THE INFLUENCE OF PESANTREN TRADITION ON ARABIC LANGUAGE LEARNING IN ISLAMIC SCHOOLS

Maya Aulia[1], Ika Supriyanti[1*]
[1]STIT Pringsewu Lampung
*✉: ikanurdin12@gmail.com

Abstrak

Penelitian ini menyelidiki integrasi dan dampak metode pedagogis pesantren tradisional terhadap pengajaran bahasa Arab dalam sistem sekolah Islam modern Indonesia. Menggunakan desain penelitian kualitatif berdasarkan tinjauan literatur yang komprehensif, penelitian ini meneliti bagaimana praktik seperti sorogan, bandongan, dan halaqah memengaruhi kemahiran siswa, terutama dalam pemahaman dan hafalan tekstual klasik. Temuan ini mengungkapkan bahwa meskipun metode tradisional ini secara signifikan meningkatkan keterampilan membaca dan interpretatif, mereka sering gagal dalam mengembangkan kompetensi komunikatif. Studi ini memberikan analisis komparatif pendekatan pedagogis berbasis pesantren dan modern, diakhiri dengan diskusi tentang potensi model hibrida yang menyeimbangkan kekuatan kedua tradisi untuk meningkatkan pendidikan bahasa Arab secara keseluruhan di Indonesia.
Kata kunci: Pesantren, Pembelajaran Bahasa Arab, Sekolah Islam.

Abstract

This study investigates the integration and impact of traditional pesantren pedagogical methods on Arabic language instruction within Indonesia's modern Islamic school system. Employing a qualitative research design based on a comprehensive literature review, the research examines how practices such as sorogan, bandongan, and halaqah influence student proficiency, particularly in classical textual comprehension and memorization. The findings reveal that while these traditional methods significantly enhance reading and interpretative skills, they often fall short in developing communicative competence. The study provides a comparative analysis of pesantren-based and modern pedagogical approaches, concluding with a discussion of the potential for a hybrid model that balances the strengths of both traditions to improve overall Arabic language education in Indonesia.
Keywords: Pesantren, Arabic Language Learning, Islamic School.

INTRODUCTION

Arabic is fundamental to Islamic education because it's the language of core Islamic texts like the Quran and Hadith. Proficiently understanding Arabic allows for a deeper grasp of religious teachings, which not only supports a student's religious practice but also helps shape their identity within Islamic educational settings (Sekarsari et al., 2024).

Pesantren, as the oldest form of Islamic educational institution in Indonesia, have historical importance dating back centuries (Isbah, 2020). They have served as crucial centers for religious instruction and community life, demonstrating resilience and adaptability,

particularly during the colonial era (Tayeb, 2018). This history positions pesantren as unique institutions that connect Islamic education with community identity (Isbah, 2020).

There is a distinct link between pesantren methods and Arabic language acquisition. Traditional pesantren prioritize skills like reading and translation through the study of classical Arabic texts *(Kitab Kuning)*, which often leads to strong textual comprehension but passive language skills. In contrast, modern pesantren are more focused on developing speaking and listening abilities (Farhani et al., 2023).

A noticeable gap exists between the traditional pesantren-based methods and the curricula of contemporary Islamic schools, which often emphasize practical language use (Wardi et al., 2024). Pesantren face the challenge of updating their teaching approaches while maintaining religious authenticity. Research is needed to help bridge this divide by harmonizing traditional and modern practices.

Studying this topic is important for more than just academic purposes. It offers insights for educators and policymakers on how to effectively integrate the strengths of the pesantren tradition into formal educational frameworks. This can improve teaching methods and enhance the quality of Islamic education, helping students gain both religious literacy and the practical Arabic skills necessary for today's world.

METHOD

The study utilizes a qualitative research approach, specifically library research, which involves an extensive analysis of existing academic literature (Mann, 2015). The primary sources of data for this research are scholarly books, journal articles, and previous studies on pesantren teaching methods and Arabic language instruction in Islamic schools. This methodology is ideal for exploring complex educational traditions and curricula where quantitative methods may not be suitable. By synthesizing a wide range of documented knowledge, the study aims to develop a deep, contextual understanding of how the pesantren tradition affects Arabic language learning in contemporary Islamic educational environments.

