



MODERNIZATION AND REFORM OF PESANTREN: A PREVENTIVE EFFORT TO MAINTAIN THE IMAGE OF PESANTREN IN INDONESIA

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Abstract

Article Info:

Received:
2025-12-26

Revised:
2026-01-03

Accepted:
2026-01-05

Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) in Indonesia face the paradox of modernization: on the one hand, they must adapt to the demands of the times, while on the other, they must preserve their traditional identity. The widespread negative reporting and rigid religious practices have eroded public trust and the image of pesantren. This study analyzes the modernization and reform of pesantren as a preventive strategy to maintain their image and relevance. Using a qualitative approach and systematic literature review, data were collected and analyzed through Miles and Huberman's techniques (reduction, display, verification). The findings reveal three patterns of modernization: first, digitalization of educational content and management; second, integration of the national curriculum with local wisdom of pesantren; and third, transformation of socio-economic roles through social entrepreneurship. The analysis indicates that pesantren modernization requires a "glocalization" approach—adapting global advancements without abandoning local values. This study contributes to the development of an adaptive pesantren model that is academically and socially relevant. The implication is the need for holistic mentoring policies from the government and synergy with educational stakeholders.

Keywords: Modernization; Reformation; Islamic Boarding School; Organizational Reputation; Islamic Education.



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Journal Homepage

<https://journal.ekantara.com/index.php/sitasi>

How to Cite:

(Chicago Manual of Style 18th edition—notes and bibliography)

Hamdi, Hamdi, et al. 'Modernization and Reform of Pesantren: A Preventive Effort to Maintain the Image of Pesantren in Indonesia'. *SITASI: Journal of Islamic Studies and Inclusive Education* 1, no. 1 (2026): 106-114. DOI

Published by:

CV. Eureka Artha Nusantara

INTRODUCTION

Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) in Indonesia, as traditional Islamic educational institutions, have long served as important pillars in shaping character, developing religious knowledge, and empowering communities.¹ However, in the modern era, pesantren face dual pressures. Internally, they are required to modernize curricula, management systems, and teaching methods to remain relevant to contemporary needs. Externally, their public image has been eroded by widespread negative reporting on social media and in mass media.²

The declining image of pesantren is not only related to individual cases but also involves broader dimensions such as institutional systems, religious ideologies, and social practices. Studies indicate that negative reporting has contributed to decreasing public trust, particularly among parents considering pesantren for their children. While some cases circulating on social media are factual, others are merely provocative.³

The prevalence of such cases has further reduced parental confidence in pesantren as educational institutions. This situation presents a significant challenge for pesantren in the context of modernization. In recent decades, pesantren have encountered various challenges that threaten their image and relevance. One major issue is the emergence of rigid religious expressions that conflict with democratic values and the historically tolerant culture of pesantren. Additionally, pesantren must adapt to modernization demands without losing their traditional identity.⁴

Previous studies highlight the significant role of pesantren in social transformation in Indonesia, including economic empowerment, prevention of violence and radicalism, and reduction of social inequality.⁵ Pesantren have also contributed to advancing Islamic scholarly traditions, moderating traditionalism, and facilitating modernization.⁶ However, a gap remains in understanding how pesantren can balance equity principles with market-oriented demands.⁷ While many studies have examined

¹ Gesha Berlianto et al., 'Islamic Education in the Time of Umar Bin Khattab: A Historical Study', *Jurnal Hurriah: Jurnal Evaluasi Pendidikan Dan Penelitian* 4, no. 3 (2023): 310–20.

² Achmad Imam Bashori and et al, *Pendidikan Islam Dan Globalisasi Menyelaraskan Tradisi Dengan Modernitas* (Duta Sains Indonesia, 2025).

³ S Ma'arif, 'Reinventing Pesantren's Moderation Culture to Build a Democratic Society in the Post-Reform Republic of Indonesia', *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 27, no. 3 (2019): 1739–51.

⁴ M Hanif et al., 'PESANTREN RESISTANCE TO INDONESIA'S NATIONAL CURRICULUM TO DEFEND ITS CURRICULUM MODEL', *Revista de Gestao Social e Ambiental* 18, no. 7 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.24857/rgsa.v18n7-049>; M J Sofi et al., 'PESANTREN IN DYNAMIC TRANSFORMATION: Harmonizing Classical Roots and Modern Practices', *Miqot: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 49, no. 2 (2025): 333–53, <https://doi.org/10.30821/miqot.v49i2.1459>.

