

Pesantren as the Pivot of Islamic Higher Education Science Development

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ABSTRACT

Pesantren have historically served as the backbone of traditional Islamic education in Indonesia. As Islamic higher education continues to evolve, *pesantren* institutions are increasingly recognized for their foundational role in shaping academic and spiritual development. This study uses a historical-analytical approach to trace the evolution of *pesantren* into a core component of Islamic higher education, examining philosophical, curricular, and institutional changes over time. Findings show that *pesantren* not only maintain traditional Islamic values but also adapt their curriculum to align with contemporary educational standards. Their educational philosophy—centered on spiritual growth, discipline, and community engagement—has significantly influenced the identity formation and independence of students. Moreover, several *pesantren* have successfully transformed into higher education institutions, integrating modern disciplines while preserving core Islamic teachings. Despite their progress, *pesantren* face challenges such as curriculum standardization, accreditation demands, and institutional autonomy. However, strategic collaborations with universities and state recognition have opened new opportunities for *pesantren* to contribute meaningfully to national education. The study emphasizes that *pesantren* remain vital to the development of Islamic higher education in Indonesia. Enhanced cooperation between *pesantren* and Islamic universities offers promising pathways for integrated, value-based education.

Keywords: *pesantren, Islamic higher education, curriculum integration, educational transformation, spiritual development, Indonesia.*

Introduction

Pesantren, as a distinctive Islamic educational institution, has become a central axis in the development of Islamic higher education. Throughout its extensive history, the *pesantren* has played a pivotal role as a center of religious learning. Over time, however, its function has undergone a significant evolution, leading to its emergence as a pivotal institution in promoting Islamic scholarship in Indonesia. The present study aims to investigate the role and relevance of *pesantren* in the development of Islamic higher education, highlighting its evolution from a traditional place of learning to the core of the expansion of Islamic higher learning in line with the demands of the times.

Pesantren is not merely a place of religious training; it is also a bastion of independence, character, and Islamic identity for the next generation. The philosophy of *pesantren* education, which is predicated on Islamic values, constitutes a salient point that is not only pertinent to the traditional context but also to the development of modern Islamic higher education.

Nevertheless, the challenges confronting *pesantren* in their efforts to develop Islamic higher education that is adaptive and relevant to the changing times cannot be disregarded. The integration of the *pesantren* curriculum with the needs of Islamic higher education is a critical focus that will be researched. Concurrently, the discourse will center on the role of *pesantren* in shaping the academic and spiritual character of students, as well as the strategic efforts to strengthen the contribution of *pesantren* in the development of Islamic higher education.

The paper will also explore case studies of *pesantren* that have been successful in supporting Islamic higher education, offering views on how such successful models can be widely adopted to enrich the discourse on Islamic higher education in Indonesia.

Furthermore, this paper will underscore the significance of integrating *pesantren* with modern Islamic higher education institutions. Collaboration and integration efforts between *pesantren* and Islamic higher education institutions are imperative to ensure the relevance and continuity of Islamic science in the contemporary era.

It is posited that a comprehensive understanding of *pesantrenan's* role in the development of Islamic higher education will result in a meaningful contribution to educational stakeholders. Furthermore, it is anticipated that this paper will provide a novel perspective on the importance of *pesantrenan* in the development of Islamic intellectuality in Indonesia. By offering a synopsis of the history, philosophy,

challenges, and contributions of *pesantren*, this paper establishes a foundation for the reconstruction of Islamic scholarship that is inclusive and pertinent to the contemporary era.

According to Rafiq A (2005), a *pesantren* is a community where caregivers (kyai), ustadz, *santri*, and *pesantren* administrators reside collectively within an educational environment grounded in Islamic religious values, norms, and practices that deviate from those of the public, particularly elites. Accordingly, the elements of *pesantren* comprise at least the following: (1) actors, including kyai, ustadz, *santri*, and administrators; (2) hardware facilities, such as the caregiver's residence, buildings, *santri* dormitories, educational buildings, libraries, offices, and others; and (3) software facilities, including curriculum, learning resources, teaching and learning methods, learning evaluation, and so on.

