



Jurnal Studi Sosial Keagamaan

Syekh Nurjati

Maintaining Traditions in the Midst of the Current Era: Adaptive Strategies of Islamic Boarding Schools to Modernization

Mempertahankan Tradisi di Era Saat Ini: Strategi Adaptif Pesantren terhadap Modernisasi

Eka Safitri^{1*}, Annas Alkhowarizmi², Rantika Luthfi³, Najwa Aulia Putri⁴, Eva Tatia Fazriani⁵

^{1 2 3 4} Universitas An Nasher Cirebon, Indonesia

⁵ UIN Prof KH. Saifudin Zuhri, Purwokerto, Indonesia

Article Information:

Received : 01 May 2025

Revised : 31 May 2025

Accepted : 23 June 2025

Keywords:

Educational, Kiai, Modernization, Pesantren, Tradition

*Correspondence email:

safitriexaf@gmail.com

Copyright Holder:

@Eka Safitri, Annas Alkhowarizmi, Rantika Luthfi, Najwa Aulia Putri, Eva Tatia Fazriani

First publication right:

Jurnal Studi Sosial Keagamaan Syekh Nurjati

Abstract: Purpose- This study aims to explore how Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) in Indonesia respond to the challenges of modernization, focusing on the balance between preserving traditional values and embracing educational innovation.

Design/methods/approach- The research uses a qualitative descriptive approach by examining the philosophical foundation of *al-muhafazhah 'ala al-qadīm as-sālih wa al-akhdz bi al-jadīd al-aslah* as a guiding principle for adaptation. Analysis centers on the role of the *kiai* as a key actor in decision-making and institutional resilience. **Findings-** The study finds that pesantren have demonstrated remarkable adaptability by integrating modern educational practices while preserving their religious and cultural heritage. The *kiai* plays a pivotal role in interpreting change, facilitating innovation selectively, and managing tensions between traditionalism and reform. This dynamic allows pesantren to remain relevant without losing their identity. **Research Implications-** The findings underscore the importance of maintaining a contextual and value-based approach in Islamic education reform. Understanding how pesantren synthesize conservatism with progressivism offers a model for educational institutions facing similar dilemmas in plural and rapidly evolving societies.

Introduction

Pesantren is one of the oldest Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia, playing a significant role in shaping the foundation of knowledge and religious values in the Nusantara region.¹ This institution is not only a place for transmitting classical Islamic sciences but also a center for character building and spiritual values. From the colonial era to the independence period, pesantren contributed to producing ulama, Muslim scholars, and public figures who played important roles in the social, political, and cultural dynamics of the nation. The identity of pesantren, deeply rooted in traditional values, a simple lifestyle, and its close relationship with rural communities, has made it a grounded and contextual institution.²

Throughout its history, pesantren has managed to withstand various challenges across different eras. In the current era of globalization and Industry 4.0, pesantren faces increasingly complex challenges, particularly in terms of foreign cultural influences, the commercialization of education, and the penetration of information technology.³ Modernization has brought about significant changes in all aspects of life, including the education system. While modernization offers convenience and efficiency, it also brings the risk of changing values, promoting consumer lifestyles, and blurring spiritual and cultural identities.⁴

Pesantren's presence is no longer limited to rural areas. Today, many pesantren have emerged in urban areas, even establishing branches in various regions with more modern and integrated educational systems.⁵ This development illustrates that pesantren is undergoing a transformation in terms of form, methods, and approaches, without abandoning the substance of Islamic values and classical traditions that form its essence.

¹ Binti Maunah, *Tradisi Intelektual Santri Dalam Tantangan Dan Hambatan Pendidikan Pesantren Di Masa Depan* (Yogyakarta: Teras, 2009).

² Atiq N U R Dianti, 'Konsep Pendidikan Untuk Perempuan Perspektif Nyai Hj. Masriah Amva', *OASIS : Jurnal Ilmiah Kajian Islam*, 4.2 (2020), 93–110.

³ Toha Masum and Muh Barid Nizarudin Wajdi, 'Pengembangan Kemandirian Pesantren Melalui Program Santripreneur', *Engagement: Jurnal Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat*, 2.2 SE-Articles (2018) <<https://doi.org/10.29062/engagement.v2i2.40>>.

⁴ M. Falikul Isbah, 'Pesantren in the Changing Indonesian Context: History and Current Developments', *Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies*, 8.1 (2020), 65–106 <<https://doi.org/10.21043/QIJS.V8I1.5629>>.

⁵ Moh Afif, 'Penerapan Metode Sorogan Dalam Meningkatkan Baca Kitab Di Pondok Pesantren Tarbiyatun Nasyi'in', *Kabilah: Journal of Social Community*, 4.2 (2019), 34–43 <<https://doi.org/10.35127/kbl.v4i2.3592>>.

This phenomenon demonstrates that pesantren possesses the capacity to adapt flexibly to the changing times, as long as it remains rooted in solid foundational principles.⁶

However, adaptation to modernization is not without anxiety. For some pesantren, modernization may be viewed as a threat to the authenticity of traditional educational systems.⁷ This concern is understandable, especially when transformation leads to an identity dilemma: can pesantren still be called "pesantren" if it has abandoned traditional elements such as sorogan, bandongan, and the presence of the kiai as the center of scholarly and spiritual authority? This is where the dilemma of pesantren lies: between the demand to change for relevance and the desire to preserve traditions as cultural and religious heritage.⁸

In this context, modernization is not something that must be rejected outright. Rather, what is needed is a selective and critical approach, in line with the principle of *al-muhāfazah 'ala al-qadīm as-sālih wa al-akhdz bi al-jadīd al-aslah*—preserving the good old values and adopting the better new ones.⁹ This principle serves as a philosophical foundation for determining the direction of pesantren development in the face of changing times. Modernization can become an opportunity to strengthen pesantren, improve management quality, expand outreach, and update curricula, without uprooting the deep-rooted traditional values that have shaped its foundation.¹⁰

On the other hand, pesantren also carries a prophetic mission in responding to the challenges of the modern era, particularly in building the character of the community amidst the hegemony of hedonistic and materialistic culture.¹¹ Pesantren stands as a moral fortress and a center for nurturing the spirituality of a society that is increasingly losing its way. Therefore, it is essential for pesantren to develop adaptive strategies that

⁶ Siswoyo Aris Munandar and Rinda Khoirunnisfa, 'KH Hasyim Asy'ari and the Teacher Code of Ethics: Thought Study KH. Hasyim Asy'ari on Ethics Education and Its Relevance to Modern Education in Indonesia', *Journal EVALUASI*, 4.1 (2020), 114 <<https://doi.org/10.32478/evaluasi.v4i1.359>>.

