

## UNITING TRADITIONAL AND INNOVATION : A NEW DIRECTION FOR SCHOLARSHIP IN ISLAMIC EDUCATION AND ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOLS

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### Abstract

*This study examines the integration of tradition and innovation in Islamic boarding school education as a new direction for scholarship. Pesantren have long been known for their tradition of studying classical Islamic texts, the sorogan and bandongan teaching methods, and the role of the kiai as the center of spiritual and intellectual guidance. However, globalization and digitalization require pesantren to adjust their curriculum, utilize technology, and broaden the horizons of their students to be relevant to 21st-century competencies.*

*Using a qualitative method based on literature study, this research examines primary and secondary sources related to the dynamics of Islamic boarding schools. The results show that innovation is carried out through the integration of general lessons with classical texts, the establishment of Islamic boarding school madrasas and universities, and the emergence of digital santri. The study concludes by emphasizing the concept of adaptive turats, which is preserving traditional values while adopting new methods. This model is expected to produce a generation of religious, critical, and adaptive santri who are ready to face global challenges.*

**Keywords:** *Islamic Boarding Schools; Scholarly Tradition; Educational Innovation; Turats Integration; Adaptive Turats*

### I. INTRODUCTION

Islamic education and pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) have played a crucial role in the historical development of education in Indonesia. As traditional educational institutions, pesantren have become centers for the development of religious knowledge and moral values deeply rooted in society (Harmathilda et al., 2024). Their distinctive learning system, which involves the *kitab kuning* (classical texts) and the *sorogan* or *bandongan* methods, along with the central role of the *kyai* (religious teacher), demonstrates a profound and continuous scholarly tradition (Saputro & Nas'udin, 2025).

However, in the era of modernization and globalization, this traditional education system faces various challenges, including the need to master modern sciences, technology, and 21st-century competencies (Aldeia et al., 2023). Therefore, there is a growing need to integrate traditional values (*turats*) with contemporary knowledge (*mu'asharah*). This integration is essential to chart a new direction for scholarship that remains rooted yet progressive, enabling pesantren to contribute to addressing the demands of the times without losing their identity (Muzedi & Husni, 2025; Yusuf & Ali, 2025).

The research problem is focused on three main aspects. First, what forms of scholarly tradition have developed within Islamic education and pesantren over time. Second, what types of innovation have emerged and been implemented in contemporary pesantren as a response to modernization challenges. Third, what efforts have been made to integrate tradition and innovation to develop a new scholarly direction relevant to current needs. This study aims to

describe the scholarly traditions in Islamic education and pesantren, identify the forms of innovation applied in contemporary pesantren, and analyze the new scholarly directions formed through the integration of tradition and innovation. With these objectives, the study is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of Islamic education in the modern era.

This research is expected to provide both theoretical and practical benefits. Theoretically, it contributes to the development of integrative Islamic education discourse, particularly regarding the integration of tradition and innovation in pesantren. Practically, it can serve as a reference for pesantren administrators, educators, and policymakers in formulating strategies for developing adaptive Islamic education that keeps pace with contemporary developments while preserving deeply rooted traditional values.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW Scholarly Traditions in Pesantren

Historically, pesantren in Indonesia have played a central role in developing traditional Islamic knowledge, particularly through the use of *kitab kuning*, *sorogan* and *bandongan* methods, and the importance of scholarly chains (*sanad*) to maintain academic authority and textual authenticity (Dhofier, 2011). This system values *adab* (etiquette), simplicity, spirituality, and obedience to the *kyai* and educators. Dhofier (2011) argues that pesantren education is not merely about transferring knowledge but also about shaping moral character grounded in spirituality and the life of the pesantren community. These values continue to be foundational for many traditional pesantren, even under modernization pressures, ensuring that students not only master religious texts but also develop ethical awareness and social responsibility.