Pesantren, an archetypal Indonesian educational institution, boasts numerous advantages over its counterparts (Baharun, 2017). Kiai serves as the central figure, and the mosque functions as the hub for all its activities. *Pesantren* effectively instill the values of *santri* life on a 24-hour basis. The education system in *pesantren* is regarded as superior to other educational institutions due to its distinctive dormitory system, which is overseen by kiai and provides comprehensive supervision of students. Islamic values such as seriousness, independence, cooperation, noble ethics (*akhlaqul karimah*), and solidarity (*ukhuwah*) will be more strongly instilled in *pesantren* (H Baharun, 2011). It is an accurate assertion to state that *pesantren* can be considered as one of the primary sources in influencing Islam in shaping the morals of the Indonesian nation.

Nurcholish Madjid in Yasmadi (2002) posits that *pesantren* is a traditional educational institution involving various aspects, including lesson content, teaching methods, educational structure, and leadership style. Consequently, he asserts the imperative for comprehensive enhancement of the *pesantren* system, encompassing various dimensions, to ensure its capacity to adapt to advancements in the educational landscape.

Universities in *pesantren* must prioritize the promotion of a critical academic tradition that is both theoretically and practically useful. This initiative is crucial for producing individuals who are competent in the fields of science and technology. Considering the prevailing global circumstances, there is an imperative to nurture autonomous and affable individuals, founded upon self-awareness and latent capabilities,

reinforced by an unwavering moral compass (Muali, 2017).

Recent developments have given rise to the concept of integrating higher education institutions with *pesantren*. Initially, an integration model was implemented, whereby *pesantren* adapted to higher education. Conversely, a recent development in the realm of higher education has given rise to a model that is tailored to *pesantren*. Despite the provision of dormitory facilities by certain universities for their students, these facilities are not currently managed in accordance with *pesantren* principles.

Methods

The research method employed in this study is a literature review, which aims to explore and analyze relevant sources in the context of the role of *pesantren* as the axis of Islamic higher education science development.

The initial step in this methodological approach entails the compilation of relevant literature sources pertaining to the research subject. The sources were collected through various platforms, including academic databases, scientific journals, online libraries, books, articles, theses, and research reports related to the role of *pesantren* in the context of Islamic higher education.

After the collection of sources, the subsequent step was to select relevant literature sources. The selection of sources was conducted with a focus on criteria such as accuracy, reliability, novelty, and relevance to the research focus, including the history of *pesantren*, the philosophy of *pesantren* education, the role in curriculum development, and the contribution to Islamic higher education.

The analysis stage constitutes the core of this literature study method. A comprehensive review of the selected literature sources is undertaken. Significant findings related to the role of *pesantren* as the axis of Islamic higher education science development were recorded and analyzed. In this stage, a comparative analysis was conducted of the various perspectives expressed in extant literature.

In addition, a synthesis of information from the various literature sources collected was carried out. A comprehensive understanding of the role of *pesantren* in the development of Islamic higher education was achieved through the integration of information from multiple sources.

The subsequent stage in this method is the composition of the literature review. In the writing process, information from literature sources is systematically reviewed. The resulting comprehensive analyses are then methodically compiled into a scholarly paper,

encompassing a concise summary, systematic interpretation, and judicious evaluation of the utilized sources.

The final step in the research process is the compilation of a bibliography that contains all the literature sources that were utilized in the research. In the written work, each source quoted or referred to is meticulously referenced in full, adhering to the selected writing format.

It is anticipated that the implementation of this literature study method will facilitate the advancement of research concerning the role of *pesantren* in the development of Islamic higher education. This advancement will be supported by a profound comprehension of the multifaceted perspectives encompassed within the pertinent literature.

Results and Discussion

Higher education is the stage of education that succeeds secondary school. It encompasses a variety of programs, including diplomas, bachelor's degrees, master's degrees, doctoral degrees, professional degrees, and specialist degrees. These programs are administered by higher education institutions in accordance with Indonesian culture. Concurrently, higher education refers to the organized framework of educational institutions that facilitate advanced learning.

At the outset, a conspicuous disparity exists between universities and *pesantren* regarding their respective roles in the domain of education. As articulated by Malik Fajar (2004), universities are frequently linked with urban contexts, while *pesantren* are more deeply entrenched in rural environments. Universities are commonly associated with modernity, while *pesantren* are frequently identified with traditionalism. The approach adopted by universities tends to be more liberal, while *pesantren* tend to prioritize a conservative attitude based on the authority of *kiai*.