⁷ Muhaemin, 'TEOLOGI ASWAJA NAHDHATUL ULAMA DI ERA MODERN : Studi Atas Pemikiran Kyai Hasyim Asy'ari', *Jurnal Diskursus Islam*, 1.2 (2013), 315–28 <http://journal.uin-alaudhin.ac.id/index.php/diskursus_islam/article/view/6634>.

⁸ Afif.

⁹ Kamila Adnani, 'Pluralisme Pemahaman Keagamaan Santri Di Surakarta', *Al-Balagh : Jurnal Dakwah Dan Komunikasi*, 1.2 (2016), 183 <<https://doi.org/10.22515/balagh.v1i2.352>>.

¹⁰ Ahmad Choirul Rofiq, 'Argumentasi Hasyim Asy'Ari Dalam Penetapan Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jama'Ah Sebagai Teologi Nahdlatul Ulama', *Kontemplasi: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin*, 5.1 (2017) <<https://doi.org/10.21274/kontem.2017.5.1.21-48>>.

¹¹ Arifuddin Arifuddin, 'Konsep Pendidikan Profetik (Melacak Visi Kenabian Dalam Pendidikan)', *Jurnal MUDARRISUNA: Media Kajian Pendidikan Agama Islam*, 9.2 (2019), 319 <<https://doi.org/10.22373/jm.v9i2.4782>>.

are not merely reactive to change but also proactive in creating a contextual, transformative, and globally competitive model of Islamic education.¹²

The role of the kiai in this context is central. He is not only an educator but also a spiritual guide, a guardian of values, and a community leader.¹³ The charisma of the kiai becomes a symbol of the traditional legitimacy of pesantren, capable of bridging the glorious past with the challenging future. With his significant influence, the kiai can guide the transformation of pesantren to ensure it does not lose its way and remains grounded in its mission of Islamic da'wah that is *rahmatan lil-'ālamīn*.¹⁴

Therefore, this paper arises from the concerns over the dynamics faced by pesantren in the era of modernization. How can pesantren remain an authentic Islamic educational institution amidst rapid social transformation? What strategies are being implemented by pesantren to preserve their existence while addressing the challenges of the times? By exploring this theme, this paper aims to offer new perspectives on the role of pesantren as an Islamic educational institution that not only survives but also directs the transformation of Indonesia's social and religious landscape.

Method

This study uses a literature review approach to analyze the dynamics of pesantren in responding to the waves of modernization. The literature review method is chosen as the primary approach because it allows the researcher to explore various theoretical perspectives and empirical findings that have already been published on this topic. The sources used in this study include scholarly articles, books, journals, theses, and dissertations that are relevant to the development of pesantren, the challenges of modernization, and the adaptive strategies employed by pesantren in the face of social, cultural, and technological changes.¹⁵ Data collection was conducted through searches in

¹² Muhammad Anwar Fathoni and Ade Nur Rohim, 'Peran Pesantren Dalam Pemberdayaan Ekonomi Umat Di Indonesia', *Proceeding Conference on Islamic Management, Accounting, and Economics (CIMAIE)*, 2 (2019), 133–40.

¹³ Arip Syaprudin, 'Santri's Economic Empowerment Model in Pesantren Al-Ittifaq Ciwidey District of Bandung', *International Journal of Nusantara Islam*, 5.2 (2019), 213–22 <<https://doi.org/10.15575/ijni.v5i2.4793>>.

¹⁴ Siti Mu'azaroh, 'Cultural Capital Dan Kharisma Kiai Dalam Dinamika Politik: Studi Ketokohan K.H. Maimun Zubair', *IN RIGHT: Jurnal Agama Dan Hak Azazi Manusia*, 6.2 (2017), 195–212 <<http://ejournal.uin-suka.ac.id/syariah/inright/article/view/1451>>.

¹⁵ Ulfatul Husna and Muhammad Thohir, 'Religious Moderation as a New Approach to Learning Islamic Religious Education in Schools', *Nadwa*, 14.1 (2020), 199–222 <<https://doi.org/10.21580/nw.2020.14.1.5766>>.

academic databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR and Scopus with the selection of credible and relevant sources to enrich the understanding of the topic.

Once the data was collected, the next step was to perform a content analysis of the available literature. This process aims to identify the key themes, ideas, and arguments related to how pesantren adapt to modernization.¹⁶ The themes to be analyzed include the role of the kiai in preserving traditions, the strategies pesantren use to adapt their educational system, and the challenges faced in maintaining Islamic identity amidst the changing times. The literature analyzed is not limited to studies of pesantren in Indonesia but also includes research on pesantren in other countries with similar social and cultural contexts, in order to provide a broader perspective on how pesantren adapt.

Although this study is based on a literature review and does not involve primary data such as direct interviews, the analysis remains relevant in providing a comprehensive understanding of the role of pesantren in responding to modernization. This limitation is balanced by a synthesis of theoretical perspectives and existing empirical findings, which are expected to contribute to a deeper understanding of the position of pesantren in the context of modernization. This study aims to offer new insights into how pesantren can transform while preserving the traditional essence that defines them, and maintain their central role in Islamic education in Indonesia.