### Innovations in Islamic Education and Pesantren

In response to global changes and globalization, many pesantren have begun adopting educational innovations to remain relevant. Azyumardi Azra (2024) notes that curriculum modernization has become essential, integrating general subjects such as natural sciences and technology into the pesantren learning structure. This shift is driven by the need for 21st-century competencies, including digital literacy and adaptability to rapid technological changes. Studies on digital learning in pesantren during and after the COVID-19 pandemic indicate that the use of digital devices, hybrid learning, and online platforms has become an innovative strategy to maintain learning continuity (Saputro & Nas'udin, 2025; Yusuf & Ali, 2025).

Educational management in pesantren has also evolved, including the adoption of output-based evaluation, accreditation, and the strengthening of global networks to improve education quality and external recognition.

### Integration of Knowledge: Concepts and Models

The concept of knowledge integration in Islamic education is often linked to Islamization of knowledge, integrative-holistic approaches, and transdisciplinary methods, where religious and general knowledge are not viewed as separate domains but as mutually enriching (Amin Abdullah, 2019). Curriculum integration models include the monolithic model, where the curriculum is structured as a unified whole; the linked model, which connects general and religious knowledge thematically; and the fully integrative model, which combines both domains in every aspect of learning (Azra, 2024; Muzedi & Husni, 2025).

Some studies also position pesantren as bridges between past scholarly traditions and future demands. For example, the establishment of pesantren-madrasah programs or pesantren with faculties of science or technology enables graduates to master religious knowledge while being prepared to compete in the modern world.

### Previous Studies

Several empirical studies and recent reviews have examined how tradition and innovation integration occurs in pesantren. For instance, the study *Modernization of Pesantren Management in the Society 5.0 Era* (2023) explores institutional and managerial changes in pesantren in response to digital and informational demands, finding that pesantren successfully internalizing management innovations tend to have higher education quality and appeal (Aldeia et al., 2023). Other studies by Saputro & Nas'udin (2025) and Yusuf & Ali (2025) highlight technology integration in learning during the pandemic as a catalyst for innovation, accelerating hybrid learning and digital platform use. However, these studies reveal a research gap, particularly regarding how integration affects students' Islamic identity and the balance between innovation and preservation of traditional values.

### III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY RESEARCH TYPE

This study employs a qualitative approach using library research. The qualitative approach allows an in-depth understanding of phenomena through interpretation of descriptive data (Creswell, 2018). Library research is appropriate as this study does not require field data collection but focuses on reviewing literature, including books, journals, and scientific documents. According to Zed (2014), library research utilizes literature as the primary source to obtain deep and comprehensive data.

#### Data Sources

The data sources are divided into two categories: primary and secondary.

Primary sources include classical Islamic literature, pesantren curriculum documents, and works of Islamic education scholars. Primary sources serve as the main references for developing concepts, theories, and frameworks (Moleong, 2019).

Secondary sources consist of scientific journals, articles, theses, dissertations, and research reports on similar topics. Secondary sources complement and provide comparison to enrich the data. Sugiyono (2019) states that secondary sources strengthen analysis by offering additional perspectives and broadening the researcher's insight.

#### Data Collection Techniques

Data collection is conducted through literature review, involving identification, selection, and examination of relevant sources. George (2008) explains that literature review is a systematic process to trace, select, and evaluate literature related to the research topic.

Identification involves searching for books, journals, articles, and official documents aligned with the research focus. Selection involves choosing sources with high credibility and relevance. Finally, the examination phase entails reading and interpreting the literature to obtain data suitable for the study (Nazir, 2014).

#### Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis uses content analysis. This method is suitable for systematically examining texts and literature. Krippendorff (2018) explains that content analysis enables researchers to make valid and replicable inferences from text-based data while considering the context.

The content analysis process involves three main steps. First, data classification, grouping information from literature into themes or categories relevant to the research focus. Second, data interpretation, assigning meaning to the literature content according to the theoretical framework. Third, data synthesis, connecting findings from primary and secondary sources to produce comprehensive, in-depth, and systematic conclusions (Weber, 1990).