⁵ A Asror, 'Transformative Propagation1 of Islamic Boarding School in Response to Contemporary Challenges', *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 25, no. August (2017): 187–94.

⁶ F. S Khawash et al., 'Penafsiran Ayat-Ayat Toleransi Dalam Tafsir Al-Azhar Dan Al-Misbah Serta Implementasinya Terhadap Masyarakat Indonesia', *Al-Fahmu: Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Tafsir* 3, no. 1 (2024): 1–15.

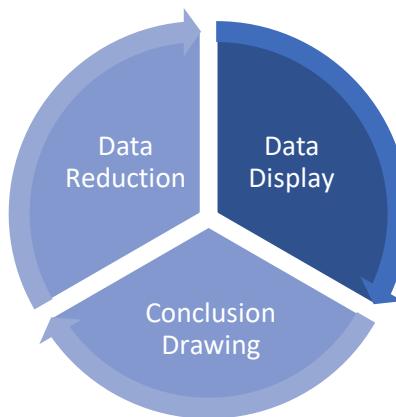
⁷ M F Isbah and Z Sakhiyya, 'Pesantren in Contemporary Indonesia: Negotiating Between Equity and the Market', in *Education in the Asia-Pacific Region*, vol. 70 (2023), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-99-1878-2_8.

the role of pesantren in education and social change, there is limited understanding of how they can effectively pursue modernization and reform while maintaining a positive public image.

This study aims to address that gap by exploring innovative strategies pesantren can adopt to respond to modernization challenges while preserving traditional values. Pesantren hold great potential as agents of social change in Indonesia.⁸ Through appropriate modernization and reform, they can continue to play a vital role in education and community development. However, this process must be undertaken carefully to ensure that the foundational values of pesantren remain intact. This research provides valuable insights into how pesantren can navigate these challenges and sustain their relevance in the modern era.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative-descriptive approach, specifically using a systematic literature review. Data were collected from credible sources, including journal articles, conference proceedings, e-books, academic repositories, and official documents from institutions such as the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Source selection was based on relevance to the research topic, author credibility, publication novelty (within the last ten years), and data completeness.⁹



Picture 1. Analysis of the Miles and Huberman Interactive Model

This study employs a qualitative-descriptive approach using library research as its primary method. The focus of the research is directed toward examining literature relevant to the themes of pesantren modernization and institutional image. Data sources are obtained from scholarly journal articles, conference proceedings, e-books, academic repositories, as well as official documents issued by government institutions such as the

⁸ Dewi Sinta et al., 'The Role of Digital Media in Optimizing Project-Based Learning to Practice 21st Century Skills', *Educative: Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan* 2, no. 3 (2024): 129–38.

⁹ Sugiono, *Metode Penelitian Pendidikan, Pendekatan Kualitatif, Kuantitatif Dan RD* (Alfabetha, 2017).

Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Central Bureau of Statistics.¹⁰ The selection of sources is carried out based on several criteria, namely relevance to the research topic, credibility of the author or publishing institution, the novelty of publications—particularly those produced within the last ten years—and the completeness of data that can support the analysis. Accordingly, only literature that meets academic standards and has a direct connection to the issues of modernization and the image of pesantren is utilized as the basis of this study.

Data analysis in this study employs the Miles and Huberman model, which consists of three main stages. The first stage is data reduction, namely the process of selecting and simplifying information from various sources by categorizing the literature according to themes such as pesantren modernization, the image of Islamic educational institutions, ecopedagogy, and institutional reform. The second stage is data display, in which the reduced information is organized into a systematic narrative and, when necessary, visualized in matrices or thematic schemes to illustrate the relationships between concepts.¹¹

The final stage is conclusion drawing and verification, which involves formulating research findings based on the data presented and conducting consistency checks through source triangulation, for example by comparing journal studies with official government reports. The Miles and Huberman analysis model enables library research to be conducted in a structured manner, ensuring that the results are not only descriptive but also analytical, thereby providing both theoretical and practical contributions to the development of pesantren in the modern era.¹²

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

Pesantren face challenges in integrating the national curriculum with traditional religious education. While many have incorporated formal education, they often modify the national curriculum to align with their religious identity, reflecting the tension between modernization and traditional values.¹³ This requires continuous adaptation to progress and competition in educational development, making transformative innovation essential to avoid falling behind.¹⁴

Effective management transformation is crucial for improving accessibility and educational quality in pesantren. This includes integrating information and

¹⁰ Abuddin Nata, 'Penguatan Materi Dan Metodologi Pendidikan Agama Islam', *Ta'dibuna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 9, no. 2 (2020): 244–66.