Result and Discussion

In this section, the author will present the results of the research on how pesantren face the challenges of modernization, as well as the various efforts made to maintain their existence amidst the changing times. This discussion will explore various aspects that influence the adaptation of pesantren, including social, cultural, and technological changes. Furthermore, it will address how pesantren preserve their traditional values while responding to the rapid development of the modern world. Thus, the results and discussion are expected to provide a clearer picture of the position of pesantren in the context of modernization, as well as the adaptive strategies implemented to maintain their relevance and identity.

1. Pesantren and Modernization: Preserving Identity in Times of Change

Pesantren, as the oldest Islamic educational institution in Indonesia, has played a vital role in the history of education and the formation of the character of Muslims in the

¹⁶ Munandar and Khoirunnisfa.

country.¹⁷ As an institution that existed long before Indonesia's independence, pesantren has produced numerous scholars and intellectuals who have significantly influenced the social, political, and religious development of Indonesia.¹⁸ Over time, pesantren has managed to preserve its identity as an institution focused on religious education, but it is undeniable that it is now facing major challenges posed by the accelerating tide of modernization.¹⁹

Modernization, often associated with technological advancement, culture, and more efficient educational systems, has become one of the primary factors affecting pesantren. In this era of digitalization and globalization, pesantren faces increasingly complex challenges, especially in terms of foreign cultural penetration, the commercialization of education, and the infiltration of information technology.²⁰ While modernization offers convenience and efficiency, it also brings risks such as shifts in values, consumerist lifestyles, and the blurring of spiritual and cultural identities. In this context, pesantren is confronted with the dilemma of whether it should open itself up to these developments or continue to hold firm to traditional educational practices.²¹

Pesantren, which has long been known for its in-depth teaching traditions, such as the sorogan and bandongan methods of studying classical Islamic texts, now faces the pressing need to adapt its teaching methods to stay relevant in the face of modern advancements. While these traditional teaching methods have proven effective in producing scholars and religious leaders, there is a growing need to introduce more modern approaches to education so that pesantren can remain competitive in the global landscape.²² As a result, pesantren needs to not only update its religious curricula but also incorporate technology into the learning process to ensure that its students are not left behind in this globalized world.

¹⁷ Purwanti Purwanti and others, 'Dynamics of Pesantren Formation: The Origins of Pesantren and Institutional Growth', *Journal of Social Research*, 2.11 (2023), 4155–63 <<https://doi.org/10.55324/josr.v2i11.1599>>.

¹⁸ Mukhamat Ilyasin and Akhmad Muadin, 'Pesantren as a Community-Based Islamic Educational Institution', 11.3 (2024).

¹⁹ Nor Ismah, 'Pesantren in Indonesia and Their Role in the Colonial Period', *Tebuireng: Journal of Islamic Studies and Society*, 3.1 (2022).

²⁰ Lukman Hakim, 'Pesantren as the Identity of Islamic and Cultural Education in West Java', *AL-ISHLAH: Jurnal Pendidikan*, 15.4 (2023), 4578–86 <<https://doi.org/10.35445/alishlah.v15i4.3369>>.

²¹ Dahlia Lubis, 'Islamism in the Perception of the Teachers and the Students of Pesantren Mawaridussalam Deli Serdang North Sumatra', *TEOSOFI: Jurnal Tasawuf Dan Pemikiran Islam*, 9.1 (2019), 1–29 <<https://doi.org/10.15642/teosofi.2019.9.1.1-29>>.

²² Ilpi Zukdi, Zulvia Trinova, and Ilman Nasution, 'The Role of Islamic Boarding Schools in Building the Character of the Nation', *Edukasi Islam: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 11.01 (2022), 1137–50 <<https://doi.org/10.30868/ei.v11i01.2913>>.

However, the acceptance of modernization within pesantren is not straightforward. Many pesantren worry that by opening themselves up to the developments of the modern world, they will lose the traditional values that have defined them. The values ingrained in pesantren life, such as simplicity, direct teaching from kiai, and close community relationships, are treasured and have their own unique qualities.²³ Therefore, many argue that modernization must be approached cautiously, ensuring that the essence and identity of pesantren are not lost. In this context, modernization should strengthen rather than replace these foundational values.

One of the significant challenges pesantren faces in the face of modernization is the shift in societal lifestyles. Today, society tends to prioritize convenience and practicality, which often come with a high price. In this regard, pesantren must continue to uphold the core principles of morality and spirituality, such as simplicity, discipline, and devotion to knowledge. However, these principles need to be presented in a way that resonates with the younger generation living in an increasingly global and open world. Balancing the preservation of these values with the realities of modern life is a delicate challenge that pesantren must navigate.²⁴ To address these challenges, pesantren must develop adaptive strategies that allow them to survive and remain relevant amid modernization. One guiding principle in this regard is *al-muhāfazah 'ala al-qadīm as-sālih wa al-akhdz bi al-jadīd al-aslah*—preserving the good of the old and adopting the better of the new. This principle teaches pesantren not to reject change outright but to embrace and harness it for the advancement of the institution. Modernization, when approached with a critical and selective mindset, does not pose a threat but can serve as an opportunity to enhance pesantren, improve management quality, expand outreach, and update curricula without severing the deep-rooted values that define them.²⁵

For example, many pesantren have started utilizing technology to expand learning opportunities, through e-learning, mobile applications, and other digital platforms. Additionally, pesantren are increasingly adapting their curricula to include scientific and technological knowledge, all while maintaining the core religious teachings at the heart of the pesantren. This enables pesantren not only to remain centers of religious education

²³ Syaprudin.

²⁴ Loubna Zakiah, 'Kepercayaan Santri Pada Kiai', *Buletin Psikologi*, 12.1 (2015), 33–43 <<https://doi.org/10.22146/bpsi.7467>>.

²⁵ Muhammad Burhanudin dan Wirda Kamalia, 'Budaya Santri (Ngaji, Ngopi, Ngantri, Ngabdi) Pada Novel Akademi Harapan Asa Karya Vita Agustina', *Indonesian Journal of Conservation*, 9.01 (2019) <<https://journal.unnes.ac.id/nju/index.php/ijc/article/view/3085>>.

but also to prepare their students to face the challenges of the global world, ensuring their relevance in a rapidly changing landscape.

