BOARDING SCHOOL AND THE CHALLENGES OF CHARACTER EDUCATION OF STUDENTS IN THE MODERN ERA

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Abstract

Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) play a vital role in shaping the character of their students through comprehensive education that integrates religious, moral, and social dimensions. According to Al-Ghazali, character formation involves both hereditary and environmental factors, emphasizing the importance of mujahadah (struggle) and riyadah (discipline). Pesantren education prioritizes affective and psychomotor aspects over cognitive elements to produce morally upright and capable individuals. Students develop character in three key areas: knowledge, morality, and social interaction. In knowledge, students gain expertise in classical Islamic texts and Arabic, fostering critical thinking and intellectual depth. Morally, pesantren aim to instill akhlakul karimah (noble character) through religious and ethical education. Socially, students are trained in harmonious interactions and community responsibilities, promoting values like honesty, respect, and empathy.

To stay relevant in modern times, pesantren are embracing innovation in methodologies, curricula, and management. This includes contextualizing classical texts, encouraging ijtihad (critical reasoning), and integrating modern skills with traditional Islamic values. Pesantren also function as agents of social and cultural transformation by fostering interethnic and intersocial harmony, promoting educational reform, and addressing contemporary challenges. Ultimately, pesantren balance tradition with transformation, maintaining their identity while equipping students to navigate the complexities of modern life. This dual role highlights their significance as centers for religious education and societal progress, contributing to national development and global engagement.

Keywords: *Islamic Boarding Schools; Character Education; Students; Challenges; Modern Era.*

INTRODUCTION

Since its emergence in the era of the Walisongo, Islamic boarding schools have always been the basis for the development of Islam in Indonesia. For a long time, in addition to being an educational institution, Islamic boarding schools have also taken on their role as social institutions where Islamic boarding schools become the control of the surrounding community in responding to the challenges of the times. In this Islamic boarding school, the kyai becomes a 'filter' for the entry of outside cultures into the lives of the surrounding community. Some argue that Islamic boarding schools as unique and distinctive educational institutions must maintain their traditionalism. However, other opinions want Islamic boarding schools to begin adopting cultural and educational elements from outside (Tolib,2015).

According to Hasan Langgulung, there are six types of Islamic education bases, namely historical, sociological, economic, political, administrative, psychological and philosophical, where the six types of bases are centered on philosophical bases. According to Abdul Mujib and Jusuf Mudzakir, Hasan Langgulung's opinion is considered rather secular, because in

addition to not including religious bases, philosophy is also the mother of all bases. According to Abdul Mujib and Jusuf Mudzakir, in Islam, the operational basis of everything is religion, because religion becomes a frame for every activity that has an Islamic nuance. With religion, all educational activities become meaningful, color other bases, and have worship value. Therefore, the operational basis of education above six needs to be added to the seventh basis, namely religion (Nata,2016).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach with a literature study method. The design of this study aims to analyze were chosen because they allow reserchers to explore the topic of islamic boarding shcools and the challenges of character education for students in the modern era without being tied to field data. Thus, this study emphasizes in-depth analysis of secondary to gain comprehensive insight into the suject under study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. The Role of Islamic Boarding Schools in the Formation of the Character of Students

According to Al-Ghazali, there are two factors that can determine character change that seem to prioritize the integration of two schools of thought, namely nativism and empiricism. This means that Al-Ghazali tends more towards the convergence between hereditary factors and environmental influences. Because heredity cannot be changed, behavioral change is more based on the issue of mujahadah and riyadah (empirical factors). From this explanation, it can be seen that in the formation of a character or morality, it goes through a physical and spiritual process. Forming morality must form external behavior that has been absorbed in such a way in the soul. Because forming character or morality can only be done through habituation, until it is embedded in the soul, only then is it truly called having a good character, both physically and mentally (Silfiyasari,2020).