Nurcholish Madjid, as articulated by Yasmadi (2002), has also posited that Islamic boarding schools constitute an educational institution that is conventional in its approach to curriculum, pedagogical techniques, educational framework, and leadership style. Consequently, he asserts the necessity for comprehensive enhancement of the *pesantren* system, emphasizing its adaptability to global educational developments.

One of the early changes and developments in *pesantren* was the combination of the boarding school system with the madrasah system. Initially, these two institutions operated independently of one another. The pedagogy employed in Islamic boarding schools is typically characterized by a traditional approach, often taking place within the confines of a mosque or surau and employing the *sorogan* method.

Conversely, the pedagogy in madrasas is marked by a modernity in its methods, with classrooms serving as the primary setting for instruction. The integration of Islamic boarding schools and madrasas has precipitated numerous advancements within the domain of Islamic boarding schools. For instance, upon completion of their studies at the boarding school, the *santri* are empowered to pursue higher education at the university level, both domestically and internationally, particularly in faculties related to religion, such as the Faculty of Tarbiyah, Faculty of Ushuludin, Faculty of *Shari'ah*, and so on.

It has been observed that the educational system in these universities bears a striking resemblance to the system that is in place in *pesantren*. In essence, an individual pursuing knowledge will seek out a mentor to study a particular discipline. The distinguishing factor is that *santri* are from the outset guided to pursue a specific field of knowledge, frequently by first mastering the fundamental material before progressing to a more advanced level of study. In higher education, this deepening of understanding typically occurs when students complete their final project.

In recent discourse, a unifying concept has emerged between higher education and *pesantren*. At the outset, an integration process occurred in which *pesantren* adapted to higher education. Conversely, a recent model of higher education has emerged that seeks to adapt to *pesantren*. While certain universities do offer residential facilities for their students, these are not currently administered in the same manner as *pesantren*.

The prevailing tradition in Islamic education institutions, often referred to as *pesantren*, posits a close and inseparable relationship between *pesantren* and yellow classical books. Since their establishment, *pesantrens* have devoted significant resources to the comprehensive study of the works of classical scholars derived from the yellow Islamic classic books. This is of particular significance for *santri* who aspire to pursue advanced studies in the domain of religious studies.

Universities in *pesantren* must prioritize the cultivation of a critical academic culture that is both theoretically and practically applicable. This cultural transformation is essential for producing individuals who possess both scientific and technological expertise. In the contemporary global era, the cultivation of autonomous individuals endowed with distinct personal identities, specialized knowledge, and unwavering moral integrity assumes paramount importance (Muali, 2017).

A consideration of the "*Tri Dharma of Pesantren*" is warranted, which encompasses the following: It has been demonstrated that

pesantrens do not exclusively prioritize religious education; rather, they emphasize three fundamental principles: 1) faith and devotion to Allah swt., 2) development of useful knowledge, and 3) service to religion, society, and the state. As demonstrated in the second point above, educational institutions can incorporate science and technology into their curricula, thereby equipping *pesantren* alumni with the necessary skills to thrive in a highly competitive global environment.

Consequently, within the contemporary academic milieu, there is an imperative to instill and uphold the principles inherent in *pesantren*. This is particularly salient in an academic context, where the erosion of moral values has become increasingly pronounced, exacerbated by the prevalence of divisions. Islam is not merely a matter of *aqidah* or *syari'ah*. A mere 10% of the curriculum is dedicated to the study of *aqidah* and *Shari'ah*, with the remaining 90% encompassing morals and culture. Muslims are responsible not only for instilling *aqidah* and *Shari'ah* (halal-haram) but also for conveying doctrines based on scientific truth.

The *Pesantren* institution plays a multifaceted role in the production of knowledge. It does not merely contribute to the creation of erudite scholars; rather, it is also capable of producing scientists, that is, individuals who possess expertise in the domains of science and technology and who have a profound comprehension, proficiency, and practice of Islamic values. The historical accomplishments of Muslim scientists serve as a source of motivation to emulate and, potentially, surpass their achievements in the present era. *Pesantren* are regarded as the optimal environment for the execution of this prophetic mission. Ultimately, scientists affiliated with *pesantren* have the potential to contribute to the nation's natural resource management initiatives.

The profile of these scientists is produced by higher education institutions based on *pesantren*. As Azra (2001) asserts, it is not only an obligation but also a moral responsibility for the Indonesian nation to prioritize the advancement of science and technology for the sake of both domestic interests and the pursuit of moral and ethical principles in scientific and technological pursuits.