In navigating this transformation, the role of the kiai is paramount. The kiai, as both a spiritual leader and intellectual guide of the pesantren, holds significant influence over the direction of the institution's development.²⁶ The kiai is not only a teacher but also a guardian of the values and traditions of pesantren. With wisdom and a deep understanding of the challenges of the modern era, the kiai can ensure that pesantren's transformations stay true to its original mission while adapting to contemporary needs. Through the guidance of the kiai, pesantren can integrate innovation with tradition to create an Islamic education model that is contextual, adaptive, and globally competitive.²⁷

Given all these challenges, pesantren must evolve from merely surviving to thriving and contributing positively to Indonesian society. In facing modernization, pesantren must strike a balance between preserving traditional values and embracing changes that can bring benefits. A pesantren that is adaptive and open to modernization, without sacrificing its core values, will continue to serve as a relevant institution of Islamic education, contributing to the social and religious advancement of Indonesian society.

2. Kawah Candradimuka Pesantren

Pesantren can be understood as a *kawah candradimuka* (mythical cauldron) that forges and shapes individuals who are not only knowledgeable in religious matters but also resilient in the face of life's challenges. The term *kawah candradimuka* is derived from Javanese mythology, symbolizing a place where warriors are tested before they enter the battlefield. Similarly, pesantren serves as a transformative space where students (santri) undergo rigorous spiritual, intellectual, and personal development, preparing them to face the complex and rapidly changing world outside its walls. It is a place where knowledge is not only learned but also internalized and lived.²⁸

The unique nature of pesantren lies in its ability to blend traditional religious education with the challenges of the modern world. In the past, pesantren was primarily a space for learning classical Islamic texts and fostering a deep connection to religious

²⁶ Jamali Sahrodi and Abdul Karim, 'Leader Power of Islamic Higher Education Institutions in Improving the Performance of Human Resources Management', *Cogent Arts and Humanities*, 12.1 (2025) <<https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2024.2442818>>.

²⁷ Samsul Bahri and Abd Hamid Wahid, 'Digital Transformation in Pesantren : The Kyai ' s Role in Improving Educational Services', 03.02 (2024), 61–72.

²⁸ Purwanti and others.

tradition. However, as time has progressed and the forces of modernity have increasingly shaped society, pesantren has evolved into an institution that must adapt to these changes while remaining faithful to its core principles. This adaptation has led pesantren to become an essential institution, both as a center of religious learning and as a hub for cultivating resilience in the face of modern challenges.²⁹

In the context of modernization, pesantren is tasked with the dual challenge of maintaining its traditional educational approach while preparing its students to succeed in a globalized, technology-driven world. The *kawah candradimuka* metaphor aptly captures this process, as pesantren acts as a forge where the young are trained to withstand the pressures of modernity, while preserving their spiritual and moral compass. Students are taught not only religious knowledge but also values such as discipline, integrity, and social responsibility, which are crucial for navigating the complexities of contemporary society.

Beyond intellectual growth, pesantren also functions as a space for character development, providing a holistic education that encompasses both the mind and the soul. Santri are expected to live in a disciplined environment, adhering to a structured daily routine that includes religious rituals, academic study, and community service. These practices instill a sense of responsibility, humility, and social awareness, making pesantren more than just an educational institution—it is a community that shapes its members into individuals who can contribute positively to society. This holistic approach ensures that pesantren graduates are equipped with the skills necessary to succeed in both their religious and secular lives.³⁰

As pesantren has evolved, it has become a significant agent of social change, shaping leaders and change-makers who can address the pressing issues of the modern world while remaining deeply rooted in Islamic values. Through its transformative educational model, pesantren helps to bridge the gap between tradition and innovation, allowing students to navigate the modern world without losing their cultural and spiritual identity. In this sense, pesantren serves as a *kawah candradimuka* that not only prepares students for the challenges of today but also empowers them to shape the future in accordance with their faith and values.

²⁹ Muhammad Sahal Malik Fajar, 'Kyai'S Leadership in Building Religious Moderation in Pesantren-Based Universities: A Multicultural Perspective', *EDURELIGIA: Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam*, 8.1 (2024), 1–16 <<https://doi.org/10.33650/edureligia.v8i1.8395>>.

³⁰ Hakim.

Ultimately, the metaphor of *kawah candradimuka* reflects the central role pesantren plays in preparing future generations to face the trials of life. By fostering resilience, knowledge, and a strong sense of identity, pesantren ensures that its students are not only capable of thriving in a rapidly changing world but also of contributing positively to the broader society. The crucible of pesantren, through its rigorous yet nurturing environment, remains a vital force in the development of Indonesia's spiritual and intellectual leaders.

3. Transformation of Islamic boarding schools in the midst of modernity

Pesantren is not an ancient museum, a place where unique and old objects are stored and preserved. It is also not a prison, a place where every action and thought is controlled and strictly monitored. Pesantren is a "laboratory" where ideas are studied and tested again. Since its inception, pesantren has grown, developed, and spread across various rural areas.³¹ The existence of pesantren as an Islamic institution that is deeply rooted in Indonesia's character holds strategic values for the development of Indonesian society. The reality shows that, on one hand, the majority of Indonesia's population is Muslim, and on the other hand, most of them live in rural areas. However, as time and civilization have advanced, pesantren has expanded its reach. Its existence is no longer limited to rural areas but has now reached urban areas, even city centers.

The image of pesantren in the eyes of the general public is often associated with a shabby and unclean place. There is a statement in society that says, "If you're not dirty, you haven't truly become a santri," which implies that pesantren's conditions are not conducive to health. Another issue is that the lifestyle of the santri (those seeking knowledge in pesantren) is technologically far behind those outside pesantren, and there are still many negative perceptions (from non-pesantren circles) towards pesantren.³² Pesantren is a religious institution rich in noble values and traditions that have characterized it throughout its history. Throughout its journey, pesantren has consistently focused on education, making it the central activity. In developing education, pesantren has shown remarkable resilience, allowing it to survive various periods and face different challenges.³³ The educational mission of pesantren is to build an ideological foundation for the santri, so they can later pass on their knowledge to society. Although the teaching

³¹ Ilyasin and Muadin.