Data is collected by systematically gathering information from a variety of credible sources, including religious texts, academic treatises on pedagogy, curriculum analyses, and case studies found in peer-reviewed journals (Mann, 2015). The research employs two main analytical techniques. Thematic analysis is used to identify recurring patterns and distinct elements within the pesantren tradition that influence how students learn Arabic (Neuendorf, 2018; Vaismoradi et al., 2013). Additionally, a comparative analysis contrasts the methods of pesantren with those of modern Islamic schools to highlight the similarities and differences in

their approaches to curriculum and language proficiency goals. Together, these qualitative methods allow the study to critically assess the benefits and challenges of integrating pesantren-based practices into formal Islamic school curricula, ultimately providing insights for educational policy and development.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Result

Findings on Teaching Approaches

The research identified several key pedagogical methods originating from the pesantren tradition that have been adapted for use in modern Islamic schools. The sorogan method, for instance, is characterized by one-on-one instruction where a student reads a text to a teacher, who then provides direct corrections and explanations. This practice, rooted in deep respect for the teacher's authority, fosters a close mentoring relationship (Alfani et al., 2025). Similarly, bandongan involves a teacher reading a text while a group of students listen and follow along in their own copies, a method that is efficient for conveying information to a large number of students simultaneously. The halaqah system, a circular study group, encourages dialogue and communal learning, though it is more prevalent in traditional settings and less frequently adapted in structured school curricula.

Table 1: Comparison of Traditional and Modern Arabic Language Teaching Methods

Feature	Traditional Pesantren Methods	Modern Islamic School Methods
Primary Goal	Mastery of religious texts and moral discipline	Communicative competence and global readiness
Pedagogy	Teacher-centered (sorogan, bandongan)	Student-centered (group work, dialogue)
Key Skill Focus	Reading, comprehension, memorization	Speaking, listening, writing
Curriculum	Classical texts (Kitab Kuning)	Competency-based curriculum with practical language use

The adaptation of these methods in modern Islamic schools often takes a more structured and formalized shape. While traditional pesantren might use these methods organically throughout the day, modern schools often integrate them into specific classroom schedules (Mas' udi, 2024). For example, the one-on-one sorogan approach is sometimes

implemented during designated consultation hours or in small-group settings to provide targeted support to students struggling with a specific concept. The bandongan method, on the other hand, is a more direct fit for a formal classroom, where it can be used for lectures and group readings of classical texts, such as the Kitab Kuning.

However, this adaptation is not without its challenges. The highly teacher-centered nature of these methods contrasts with the student-centered, communicative approach often promoted in modern education. Schools must carefully balance these different philosophies to maintain student engagement and ensure learning objectives are met. The formalization of these methods can sometimes strip them of the organic, deeply embedded communal and spiritual aspects that they possess in a traditional pesantren setting, reducing them to mere instructional techniques rather than holistic educational practices (Silfiana, 2020).

Impact on Student Proficiency

The research findings indicate that students educated with pesantren-based methods demonstrate a high level of proficiency in specific areas of Arabic. Most notably, these students show exceptional skills in reading, comprehending, and interpreting classical religious texts (Kholis & Mustofa, 2024). The rigorous focus on grammar and syntax through the study of classic works helps students to decipher the complexities of classical Arabic, which is crucial for authentic engagement with foundational Islamic texts. This foundation also strengthens their abilities in independent textual analysis and scholarly research within a traditional framework.