#### **IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION The Portrait of Scholarly Tradition in Pesantren Education**

Pesantren are the oldest Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia, employing a distinctive teaching system based on classical texts (*kitab kuning*). This tradition is passed down through *sorogan*, *bandongan*, and *wetonan* methods, where students learn directly from the *kyai* with high spiritual and intellectual proximity (Dhofier, 2011). The central role of the *kyai* in maintaining knowledge transmission is crucial in shaping students' character, piety, and religious knowledge (Madjid, 1997). Therefore, pesantren function not only as educational institutions but also as centers for sustained moral and Islamic cultural development (Harmathilda et al., 2024).

#### **Forms of Innovation in Contemporary Pesantren Education**

In the modern era, pesantren face globalization, digitalization, and the need for 21st-century competencies. This has led to various innovations, including curriculum adaptation with general subjects like science, mathematics, and foreign languages; use of information technology in learning; and expansion of student perspectives through entrepreneurship and vocational programs (Azra, 2019; Saputro & Nas'udin, 2025). These innovations complement rather than replace tradition, equipping students with skills relevant to contemporary society.

#### **Strategies and Models of Tradition-Innovation Integration**

Integration strategies in pesantren are reflected in several models. First, combining classical texts with science lessons allows students to master religious knowledge while understanding modern science (Azra, 2019). Second, many pesantren have established formal madrasah or university programs, providing recognized academic structures (Steenbrink, 1986). Third, the concept of "digital santri" has emerged, training students in technology literacy, social media use, and digital platforms for learning and da'wah (Qomar, 2015). Integration also occurs in entrepreneurship curricula grounded in Islamic values, producing graduates who are not only scholars but also entrepreneurs and Muslim professionals (Harmathilda et al., 2024; Yusuf & Ali, 2025).

#### **New Directions in Knowledge: Preserving Values and Responding to Modern Challenges**

The new direction of Islamic education in pesantren is conceptualized as "adaptive *turats*." Classical texts are preserved as scholarly heritage, but teaching methods and approaches are updated according to contemporary demands (Aldeia et al., 2023). *Turats* are thus seen as a dynamic, contextual knowledge repository rather than static heritage. Saputro & Nas'udin (2025) emphasize that strengthening tradition must align with mastering 21st-century skills, including digital literacy and critical thinking. This integrative paradigm eliminates the dichotomy between religious and general knowledge, viewing both as complementary for holistic human development (Muzedi & Husni, 2025). Therefore, the new scholarly direction in pesantren is to preserve Islamic values while adaptively responding to global challenges (Yusuf & Ali, 2025).

#### **V. CONCLUSION**

This study shows that pesantren, as traditional Islamic educational institutions, play a vital role in preserving scholarly traditions while addressing modernization challenges. Pesantren traditions are reflected in the use of *kitab kuning*, *sorogan* and *bandongan* methods, and the central role of the *kyai* as educator and spiritual guide. This system has successfully shaped students into religious individuals with strong moral character. Globalization, technology, and 21st-century demands have driven pesantren to innovate. Innovations include curriculum adjustments incorporating science and general knowledge, the use of digital technology in

learning, and entrepreneurship programs. These efforts enable students to master religious knowledge while being competitive socially, academically, and professionally.

The integration of tradition and innovation produces a new educational model that preserves the authenticity of *turats* while responding to contemporary needs. The concept of adaptive *turats* emphasizes that classical texts must be maintained, but teaching methods and pedagogical approaches should be contextualized. With this integrative paradigm, pesantren no longer strictly separate religious and general knowledge, combining them to develop religious, critical, and productive students. Therefore, the new scholarly direction of pesantren is to preserve traditional values while adaptively responding to modern challenges, ensuring that pesantren remain relevant and contribute to the development of Islamic civilization in the modern era.

First, pesantren administrators should continue developing integrative curricula that combine mastery of classical texts with modern sciences and practical skills. Second, educators and *kyai* are encouraged to adopt creative teaching methods using digital technology without neglecting traditional methods. Third, governments and policymakers should provide support through facilities, training, and policies that strengthen pesantren as leading educational institutions. Lastly, future researchers are advised to study the implementation of traditioninnovation integration across various types of pesantren to gain a more comprehensive understanding of Islamic education dynamics in Indonesia.

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**From Kitab Kuning to Laboratory: The Evolution of Pesantren Scholarship Towards The Digital Era**