³² Purwanti and others.

³³ Sahrodi and Karim.

methods are conservative, they have endured over time, despite the emergence of new methods.

One of the distinctive features of the educational model in pesantren is its approach, which is grounded in what is familiar to the community and blends theoretical and practical aspects. This educational approach has allowed pesantren to develop into a flexible system with a broad spectrum, transcending the boundaries of the pesantren itself.³⁴ It is not an exaggeration to say that pesantren is a form of deschooling society, transforming the community into a society of learners and turning learning into a continuous process. The complexity of pesantren life can shape the character of the santri and the surrounding community. Various methods are used by the kiai (the pesantren leader) to ensure the pesantren's survival in the face of changing times. It is through the presence of the kiai that the pesantren endures; the kiai plays a key role in formulating, holding, and contemplating the existence of the pesantren with its educational system and management.³⁵ As explained above, pesantren is a religious educational institution whose existence continues today and will likely persist in the future. Throughout its history, pesantren has never faltered but has always been able to answer the challenges of its time. This has occurred because pesantren is dynamic and adaptable to circumstances, undergoing various transformations such as leadership transitions, changes in educational systems, the structure of the pesantren institution, curriculum, and teaching methods.

Leadership within pesantren cannot be separated from the kiai. The term kiai seems to refer to regional customs; leaders of pesantren in East Java and Central Java are called kiai, while in West Java, they are called Ajengan.³⁶ Nationally, the term kiai is more widely recognized than Ajengan. A kiai is an informal and spiritual leader whose position is closely tied to lower social groups. As a leader, a kiai has a community of followers who are bonded through close ties and paternalistic cultural relationships. His advice is always heard, followed, and implemented by his followers.³⁷ This means the kiai becomes a respected figure in the community, or the father of the community. The kiai carries moral and spiritual responsibilities in addition to material needs. It is not an exaggeration to say

³⁴ Hakim.

³⁵ Ismah.

³⁶ Wahyu Hidayat and others, 'Kepemimpinan Dalam Perspektif Islam', *El-Hikmah*, 14.1 (2020), 98–111.

³⁷ Muhammad Fadhli, 'Internalisasi Nilai-nilai Kepemimpinan Profetik Dalam Lembaga Pendidikan Islam', *At-Ta'dib; Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Agama Islam*, 10.2 (2018), 116–27.

that the figure of the kiai as a charismatic leader causes almost all social issues surrounding him to be consulted with him before taking a stand on the matter. The high trust of the community in the kiai, coupled with his ability to solve various socio-psychological, cultural, political, and religious problems, places him in an elite position within the social and political structure of the community.³⁸ The kiai decisive position tends to contribute to the development of absolute authority. In pesantren, the kiai is the sole leader with absolute authority. There is no one else more respected than the kiai. The kiai is the central figure of power, controlling resources, especially knowledge and authority, which are the foundations for the santri.

However, over time, as the kiai becomes more open to changing circumstances, it has become necessary for him to make precise policies for the survival of the pesantren, leading to a change in the leadership model. Initially, the kiai held absolute authority over the pesantren, but now the kiai has begun to apply a foundation leadership model for his pesantren. This is seen as a step toward expanding the pesantren's reach, not only confined to the pesantren compound but also institutionalizing this model, transforming the pesantren into an impersonal organization.³⁹ The distribution of authority in the management system is arranged functionally, so that everything must be organized and managed according to modern management principles. The introduction and application of the foundation concept is a strategic solution. The kiai's burden is now lighter as tasks are shared according to responsibilities. The kiai is also relieved of the moral burden regarding the continuity of the pesantren in the future. If the leadership succession plan for his children is successful, then the successor trained by him will continue the leadership, and if the succession fails, a qualified individual will be chosen to lead the pesantren. Thus, the surrounding community will not lose its center of Islamic studies.⁴⁰

Next is the transformation in the pesantren education system. Initially, pesantren was founded by Islamic propagators, and its existence was believed to accompany the spread of Islam in this country, although its educational system was not as complete as it

³⁸ Alfiatun Munawwaroh, Farid Wajdi, and Vinesa Fitri, 'Gaya Kepemimpinan Nyai Hajah Masriyah Amva Di Pondok Pesantren Kebon Jambu Al-Islamy Babakan Ciwaringin Kabupaten Cirebon', *Eduprof: Islamic Education Journal*, 1.2 (2019), 78–92 <<https://doi.org/10.47453/eduprof.v1i2.21>>.

³⁹ Iwan Siswanto and Erma Yulita, 'Eksistensi Pesantren Dengan Budaya Patronase (Hubungan Kiai Dan Santri)', *Mitra Ash-Shibyan: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Konseling*, 2.1 (2019), 87–107 <<https://doi.org/10.46963/mash.v2i1.27>>.

⁴⁰ Kasful Kasful, 'The Leadership of Kyai in Islamic Boarding School (A Study of Islamic Boarding School in Jambi)', *Al-Ta Lim Journal*, 22.1 (2015), 88–95 <<https://doi.org/10.15548/jt.v22i1.113>>.

is now. One of the characteristics of the pesantren education system is the presence of dormitories, where educators can directly monitor and engage with students.⁴¹ The close relationship between the kiai and the santri allows for the transmission of living knowledge. Pesantren has produced individuals who can enter various professional fields. Traditionally, the education system in pesantren distinctly separates intellectual development from character building. The system prioritizes character development over intellectual growth, which has led to a lack of critical thinking, a tradition of critique, research enthusiasm, and the promotion of academic concepts.