Islamic boarding schools have a dual function (dzu wujuh) in the formation of a character, namely as a religious institution that functions to disseminate and develop Islamic religious knowledge and as a cadre institution that has succeeded in producing cadres of the people and cadres of the nation. So, education in Islamic boarding schools emphasizes not on the cognitive aspect, but rather on the affective and psychomotor aspects. Thus, Islamic boarding schools are expected to be able to produce Muslim people as extension workers or pioneers of development who are pious, capable and noble. Character education aims to form Indonesian people who are moral, to form Indonesian people who are intelligent and rational, to form people who are innovative and like to work hard, optimistic and trustworthy, and have a patriotic spirit (Lesmana,2021).

   a. Character of students in the field of knowledge

Student since the beginning of entering the Islamic boarding school have been trained to learn basic Islamic knowledge. The Islamic boarding school has taught classical books, in Arabic and without harakat. From this expertise they can deepen their knowledge based on the books, including the following:
   1. Memorization
   2. Hiwar or deliberation
   3. Mudzakaroh (bahtul masail)
   4. Fathul kutub
   5. Muqoronah (comparison)
   6. Muhawaroh or muhadatsah (speech)

Meanwhile, the scientific character possessed by students with the yellow book as the learning source is a manifestation of the main learning source, namely revelation. Hierarchically, students gain knowledge from their teachers (kyai) in Islamic boarding schools, kyai from scholars who become their teachers until they continue to the companions of the Prophet SAW and direct companions of the Prophet SAW, and the Prophet SAW from Gabriel in the form of revelation from Allah SWT.

b. The character of the students in the field of morals

The aim of Islamic boarding schools is tafaqquh fiddin (understanding religion) and forming the morality of the people. So Islamic boarding schools have the main aim of forming morals as the main area in building the character of students. Meanwhile, the most important character in the realm of akhlakul karimah is having morals towards Allah SWT, having morals towards others and having morals towards the environment.

c. Character of students in the social field

Students are part of society that requires social interaction and communication. so it is not surprising that Islamic boarding schools also aim at the formation of social characters such as helping each other, being harmonious, peaceful, and full of responsibility for the good of the community. On the other hand, in relation to the character of students related to social life as follows:
1. do not enter other people's houses without permission
2. say hello
3. speak honestly and correctly
4. do not call people by calling them their father
5. forgive others' mistakes (Arifin, 2014).

Character education typical of Islamic boarding schools supported by Islamic boarding school culture and the figure of the kiai certainly encourages the creation of superior and characterful students (Ahmad,2021).

B. Impact of Innovation on Education in Islamic Boarding Schools

The word innovation is often translated as anything new or renewal. The word innovation is absorbed into the Indonesian language as "inovasi", which means "renewal" or "change" (Tim Redaksi, 2008). Some Islamic boarding schools seem to be more open to contemporary knowledge and problems as a result of innovation and modernization. By starting to enter Islamic boarding schools and learn foreign languages, such as English, we can see indicators. This is combined with increased mastery of Arabic, both orally and in writing, which is no longer limited to studying its grammar. In addition, the world of Islamic boarding schools should integrate science and methodology, including general and Islamic sciences.

This kind of effort must certainly start from the leader or person who has authority in the pesantren, which is usually a kiai, because the kiai plays a very important and central role in the pesantren. The creativity of a kiai is highly expected in this context. It is important for the kiai to start with a vision and mission that are detailed in several stages of a structured work plan or program. Often, pesantren do not have a clear direction, so that the progress of the pesantren cannot proceed well (Hasan, 2015).

In the context of this discussion, the innovation in question is the modernization or renewal carried out by Islamic boarding schools reviewed from various related literature and field observations. There are at least two things that need to be modernized, namely in the aspect of methodology and simplifying traditional syllabi. There are three main things that must be innovated by Islamic boarding schools, namely: methods, content and management.