¹¹ Matthew B Miles and A Michael Huberman, 'Drawing Valid Meaning from Qualitative Data: Toward A Shared Craft', *Educational Researcher* 13, no. 5 (1984): 20–30; Matthew B Miles et al., *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*, 3rd edn (Sage publications, 2014).

¹² Miles et al., *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*.

¹³ Hanif et al., 'PESANTREN RESISTANCE TO INDONESIA'S NATIONAL CURRICULUM TO DEFEND ITS CURRICULUM MODEL'.

¹⁴ Dewi Sinta et al., 'Development of the Islamic Education Curriculum Facing the Challenges of 21st Century Skills', *Pendekar: Jurnal Pendidikan Berkarakter* 7, no. 1 (2024): 20–25.

communication technology (ICT) into management and learning processes, which can help address issues such as high costs and geographical barriers.¹⁵ Darwanto's research emphasizes the importance of digitalization in pesantren transformation.

Several pesantren in Indonesia have embraced digitalization as part of modernization efforts. For example, Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor has implemented a transformative educational system promoting modern values such as rationality, discipline, inclusivity, and responsibility among students.¹⁶ This transformation is achieved through classroom learning and reflective engagement in pesantren management.¹⁷ Such efforts demonstrate the importance of modernization in responding to technological advancements and safeguarding the institution's public image. This resistance is crucial for Islamic boarding schools to prevent further deterioration and damage to their reputation. Given the numerous cases that have negatively portrayed pesantren, a positive form of resistance that pesantren should undertake is to incorporate modernization into their activities, such as through digital transformation.

Digitalization in pesantren also supports intellectual tradition development and deradicalization efforts. By producing digital religious content, pesantren make education more accessible while countering radical narratives.¹⁸ Furthermore, pesantren contribute to socio-economic development by integrating traditional values with modern advancements. For instance, Rasyidiyah Islamic Boarding School (RKIBS) in South Kalimantan has played a transformative role in shaping the social and economic dynamics of the Amuntai community.¹⁹

Despite socio-economic changes, pesantren strive to balance equity principles with market orientation, ensuring accessibility for lower-income communities while adapting to modern demands.²⁰ The government should adopt an inclusive approach to support pesantren in integrating formal education while preserving their religious identity.²¹

¹⁵ A Darwanto et al., 'Transformation of Boarding School Management Models in Enhancing Student Accessibility and Educational Quality', *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam* 21, no. 1 (2024): 145–64, <https://doi.org/10.14421/jpai.v21i1.8632>.

¹⁶ Y. L Amrona et al., 'Kajian Tentang Kosmologi Dan Implikasi Dasar Terhadap Pendidikan Islam', *AZKIA: Jurnal Aktualisasi Pendidikan Islam* 18, no. 2 (2023): 92–101.

¹⁷ T Lindgren et al., 'A Model of Transformative Religious Education: Teaching and Learning Islam in Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor, Indonesia', *Millah: Journal of Religious Studies* 23, no. 1 (2024): 171–212, <https://doi.org/10.20885/millah.vol23.iss1.art6>.

¹⁸ N Azizah et al., 'Religious Moderation in The Industrial Era 4.0: Deradicalization Through The Development of Intellectual Traditions at Fadhlul Fadhl Islamic Boarding School Semarang', *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam* 20, no. 2 (2023): 233–46, <https://doi.org/10.14421/jpai.v20i2.7771>.

¹⁹ M A S Malisi and A H Mohad, 'INSTITUTIONALIZING EDUCATIONAL REFORM: BALANCING TRADITION AND MODERNITY AT PESANTREN', *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 10, no. 2 (2024): 363–74, <https://doi.org/10.15575/jpi.v10i2.24636>.

²⁰ Isbah and Sakhiyya, 'Pesantren in Contemporary Indonesia: Negotiating Between Equity and the Market'.

²¹ Hanif et al., 'PESANTREN RESISTANCE TO INDONESIA'S NATIONAL CURRICULUM TO DEFEND ITS CURRICULUM MODEL'.