In other words, pesantren focuses more on personal development than teaching, even though both should be integrated into a coherent and harmonious system. However, with the development of science and technology, and the spread of information and culture, society has been encouraged to think rationally, openly, and adaptively.⁴² Today, society faces various changes, including shifts in thinking, lifestyles, daily needs, and projections of the future. This has influenced societal mindset and needs, but the output of pesantren has not changed much due to its educational system that has not undergone a transformation. The problem is not the potential of pesantren graduates but the shifting times that demand new approaches.

Pesantren must take a wise approach in facing these challenges. It cannot isolate itself from these challenges. It must open up and respond positively by offering alternatives that focus on empowering santri to face the global era, which brings more complex problems. As Indonesia's oldest Islamic educational institution, pesantren remains a pillar of hope for the nation.⁴³ As Nurcholish Majid said, the vision of creating a civil society will be easier to realize if we open up, respond positively, and remain flexible in the face of modern developments. In its education system, pesantren must formulate a concept of education that directs the development of Islamic teachings within the social order, not just as a legalistic institution with a black-and-white perspective. More importantly, pesantren must be flexible and open to changes and progress outside

⁴¹ Mansur Hidayat, 'Model Komunikasi Kyai Dengan Santri Di Pesantren', *Jurnal ASPIKOM*, 2.6 (2017), 385 <<https://doi.org/10.24329/aspikom.v2i6.89>>.

⁴² Muhammad Misbah, 'Patronage Relations of Kyai-Santri in Character Education in Pondok Pesantren Mahadutholabah Babakan-Tegal', *Jurnal Smart (Studi Masyarakat, Religi, Dan Tradisi)*, 05.02 (2019), 213-28.

⁴³ Ali Anwar, 'The Shift of Kyai's Roles in Kediri East Java in the Post New-Order Era: The Contribution on Local Environment Context', *IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science*, 469.1 (2020) <<https://doi.org/10.1088/1755-1315/469/1/012034>>.

its walls. This openness means that pesantren must willingly accept positive, constructive, and innovative inputs from any source. Additionally, pesantren must be willing to introspect and identify its weaknesses, so solutions can be found.⁴⁴

Furthermore, pesantren is called to be creative and innovative, capable of improvising without changing its traditional character and identity. These transformative steps do not merely alter the structure but, more importantly, bring about positive and constructive values from the change. For example, there is a shift from the exclusive (closed) attitude of pesantren to a more inclusive one, from a single leadership model to a collective one, and so on. Therefore, these transformative actions, aimed at responding to modernization and ensuring pesantren's relevance, should focus on strategic steps for the advancement of pesantren.

4. Modernization without losing identity

Modernization represents an inevitable process that every institution must undergo to remain pertinent in the face of societal evolution, without compromising its fundamental identity. Within the context of pesantren, modernization emerges as an essential challenge that must be navigated by this Islamic educational institution. Pesantren must demonstrate the capacity to adapt to shifts in education, society, and technology. However, this adaptation must occur in tandem with the preservation of the values and traditional identities that have long been emblematic of pesantren. Modernization, while an overwhelming force that cannot be evaded, must be engaged with in such a manner that pesantren can endure and evolve without being unduly subsumed by it. In line with the guiding principle *al-muhāfazah 'ala al-qadīm as-sālih wa al-akhdz bi al-jadīd al-aslah*—which advocates for the preservation of beneficial traditions while adopting better, more appropriate innovations—pesantren must maintain its time-honored practices while simultaneously incorporating contemporary advancements that meet current needs.⁴⁵

As an Islamic educational institution with a rich historical legacy, pesantren has demonstrated substantial potential in navigating the complexities of modernization. While it must remain open to constructive and positive changes, pesantren must not forfeit the traditional values that have been fundamental to its identity and character

⁴⁴ Fajar.

⁴⁵ Muhaemin.

throughout history.⁴⁶ One of the key ways in which pesantren achieves this balance is by adhering steadfastly to its core principle: preserving the best of its traditional practices while embracing beneficial modern innovations. This approach illustrates that pesantren does not categorically reject modernization; rather, it seeks to engage with it in a way that allows for necessary progress while safeguarding its essential values.

Pesantren embodies a range of noble values and time-honored traditions that have been integral to its existence throughout history, including independence, simplicity, and sincerity. These values are particularly relevant when confronting the challenges posed by modernization and globalization, which have the potential to alter societal mindsets and modes of life.⁴⁷ The emphasis on independence within pesantren serves as a critical foundation for society, enabling it to avoid becoming unduly reliant on external influences that may erode local wisdom and national identity. The simplicity instilled within pesantren—both in its daily practices and its religious teachings—functions as a filter, enabling society to critically assess and mitigate the excessive impacts of modernity. Sincerity, a core tenet of Islamic teaching, guides pesantren in staying true to its educational and outreach goals, even in the face of global pressures that sometimes prioritize materialism and individual profit over communal welfare.⁴⁸ However, a critical element that must be preserved to prevent pesantren from being swept away by modernization is the continued significance of individual leadership, particularly that of the kiai. The kiai serves as the primary guardian against modernizing forces that may undermine the traditional identity of pesantren. The charismatic kiai is revered, respected, obeyed, and upheld by the santri (students), the wider pesantren community, and the surrounding society. This esteem is derived not only from the kiai's academic expertise but also from his role as a trusted figure capable of providing practical solutions to life's challenges for individuals from all walks of life. Consequently, the central response from the kiai's followers is *sami'na wa 'ata'na* ("We hear and we obey").

The kiai's leadership is crucial, as a charismatic kiai becomes a role model for the santri, fostering a deep concern for the betterment of the wider community. The continued sustainability of pesantren is, therefore, inextricably linked to the presence of

⁴⁶ Hidayat.

⁴⁷ Lailatur Rofidah and Nur Syam, 'Fenomenologi Relasi Santri-Kiai Di Pesantren : Motif Nata Sandal Di Kalangan Santri Abstrak', 33–48.

