.05$, then the distribution is normal; conversely, if $p < 0.05$, then the distribution is not normal. The results of the normality test of the distribution for the variables "interest in learning religion" and "pesantren rules" were as follows: The result of the normality test for the distribution of the "interest in learning religion" variable yielded $KSZ = 0.671$ with $P = 0.759$ ($P > 0.05$). This indicated that the distribution of the "interest in learning religion" variable is normal. The result of the normality test for the distribution of the "discipline of pesantren rules" variable yielded $KSZ = 0.609$ with $P = 0.852$ ($P > 0.05$). This indicated that the distribution of the "discipline of pesantren rules" variable is also normal.

Linearity Test

The criterion used to determine the linearity of a relationship is if the Linearity P-value is above 0.05 ($P > 0.05$), it means that the relationship between the two variables is not linear. Conversely, if the Linearity P-value is below 0.05 ($P < 0.05$), then the relationship between the two variables is linear. The result of the test between interest in learning religion and discipline of pesantren rules showed an F-value of 0.204 with $P = 0.00$ ($P < 0.05$), indicating that the correlation is linear.

Hypothesis Testing

Based on the results of the data analysis, the correlation coefficient between the variables of religion learning interest and discipline in adhering to Pesantren regulations was $r = 0.774$ with $p = 0.00$ ($p < 0.01$), indicating a highly significant positive correlation between religion learning interest and discipline in adhering to Pesantren regulations. Therefore, the hypothesis is accepted. As religion learning interest increases, discipline in adhering to Pesantren regulations also increases, and conversely, as religion learning interest decreases, discipline in adhering to Pesantren regulations also decreases. To provide a clearer picture of this relationship, a Simple Linear Regression (SLR) analysis was conducted. The results are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3

Simple Linear Regression Analysis between Religion Learning Interest and Religious Discipline

Variabel	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F	Sig. (p)	Partial Correlation
Religion Learning Interest → Religious Discipline	0.774	0.599	0.596	186.42	0.000**	0.774

The results in Table 1 showed that religion learning interest contributes effectively to 59.9% ($R^2 = 0.599$) of the variance in religious discipline, while the remaining 40.1% is influenced by other factors not included in the model. The F-test value ($F = 186.42$, $p < 0.001$) confirmed that the regression model is significant.

To further examine the moderating role of gender in the relationship between religion learning interest and religious discipline, a Moderated Regression Analysis (MRA) was conducted. The MRA results demonstrated that religion learning interest significantly influenced religious discipline ($\beta = 0.68$, $p < 0.001$), and gender was found to moderate this relationship ($\Delta R^2 = 0.04$, $p < 0.05$). The

effect of this relationship was stronger for female students, indicating that they tend to have higher levels of religious discipline when their interest in religious learning is also high. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Moderated Regression Analysis

Model	Predictor	β	t	Sig. (p)	R ²	ΔR^2
1	Religion Learning Interest	0.68	13.64	0.000**	0.599	—
2	Gender	0.18	2.15	0.034*	0.621	0.022
3 (Interaction)	Interest \times Gender	0.17	2.09	0.041*	0.639	0.040

These findings indicated that gender strengthens the relationship between religious learning interest and religious discipline. Female students who have high interest in religious learning tend to exhibit stronger discipline in observing Pesantren regulations compared to male students. This result highlighted the need for gender-sensitive educational approaches in Pesantren environments.

In addition, Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) confirmed a significant main effect of religious learning interest on the seven subscales of religious discipline (Wilks' $\Lambda = 0.74$, $F(7,119) = 5.89$, $p < 0.001$). The strongest effects were observed on the subscales of prayer discipline and participation in Pesantren activities ($p < 0.001$), suggesting that students with high religious learning interest were more consistent in performing daily prayers and actively engaging in Pesantren programs.

Multivariate Analysis

The results of the multivariate analysis showed that interest in learning religion had a significant effect on the overall dimension of religious discipline among students (Wilks' Lambda = 0.684, $F(7,119) = 8.21$, $p < 0.001$). The Pillai's Trace (0.321, $p < 0.001$), Hotelling's Trace (0.417, $p < 0.001$), and Roy's Largest Root (0.553, $p < 0.001$) also confirmed the robustness of this finding.

Table 5

Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA)

Multivariate Test	Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig. (p)	Interpretation
Wilks' Lambda	0.684	8.21	7	119	0.000	Significant
Pillai's Trace	0.321	8.21	7	119	0.000	Significant
Hotelling's Trace	0.417	8.21	7	119	0.000	Significant
Roy's Largest Root	0.553	8.21	7	119	0.000	Significant

Further analysis of each subscale revealed that the greatest influence occurred in the dimensions of prayer discipline ($F = 15.34$, $p < 0.001$) and participation in Pesantren activities ($F = 12.89$, $p < 0.001$). Meanwhile, the effects on cleanliness and non-formal activities were lower but still significant ($F = 4.12$, $p < 0.05$).

Table 6*Tests of Between-Subjects Effects for Each Subscale of Religious Discipline*

Dimension / Subscale	F	Sig. (p)	Interpretation
Prayer Discipline	15.34	0.000	Highly Significant
Participation in Pesantren Activities	12.89	0.000	Highly Significant
Cleanliness and Orderliness	4.12	0.045	Significant
Attendance and Punctuality	6.87	0.010	Significant
Academic Discipline	5.43	0.021	Significant
Non-Formal Religious Activities	4.12	0.043	Significant
Respect for Pesantren Rules	9.56	0.002	Highly Significant

These findings indicated that students' interest in learning religion not only influences religious discipline in general but also has differentiated impacts across specific aspects of Pesantren life, emphasizing the importance of fostering intrinsic motivation in religious learning as a pathway to improving overall discipline and compliance.