Discussion

Pesantren face the challenge of integrating modern educational practices while preserving their classical roots. Many have expanded curricula, adopted digital tools, and aligned with national education policies to enhance institutional capacity and relevance.²² However, resistance to fully adopting the national curriculum remains, as pesantren strive to maintain their religious identity.²³

Pesantren also contribute to local economic development through initiatives such as eco-cement, focusing on sustainability and community welfare.²⁴ Modernization efforts include improving educational quality and accessibility by integrating ICT into management and learning processes—essential for meeting contemporary educational needs.²⁵ Additionally, pesantren incorporate interfaith education and promote gender equality to foster inclusivity.²⁶

Pesantren are developing distinctive curricula that integrate religious teachings with modern subjects, including accelerated learning programs and specialized tracks to improve educational outcomes.²⁷ They also emphasize character formation, moral values, and social responsibility, fostering well-rounded individuals who contribute positively to society.²⁸ Modernizing and reforming pesantren is essential for their continued relevance in Indonesia's educational landscape. By addressing challenges, embracing innovation, contributing to socio-economic development, and preserving their historical and cultural identity, pesantren can maintain their vital role in shaping Indonesia's future.²⁹

²² Hanif et al., 'PESANTREN RESISTANCE TO INDONESIA'S NATIONAL CURRICULUM TO DEFEND ITS CURRICULUM MODEL'; Sofi et al., 'PESANTREN IN DYNAMIC TRANSFORMATION: Harmonizing Classical Roots and Modern Practices'.

²³ Hanif et al., 'PESANTREN RESISTANCE TO INDONESIA'S NATIONAL CURRICULUM TO DEFEND ITS CURRICULUM MODEL'.

²⁴ E Prasojo et al., 'Infusing Indigenous Islamic Values into Western-Style Public Administration in Indonesia: The Role of Pesantren Institutions', in *Islamic Public Value: Theory, Practice, and Administration of Indigenous Cooperative Institutions* (2025), <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781035333646.00026>.

²⁵ Darwanto et al., 'Transformation of Boarding School Management Models in Enhancing Student Accessibility and Educational Quality'.

²⁶ M Athoillah et al., 'POLICIES AND PRACTICES RELIGIOUS MODERATION IN PESANTREN', *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 10, no. 2 (2024): 387–96, <https://doi.org/10.15575/jpi.v10i2.27543>.

²⁷ F Listrianti and A Mundiri, 'TRANSFORMATION OF CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT BASED ON NATIONALITY-ORIENTED', *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 8, no. 1 (2020): 37–52, <https://doi.org/10.26811/peuradeun.v8i1.380>; M Thoha and A Hannan, 'MODERNIZATION OF EDUCATION GOVERNANCE BASED ON ACCELERATIVE PARADIGM AMONG PESANTREN COMMUNITIES IN MADURA, INDONESIA', *Ulumuna* 26, no. 2 (2022): 417–46, <https://doi.org/10.20414/ujis.v26i2.515>.

²⁸ R Basori et al., 'MAINTAINING SALAFI VALUES THROUGH INNOVATIVE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES AT PESANTREN', *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 9, no. 2 (2023): 145–56, <https://doi.org/10.15575/jpi.v9i2.25376>; Lindgren et al., 'A Model of Transformative Religious Education: Teaching and Learning Islam in Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor, Indonesia'.

²⁹ Isbah and Sakhiyya, 'Pesantren in Contemporary Indonesia: Negotiating Between Equity and the Market'; C B Gama et al., 'ROLES AND CHALLENGES OF PESANTREN INTELLECTUAL NETWORKS', *Jurnal Ilmiah Islam Futura* 24, no. 2 (2024): 453–70, <https://doi.org/10.22373/jiif.v24i2.23134>.

CONCLUSION

The modernization and reform of pesantren are fundamentally a necessary and preventive response to contemporary challenges. Amid pressures to remain academically and socially relevant, pesantren are required to undergo transformation without eroding the traditional values that serve as their foundation. This effort is crucial not only to restore and safeguard their public image, but also to strengthen their position as adaptive educational institutions grounded in an authentic Islamic identity.

This modernization has been realized through several approaches, including digital transformation in educational management and content, curriculum integration that combines national standards with the local wisdom of pesantren, and the enhancement of socio-economic roles through community empowerment and entrepreneurship programs. These changes demonstrate that pesantren are not merely passive in the face of change, but are actively formulating strategic measures to remain relevant in the modern context while building institutional resilience.

The sustainability of these modernization efforts largely depends on collaboration and support from various stakeholders, including the government, the community, and educational actors. With appropriate policies, ongoing guidance, and a commitment to balancing tradition and innovation, pesantren are expected to not only sustain their existence but also continue to serve as a vital pillar in shaping the character and knowledge of Indonesia's future generations.

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