⁴⁸ Fakturmen Fakturmen, 'Pengaruh KH. Hasyim Asy'ari Dalam Membangun Serta Menjaga Nusantara Dan Kemaslahatan Islam Dunia', *Jurnal Indo-Islamika*, 10.1 (2020), 28–39 <<https://doi.org/10.15408/idi.v10i1.17510>>.

a charismatic kyai. Even as pesantren engages with modernization, the need for a kiai with charismatic stature remains paramount. Through this style of leadership, constructive directives—particularly those advocating for a deeper understanding of modernization—can be implemented smoothly by the ustad (teachers) and santri, free from psychological barriers such as indiscipline.⁴⁹ In summary, modernization is an unavoidable reality that pesantren must navigate. The various transformations occurring within pesantren are a testament to its acceptance of modernization, provided that it does not compromise the deeply embedded traditions that form its core identity. It is permissible—and indeed beneficial—for pesantren to modernize in various aspects to ensure its continued relevance; however, it must avoid being overtaken by the forces of modernization to the point that its essential identity is lost. Pesantren can embrace and adapt to modernization, but it must always adhere to the guiding principle of swimming with the currents of change, so long as it does not drown in them or lose its course. This demonstrates that while pesantren may evolve by incorporating contemporary advancements, it must still preserve the essence and identity that have been fundamental to its longstanding role as a vital institution within Islamic society.

Conclusion

Recognizing change does not mean that pesantren must completely transform, but it also cannot be left behind in the rapid current of modernization. Pesantren plays a crucial role as the foundation of moral education in Indonesia, necessitating the preservation of the sustainability and quality of its educational practices. In facing modernity, pesantren must adhere firmly to its core principle: preserving good old traditions while adopting better new practices. By following this principle, pesantren can maintain its identity while adapting to the progress of the times. In this process, pesantren must be able to wisely select which elements should be embraced and which ones should be avoided to preserve its traditions. The absorption of knowledge brought by modernization is essential to ensure that the development of pesantren moves in a positive direction. Therefore, the enthusiasm to embrace technological advancement must always be accompanied by strong faith, ensuring that pesantren retains its essence and identity, even as it undergoes modernization.

⁴⁹ Hidayat and others.

References

- Adnani, Kamila, 'Pluralisme Pemahaman Keagamaan Santri Di Surakarta', *Al-Balagh : Jurnal Dakwah Dan Komunikasi*, 1.2 (2016), 183 <<https://doi.org/10.22515/balagh.v1i2.352>>
- Afif, Moh, 'Penerapan Metode Sorogan Dalam Meningkatkan Baca Kitab Di Pondok Pesantren Tarbiyatun Nasyi'in', *Kabilah: Journal of Social Community*, 4.2 (2019), 34–43 <<https://doi.org/10.35127/kbl.v4i2.3592>>
- Anwar, Ali, 'The Shift of Kyai's Roles in Kediri East Java in the Post New-Order Era: The Contribution on Local Environment Context', *IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science*, 469.1 (2020) <<https://doi.org/10.1088/1755-1315/469/1/012034>>
- Arifuddin, Arifuddin, 'Konsep Pendidikan Profetik (Melacak Visi Kenabian Dalam Pendidikan)', *Jurnal MUDARRISUNA: Media Kajian Pendidikan Agama Islam*, 9.2 (2019), 319 <<https://doi.org/10.22373/jm.v9i2.4782>>
- Bahri, Samsul, and Abd Hamid Wahid, 'Digital Transformation in Pesantren : The Kyai ' s Role in Improving Educational Services', 03.02 (2024), 61–72
- Dianti, Atiq N U R, 'Konsep Pendidikan Untuk Perempuan Perspektif Nyai Hj. Masriah Amva', *OASIS : Jurnal Ilmiah Kajian Islam*, 4.2 (2020), 93–110
- Fadhli, Muhammad, 'Internalisasi Nilai Nilai Kepemimpinan Profetik Dalam Lembaga Pendidikan Islam', *At-Ta'dib; Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Agama Islam*, 10.2 (2018), 116–27
- Fajar, Muhammad Sahal Malik, 'Kyai'S Leadership in Building Religious Moderation in Pesantren-Based Universities: A Multicultural Perspective', *EDURELIGIA: Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam*, 8.1 (2024), 1–16 <<https://doi.org/10.33650/edureligia.v8i1.8395>>
- Fakturmen, Fakturmen, 'Pengaruh KH. Hasyim Asy'ari Dalam Membangun Serta Menjaga Nusantara Dan Kemaslahatan Islam Dunia', *Jurnal Indo-Islamika*, 10.1 (2020), 28–39 <<https://doi.org/10.15408/idi.v10i1.17510>>
- Falikul Isbah, M., 'Pesantren in the Changing Indonesian Context: History and Current Developments', *Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies*, 8.1 (2020), 65–106 <<https://doi.org/10.21043/QIJS.V8I1.5629>>
- Fathoni, Muhammad Anwar, and Ade Nur Rohim, 'Peran Pesantren Dalam Pemberdayaan Ekonomi Umat Di Indonesia', *Proceeding Conference on Islamic Management*,