Based on the above data analysis results, it was evident that there was a correlation coefficient of $(r) = 0.774$ with $P = 0.00$ or an error probability ($P < 0.01$), indicating a strong positive correlation between religion learning interest and discipline in adhering to the Pesantren regulations. A highly significant positive correlation implied that as religion learning interest increases, discipline in adhering to the Pesantren regulations also increases. Conversely, when religion learning interest decreases, the level of discipline in adhering to the Pesantren regulations also diminishes.

Furthermore, the Moderated Regression Analysis (MRA) showed that interest in religious learning significantly influenced religious discipline ($\beta = 0.68$, $p < 0.001$), and gender moderated the relationship ($\Delta R^2 = 0.04$, $p < 0.05$). This indicated that the influence of religious learning interest on discipline varies across male and female santri, suggesting that gender differences may affect motivational intensity and behavioral expression of religious discipline. Gender differences in educational motivation often emerge from distinct socialization processes and emotional regulation patterns (Lee et al., 2025; Portengen et al., 2025). In Islamic education settings, male santri may emphasize cognitive engagement in religious study, while female santri tend to exhibit stronger affective and relational involvement (Al Farisi et al., 2025; Siregar et al., 2025). Thus, gender becomes a relevant moderator that shapes how deeply religious interest translates into behavioral discipline within the Pesantren environment.

High discipline in adhering to the Pesantren regulations is attributed to a strong interest in religion learning (Halimah et al., 2024; Mujahid, 2021). Santri with such interest find joy and meaning in participating in Pesantren activities, focus on positive engagements, and internalize regulations out of awareness and conviction rather than compulsion (Jahidin, 2023; Siswati et al., 2023; Hasanah, 2025; Zainal, 2022). This single motivational factor both drives participation in daily activities and strengthens moral commitment to uphold Pesantren standards (Batara et al., 2016; Tsang et al., 2021; Van Cappellen et al., 2017).

The significant contribution of religion learning interest to the discipline in adhering to Pesantren regulations can be observed from the coefficient of determination (r^2) = 0.599. The remaining 40.1% variance indicated the importance of contextual factors such as parenting style,

pesantren leadership, environmental conditions, and psychological adjustment which should be explored in future studies to provide a fuller understanding of discipline formation.

Individuals who possess an intrinsic motivation to learn about religion teachings in the Islamic Pesantren tend to focus on positive activities related to religion learning within the school's framework (Asnani et al., 2024; Haryati et al., 2024; Sholeh et al., 2024). Conversely, those who study at the Pesantren due to external pressures may disengage from its activities and prefer alternatives outside the institution (Al Farisi et al., 2025; Halilintar & Rafiqah, 2024; Jahidin, 2023), which in turn undermines discipline in adhering to Pesantren regulations.

The demands of global competition, which require mastery of science and technology, can also weaken interest in religion learning when Pesantren education is perceived as narrowly non-formal (Halimah et al., 2024; Khoiri & Aryati, 2021; Mujahid, 2021). For santri of Al Munawwir Islamic Pesantren who must balance both formal and non-formal education, low religious interest may shift attention toward school or university activities, sometimes at the cost of violating Pesantren rules and missing collective routines.

Cultivating discipline ideally begins in the family, where parental modeling of disciplined behavior provides the foundation for future compliance including adherence to Pesantren regulations (Komariah & Nihayah, 2023; Kong et al., 2021). Similarly, leadership at Al Munawwir Islamic Pesantren plays a pivotal role. When administrators and teachers model religious practice, consistency, and responsibility, they foster motivation and moral-emulative behavior among santri through social learning mechanisms (Ahmad & Alam, 2018; Arifin et al., 2024; Hidayat & Sundari, 2024; Ridho et al., 2025). Beyond individual exemplars, supportive leadership and institutional culture create environments where santri's interest in religious learning translates into consistent compliance with regulations (Buchanan & Chapman, 2014; Jones & Menon, 2022; Shula & Heystek, 2024; Zhong & Frey, 2020).

Multivariate results clarified these dynamics: Interest in religious learning had the strongest effect on worship discipline and participation in Pesantren activities, since students with strong interest are highly motivated to engage in congregational worship, Quran recitation, and religious gatherings. By contrast, weaker effects on cleanliness and non-formal activities (e.g., language training, da'wah practice) suggest that these dimensions depend more on external supervision and institutional culture rather than purely on internal motivation. This highlights that religious interest shapes discipline in specific domains, while other contextual supports remain necessary for a holistic culture of discipline.

CONCLUSION

This study found a strong positive correlation between religion learning interest and discipline in adhering to the regulations among the santri of Al Munawwir Islamic Pesantren. The coefficient of determination ($r^2 = 0.599$) indicated that interest in religious learning contributes 59.9% to discipline, while the remaining 40.1% is influenced by other factors. The multivariate analysis further showed that learning interest exerts the strongest influence on worship practices and participation in pesantren activities, with relatively weaker effects on cleanliness and non-formal aspects. These findings emphasized that strengthening students' interest in learning religion is not only related to knowledge acquisition but also plays an important role in shaping disciplined behavior within the pesantren context.

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In practical terms, pesantren administrators and teachers are encouraged to create learning environments that stimulate students' religious learning interest through interactive teaching methods, integration of religious values into daily routines, consistent role modeling, and supportive programs. By fostering such interest, students are more likely to comply with pesantren regulations with greater discipline. Finally, since a substantial portion of discipline (40.1%) is explained by other factors, future research should explore additional variables such as family support, peer influence, teacher–student interactions, and the overall learning environment. These insights can guide pesantren policies and interventions to develop both academic growth and disciplined behavior among santri.

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