Meanwhile, according to Mukti Ali, the 12th former Minister of Religion, what needs to be renewed in Islamic boarding schools is only from the methodological side. Because the Islamic boarding school learning system is already very good. The Islamic boarding school education system is the best religious education and teaching institution in Indonesia, there are three fundamental weaknesses in Islamic education including Islamic boarding schools that demand immediate renewal:

a. Weakness in mastering foreign languages
b. Weakness in research methodology
c. Weakness in interest in knowledge

Based on the description above, Islamic boarding schools need to consider several suggestions in order to strengthen their existence while expanding their contribution in society. Four steps that Islamic boarding schools need to take to adapt to the times:

a. Strengthening the intellectual base of Islamic boarding schools

Every educational institution, including Islamic boarding schools, must produce graduates who have expertise in their respective fields. In the context of Islamic boarding schools, graduates must have deep religious insight and strong character. To achieve this, competent educators and adequate facilities are needed.

b. Studying the yellow book contextually

The yellow book, as the main reference in Islamic boarding schools, is an important part of the Islamic boarding school tradition. However, many Islamic boarding schools still only understand the yellow book textually. In fact, in order to be relevant to the development of the times, the yellow book needs to be interpreted contextually. If not, there is an assumption from a small group that the yellow book is no longer relevant. This reflects the challenge for Islamic boarding schools to provide a more actual meaning in the study of the yellow book.

c. Encouraging the tradition of ijtihad

An attitude of respect and obedience to teachers (kiai) is indeed highly recommended, but it should not limit students from thinking critically. The culture of criticism in Islamic boarding schools needs to be further encouraged. The tradition of ijtihad or critical culture has actually been practiced in classical Islamic education and needs to be revived.

d. From tradition to transformation

Islamic boarding schools must be able to transform, both in terms of buildings, education systems, management, and finances, in order to remain relevant to the needs of the times and society. However, Islamic boarding schools must still maintain traditional Islamic values according to sharia.

These steps are expected to help Islamic boarding schools face the challenges of the times without losing their identity (Napitupulu, 2018).

As the function and role of Islamic boarding schools so far, as an institution of social transformation. Which is a demand of society at large in the current global era. Because Islamic boarding schools have multiple functions, including as a moral reserve of the nation and on the other hand as an agent of change for the progress and development of civilization and science in accordance with social conditions (Arif, 2024).

C. Pesantren Strategy in Facing Challenges of the Modern Era

Along with the development of the era, there are problems that must be faced by Islamic boarding schools and answered in a complex manner. We should be aware that the problems

faced by Islamic boarding schools are in accordance with the development of the era and are carried by modern life. It can be interpreted that the problems faced by Islamic boarding schools are challenges caused by modern life. Meanwhile, the ability of Islamic boarding schools to answer these challenges is a benchmark for how far Islamic boarding schools answer the challenges of modernization. So if Islamic boarding schools are able to answer these challenges, they can be said to be modern institutions. Conversely, if Islamic boarding schools are unable to answer these challenges, they can be said to be outdated Islamic boarding schools (Nurcholis Majid, 1997).

The education system in Islamic boarding schools has an independent character. This can be seen from the sorogan teaching system. In this case, the kiai teaches his students in turns, meaning from one student to another. When it is his turn, the student will repeat what the kiai said, and so on. This translation method is so that students can easily learn and understand both the function of words in a series of Arabic sentences. In this system, students can do it repeatedly, so that they are able to understand and master the lesson, if they still do not understand and have not mastered it, then students are not allowed to add other lessons. Sorogan can be interpreted as the most difficult. Because it requires students to be patient, diligent, polite, diligent, and disciplined (Asyari, 2022).

The task of Islamic boarding schools in this modern era itself is to maintain their existence and function as religious education institutions, by consistently innovating in educational activities that are held, for example, the formal education system, and developing in the fields of economics and business so that the existence of Islamic boarding schools is maintained. The function of Islamic boarding schools is to create Muslim personalities who believe in and fear Allah SWT, have noble morals, are useful to society and spread and uphold the teachings of Islam in the midst of today's modern society (Achdiani, 2017).

In the era of modern civilization, Islamic boarding schools have an important role that must be played in order to continue to exist. This role includes providing adequate facilities and infrastructure, improving human resources in the field of institutional management, and focusing on aspects of community life that must be a priority. In addition, Islamic boarding schools also need to encourage institutional independence by creating independent businesses, compiling life skills-based curriculum for students and the community, which aims to increase their capacity not only in the religious field but also in practical skills.