Table 2: Observed Student Proficiency Outcomes by Method

Proficiency Area	Traditional Pesantren Approach	Modern Islamic School Approach
Reading Comprehension	Excellent	Good
Textual Interpretation	Excellent	Fair to Good
Memorization	Excellent	Fair to Good
Conversational Fluency	Limited	Good to Excellent
Creative Writing	Limited	Good

Furthermore, these traditional methods are highly effective for improving memorization and recitation skills. The iterative process of correction in the sorogan method and the repeated exposure to text in bandongan reinforce rote memorization of the Quran, Hadith, and other key religious passages. This emphasis on memorization is not merely for the sake of retention but is also viewed as a spiritual exercise that builds discipline and deepens a student's connection to the sacred texts (Anisaturrizqi et al., 2025). The fluency gained through constant recitation also aids in developing a student's phonetic accuracy and rhythm.

Despite these significant strengths, a key limitation of these methods is their limited impact on communicative Arabic competence. Students often struggle to engage in spontaneous conversation, express complex thoughts orally, or write creatively in Arabic. The focus on passive, receptive skills (reading and listening) and an almost exclusive engagement with classical, formal Arabic leaves students unprepared for practical communication in modern contexts (Tjendani & Afandi, 2023). This gap is a major concern for modern schools that aim to prepare students for a globalized world where practical language skills are highly valued.

Institutional Integration

The integration of pesantren traditions into modern Islamic schools takes on a variety of forms, from full-fledged adoption to more selective, hybrid models. In some cases, Islamic schools are founded by traditional pesantren leaders who bring the full suite of their pedagogical methods into a formal classroom setting, creating a distinct institutional culture that prioritizes traditional learning (Akla, 2021; Sugito, 2024). These institutions often retain the traditional sorogan and bandongan classes as core components of their daily curriculum, emphasizing a mastery of classical texts over other learning objectives.

However, a more common scenario involves modern Islamic schools selectively adopting elements of the pesantren tradition to complement their existing curriculum. These schools might use a halaqah circle for discussions on specific religious topics or implement a structured one-on-one reading session once a week to improve textual comprehension. This approach allows them to benefit from the strengths of the traditional methods—such as discipline, deep reading, and a strong teacher-student bond—without sacrificing their commitment to modern educational standards and a more varied curriculum that includes science, mathematics, and communicative language skills (Yaseen et al., 2024).

The institutional differences between pesantren-based schools and purely modern Islamic schools are quite pronounced. The former often maintain a live-in, communal

environment and a deeply embedded spiritual and moral focus, which are seen as integral to the learning process (Rahmansyah, 2023). Modern Islamic schools, on the other hand, typically operate within a more formal, day-school framework, with a stronger emphasis on standardized testing, a broader curriculum, and a more structured administrative hierarchy. The blending of these two institutional philosophies represents a complex but crucial process in the evolution of Islamic education in Indonesia.

B. Discussion

Interpretation of Findings

The findings from this research clearly demonstrate that pesantren traditions significantly enhance the effectiveness of Arabic language learning, particularly in specific domains. The rigorous methods of sorogan and bandongan instill a discipline that leads to a deep mastery of grammar and a nuanced ability to interpret classical religious texts (Alfani et al., 2025). This approach ensures that students can independently engage with foundational Islamic knowledge, a critical skill for religious scholars and practitioners. The teacher's direct involvement in the learning process also strengthens the student's foundation, correcting misunderstandings in real time and ensuring a solid grasp of complex concepts.

However, a key weakness of these traditional approaches is their limited focus on communicative practice. The emphasis on passive skills like reading and listening does not adequately prepare students for a world where Arabic is a living, spoken language used in business, diplomacy, and inter-cultural dialogue. This limitation can be seen in the gap between a student's ability to read and understand a classical text and their struggle to hold a simple conversation (Tjendani & Afandi, 2023). Therefore, while these methods are highly effective for preserving and transmitting classical knowledge, they fall short of preparing students for contemporary communicative needs.

Ultimately, the findings suggest that the strengths of the traditional pesantren model are deeply tied to its core philosophy: the transmission of a sacred intellectual heritage and the development of spiritual discipline. Its weaknesses are a product of this same focus, as it does not prioritize the practical application of language in modern social contexts. The challenge, then, is to find a way to honor the profound benefits of this tradition while supplementing it with the necessary skills for today's world.