- Accounting, and Economics (CIMA)*, 2 (2019), 133–40
- Hakim, Lukman, 'Pesantren as the Identity of Islamic and Cultural Education in West Java', *AL-ISHLAH: Jurnal Pendidikan*, 15.4 (2023), 4578–86
<<https://doi.org/10.35445/alishlah.v15i4.3369>>
- Hidayat, Mansur, 'Model Komunikasi Kyai Dengan Santri Di Pesantren', *Jurnal ASPIKOM*, 2.6 (2017), 385 <<https://doi.org/10.24329/aspikom.v2i6.89>>
- Hidayat, Wahyu, Muhammad Olifiansyah, Muhammad Dzulfiqar, and Bimansyah Putra Diaying, 'Kepemimpinan Dalam Perspektif Islam', *El-Hikmah*, 14.1 (2020), 98–111
- Husna, Ulfatul, and Muhammad Thohir, 'Religious Moderation as a New Approach to Learning Islamic Religious Education in Schools', *Nadwa*, 14.1 (2020), 199–222
<<https://doi.org/10.21580/nw.2020.14.1.5766>>
- Ilyasin, Mukhamat, and Akhmad Muadin, 'Pesantren as a Community-Based Islamic Educational Institution', 11.3 (2024)
- Ismah, Nor, 'Pesantren in Indonesia and Their Role in the Colonial Period', *Tebuireng: Journal of Islamic Studies and Society*, 3.1 (2022)
- Kamalia, Muhammad Burhanudin dan Wirda, 'Budaya Santri (Ngaji,Ngopi,Ngantri,Ngabdi) Pada Novel Akademi Harapan Asa Karya Vita Agustina', *Indonesian Journal of Conservation*, 9.01 (2019)
<<https://journal.unnes.ac.id/nju/index.php/ijc/article/view/3085>>
- Kasful, Kasful, 'The Leadership of Kyai in Islamic Boarding School (A Study of Islamic Boarding School in Jambi)', *Al-Ta Lim Journal*, 22.1 (2015), 88–95
<<https://doi.org/10.15548/jt.v22i1.113>>
- Lubis, Dahlia, 'Islamism in the Perception of the Teachers and the Students of Pesantren Mawaridussalam Deli Serdang North Sumatra', *TEOSOFI: Jurnal Tasawuf Dan Pemikiran Islam*, 9.1 (2019), 1–29 <<https://doi.org/10.15642/teosofi.2019.9.1.1-29>>
- Masum, Toha, and Muh Barid Nizarudin Wajdi, 'Pengembangan Kemandirian Pesantren Melalui Program Santripreneur ', *Engagement: Jurnal Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat*, 2.2 SE-Articles (2018)
<<https://doi.org/10.29062/engagement.v2i2.40>>
- Maunah, Binti, *Tradisi Intelektual Santri Dalam Tantangan Dan Hambatan Pendidikan Pesantren Di Masa Depan* (Yogyakarta: Teras, 2009)
- Misbah, Muhammad, 'Patronage Relations of Kyai-Santri in Character Education in

- Pondok Pesantren Mahadutholabah Babakan-Tegal', *Jurnal Smart (Studi Masyarakat, Religi, Dan Tradisi)*, 05.02 (2019), 213–28
- Mu'azaroh, Siti, 'Cultural Capital Dan Kharisma Kiai Dalam Dinamika Politik: Studi Ketokohan K.H. Maimun Zubair', *IN RIGHT: Jurnal Agama Dan Hak Azazi Manusia*, 6.2 (2017), 195–212 <<http://ejournal.uin-suka.ac.id/syariah/inright/article/view/1451>>
- Muhaemin, 'Teologi Aswaja Nahdhatul Ulama Di Era Modern : Studi Atas Pemikiran Kyai Hasyim Asy'ari', *Jurnal Diskursus Islam*, 1.2 (2013), 315–28 <http://journal.uin-alauddin.ac.id/index.php/diskursus_islam/article/view/6634>
- Munandar, Siswoyo Aris, and Rinda Khoirunnisfa, 'KH Hasyim Asy'ari and the Teacher Code of Ethics: Thought Study KH. Hasyim Asy'ari on Ethics Education and Its Relevance to Modern Education in Indonesia', *Journal EVALUASI*, 4.1 (2020), 114 <<https://doi.org/10.32478/evaluasi.v4i1.359>>
- Munawwaroh, Alfiatun, Farid Wajdi, and Vinesa Fitri, 'Gaya Kepemimpinan Nyai Hajah Masriyah Amva Di Pondok Pesantren Kebon Jambu Al-Islamy Babakan Ciwaringin Kabupaten Cirebon', *Eduprof: Islamic Education Journal*, 1.2 (2019), 78–92 <<https://doi.org/10.47453/eduprof.v1i2.21>>
- Purwanti, Purwanti, A Andari, MA Ansori, and Febryan Hadinata, 'Dynamics of Pesantren Formation: The Origins of Pesantren and Institutional Growth', *Journal of Social Research*, 2.11 (2023), 4155–63 <<https://doi.org/10.55324/josr.v2i11.1599>>
- Rofidah, Lailatur, and Nur Syam, 'Fenomenologi Relasi Santri-Kiai Di Pesantren : Motif Nata Sandal Di Kalangan Santri Abstrak', 33–48
- Rofiq, Ahmad Choirul, 'Argumentasi Hasyim Asy'Ari Dalam Penetapan Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jama'Ah Sebagai Teologi Nahdlatul Ulama', *Kontemplasi: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin*, 5.1 (2017) <<https://doi.org/10.21274/kontem.2017.5.1.21-48>>
- Sahrodi, Jamali, and Abdul Karim, 'Leader Power of Islamic Higher Education Institutions in Improving the Performance of Human Resources Management', *Cogent Arts and Humanities*, 12.1 (2025) <<https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2024.2442818>>
- Siswanto, Iwan, and Erma Yulita, 'Eksistensi Pesantren Dengan Budaya Patronase (Hubungan Kiai Dan Santri)', *Mitra Ash-Shibyan: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Konseling*, 2.1 (2019), 87–107 <<https://doi.org/10.46963/mash.v2i1.27>>
- Syaprudin, Arip, 'Santri's Economic Empowerment Model in Pesantren Al-Ittifaq Ciwidey District of Bandung', *International Journal of Nusantara Islam*, 5.2 (2019), 213–22

<<https://doi.org/10.15575/ijni.v5i2.4793>>

Zakiah, Loubna, 'Kepercayaan Santri Pada Kiai', *Buletin Psikologi*, 12.1 (2015), 33-43

<<https://doi.org/10.22146/bpsi.7467>>

Zukdi, Ilpi, Zulvia Trinova, and Ilman Nasution, 'The Role of Islamic Boarding Schools in Building the Character of the Nation', *Edukasi Islam: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 11.01

(2022), 1137-50 <<https://doi.org/10.30868/ei.v11i01.2913>>