In this case, Islamic boarding schools function as agents of change that are expected to be able to play a role as dynamic and catalysts in empowering human resources, encouraging development in various fields, and developing science and technology in the midst of modern civilization. As educational institutions that live in the era of modernization, Islamic boarding schools are required to equip their students with various skills through education and skills training, so that they are ready to face the challenges of the development of the times. The main goal of Islamic boarding school education is to produce people who have a comprehensive understanding of Islam and the ability to respond to life's challenges according to the context of space and time, both at the national and global levels. Transformation of Islamic boarding schools is very important in this era, but it must still maintain the characteristics and traditional values of Islamic boarding schools (Mansyuri ddk, 2023).

D. The Role of Islamic Boarding Schools as Centers for Social Transformation

Islamic boarding schools are recognized as playing an important social role, in addition to their existence as religious educational institutions. Viewed from the perspective of educational sociology, Islamic boarding schools can be categorized into two things, namely first, Islamic boarding schools as institutions that can play a role as social change: an institution that can change the structures of ideas and thoughts in society. Second, Islamic

boarding schools are institutions that can play a role as cultural change: an institution that can change various cultures in society (Afifuddin, 2013).

As agents of social and cultural change, Islamic boarding schools play a role in three channels, namely:
  a. Tafaqquh fi al-din through educational and preaching institutions, which are understood as efforts to master religious sciences and their branches and tools optimally and in depth, and complement them with general knowledge to broaden insight.
  b. Teaching yellow books through a dialogical, critical and open approach, without dogmatic efforts to impose certain doctrines and opinions. Books and teaching materials are delivered by presenting various patterns of understanding and freedom for students to choose stronger opinions.
  c. Instilling al-karimah morals in the Islamic boarding school environment with a diverse and relatively heterogeneous background of students in terms of culture, ethnicity, gender, customs, mindset, social and economic backgrounds the creation of a social environment that has the effect of building an empathetic attitude with the differences around it.

Pesantren also plays a socio-cultural adhesive role by embracing students who come from different social and ethnic backgrounds, as well as the diversity of religious understanding of their mentors. Diversity and differences can be responded to well by the pesantren community through a systematic learning and education process both formally and informally in the form of halaqah yellow book studies (Harisah, 2020).

The changes that are currently occurring in the world of Islamic boarding schools aim to adapt to the development of science and meet the demands and needs of the times. As an Islamic educational institution, the management of Islamic boarding schools by kyai and students has different forms and activities in each place. This is reflected in several Islamic boarding schools that have innovated in their teaching systems and curriculum. However, amidst these changes, there are still Islamic boarding schools that maintain the traditional teaching system as their characteristic. These Islamic boarding schools focus on teaching classical Islamic books as the core of their education without including general science lessons. In this context, Islamic boarding schools act as educational institutions that educate students to become kyai, ustaz, or religious teachers. Their main task is to spread and teach Islamic teachings to the community, so that a religious community is created that carries out Allah's commands and avoids His prohibitions (Sodiq, 2011).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Islamic boarding schools play a pivotal role in shaping the character of students through a combination of religious, moral, and social education. These institutions not only preserve Islamic traditions and teachings but also adapt to the demands of modern society through innovations in methodology, curriculum, and management. By fostering intellectual growth, moral integrity, and social responsibility, Islamic boarding schools equip students with the skills and values necessary to navigate the complexities of the contemporary world.

As agents of social and cultural transformation, Islamic boarding schools contribute to the broader development of society by promoting inclusivity, critical thinking, and the integration of traditional Islamic values with modern knowledge. In facing the challenges of the modern era, these institutions must continue to innovate while maintaining their unique identity and commitment to Islamic principles. This balanced approach ensures that Islamic boarding schools remain relevant and effective in nurturing generations of individuals who are spiritually grounded, ethically upright, and socially engaged.

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