Pesantren is the most venerable Islamic educational institution in Indonesia, with a profound legacy in the dissemination of classical Islamic sciences. From its inception, *pesantren* has functioned as a site not only for the dissemination of the yellow classical books but also for the cultivation of Islamic character and identity. The evolution of *pesantren* into institutions that facilitate Islamic higher education is marked by the integration of conventional instructional methodologies

and contemporary academic methodologies. This historical journey serves as a robust foundation for the contribution of *pesantren* in producing Muslim intellectuals who can compete globally.

The educational methodology employed in this context encompasses a variety of instructional techniques, including *sorogan* and *bandongan*. A distinguishing hallmark of this educational paradigm is the cultivation of a profound sense of spiritual interconnectedness between the *santri* and the *kiai*. This pedagogical framework is designed to foster a comprehensive understanding of both the theoretical underpinnings and the ethical principles that underpin the Islamic tradition. The distinctive nature of the boarding system, characterized by its emphasis on direct supervision from *kiai*, contributes to the institution's notable capacity to nurture a strong work ethic, foster independence, and cultivate moral integrity among its students. These values represent a significant contribution to the realm of higher education, as institutions of learning strive to maintain a harmonious equilibrium between intellectual aptitude and ethical principles.

Pesantren encounter numerous challenges in their efforts to adapt to the realm of higher education, including national curriculum standards, accreditation requirements, and institutional autonomy. Moreover, a persistent dichotomy persists between religious and general sciences, impeding the incorporation of *pesantren* into a more comprehensive higher education system. This challenge necessitates systemic innovations that remain grounded in the fundamental philosophy of *pesantren*.

The following strategies have been proposed: the development of an integrative curriculum, the training of *pesantren* leaders in modern education management, and the establishment of partnerships with Islamic universities. To gain recognition from state institutions as legitimate and quality scientific centers, *Pesantren* must strengthen their academic and research documentation systems.

The two-way integration model, whereby *pesantren* adapt to the higher education system and vice versa, signifies a novel and potentially fruitful approach. In this instance, the collaboration between *pesantren* and universities has the potential to foster an inclusive academic environment, wherein Islamic values and modern disciplines complement each other.

This collaboration has the potential to produce graduates who not only excel in the fields of science and technology but also have moral and spiritual firmness. *Pesantrenese* institutions of Islamic education present

a strategic environment for the education of Muslim scientists who can address contemporary challenges while maintaining their Islamic values. This model has the potential to serve as a national exemplar in the realm of value-based Islamic higher education reform.

Conclusions

This article underscores the pivotal function of *pesantrens* in the advancement of Islamic higher education. *Pesantren*, as an educational institution that prioritizes tradition, has successfully integrated Islamic values and teaching methods that are relevant to the development of modern science. The collaboration of *pesantren* with modern Islamic higher education demonstrates considerable potential in cultivating individuals who are not only proficient in religious aspects but also possess competence in the increasingly competitive realm of science and technology.

Pesantren function not only as institutions of religious education, but also as centers of knowledge development that combine religious teachings with modern science. The presence of moral and ethical values in the development of science and technology is regarded as a collective responsibility for Indonesian society.

This finding underscores the pivotal role of *pesantren* in nurturing scientists who possess not only a strong foundation in scientific disciplines but also a profound comprehension of religious values. The pivotal factor in the future success of *pesantren* as pertinent centers of Islamic higher education is the persistent endeavor to amalgamate religious values with the progression of modern science, thereby cultivating individuals who demonstrate proficiency in both academic and moral domains.

Acknowledgement

To complete the research on "*Pesantren* as the Axis of Islamic Higher Education Science Development", we would like to express our gratitude to all those who have provided significant support during this research process.

First, we would like to express our great appreciation to the *pesantren* managers who have provided us with their views and opportunities to gather valuable information and experiences. Without their contribution and involvement, this research would not have been realised.

We would also like to express our gratitude to the lecturers, scholars and practitioners of Islamic higher education who provided

valuable input, advice and insights throughout the course of this research.

We would also like to thank our friends who provided moral support and motivation throughout the research process.

Finally, to all individuals who cannot be mentioned one by one, we extend our gratitude for their support, understanding, and significant contributions in making this research a success. Each contribution has played an important role in the development of our ideas and understanding of the role of *pesantren* in Islamic higher education.

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