Comparison with Modern Pedagogical Approaches

The pesantren's teacher-centered model stands in stark contrast to the student-centered models prevalent in modern education. In the traditional pesantren, the teacher is the

authoritative source of knowledge, and learning is a process of receiving and absorbing that knowledge (Silfiana, 2020). This model is highly effective for the deep, focused study of a fixed body of religious texts. In contrast, modern pedagogical models, such as the communicative approach, position the student as an active participant in their own learning. These models use dialogue, group activities, and real-world scenarios to develop language skills, with the teacher acting as a facilitator rather than a sole source of information.

The potential for a hybrid method is significant and offers a promising path forward. By integrating the strengths of the traditional model (discipline, deep textual analysis, and a strong teacher-student bond) with the communicative focus of modern methods, Islamic schools can create a more holistic and effective Arabic language curriculum (Yaseen et al., 2024). This could involve using the sorogan method for textual critique and then transitioning to a modern, student-led discussion in Arabic about the text's meaning. Such an approach would honor the religious authenticity of the tradition while providing students with practical, applicable skills.

This integration requires a careful re-evaluation of curriculum and teaching methodologies. Schools would need to design programs that dedicate time to both traditional text study and interactive, communicative exercises. The goal would not be to replace one approach with the other but to create a symbiotic relationship between them. This would enable students to achieve both a deep religious literacy and the practical, communicative Arabic skills necessary to navigate a globalized world, ensuring that they are well-equipped to be both faithful and engaged members of society (Akla, 2021; Sugito, 2024).

Implications for Islamic Schools

The findings of this research have significant implications for Islamic schools seeking to improve their Arabic language programs. The first opportunity lies in deliberately and systematically incorporating key pesantren practices into their curricula. This is not about adopting the entire institutional framework of a pesantren but about identifying specific, effective pedagogical tools, such as the sorogan method for individualized attention or the halaqah for collaborative learning, and weaving them into the school's academic schedule (Mas' udi, 2024). Doing so can enrich the learning experience by providing a deeper connection to tradition and a more effective way to master classical texts.

A critical challenge, however, is to strike the right balance between classical study and the need for contemporary communication skills. Islamic schools must avoid the pitfall of prioritizing one at the expense of the other. The ideal curriculum would be a dual-track model where students receive a strong foundation in classical Arabic for religious and scholarly

purposes while simultaneously engaging in a parallel track of communicative Arabic instruction. This could involve separate classes or dedicated time slots for conversational practice, debates, and listening exercises.

Finally, the study provides a roadmap for educational policy and curriculum development. By acknowledging the unique strengths of the pesantren tradition, policymakers can create frameworks that support its integration into formal education. This would not only enhance the quality of Arabic education but also preserve a vital aspect of Indonesia's cultural and religious heritage. The insights gleaned from this research can guide schools in making informed decisions that ensure their students are not only religiously literate but also effective communicators in a complex, interconnected world.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that while the pesantren tradition offers significant benefits for Arabic language education in Indonesian Islamic schools, its influence is not without limitations. The traditional methods are highly effective in fostering deep classical text mastery and developing strong skills in reading, comprehension, and memorization, which are crucial for religious literacy. However, the research also reveals a key weakness: these methods often do not adequately develop communicative skills such as speaking and listening, leaving a gap in students' practical language proficiency.

To address this imbalance, this research proposes a two-pronged approach for Islamic schools and educational policymakers. First, Islamic schools should strategically integrate traditional pesantren methods with modern, communicative approaches to create a more balanced and effective curriculum. For example, schools could use the sorogan method to build a strong grammatical foundation but follow up with classroom debates or group discussions to practice conversational skills.

Second, there is a critical need for teacher training programs that empower educators to effectively combine these two distinct pedagogical models. Teachers should be equipped with the skills to transition from the teacher-centered, text-based instruction of the pesantren to the student-centered, communicative exercises of modern language teaching.

Finally, this study recommends further research to evaluate the long-term effectiveness of these hybrid models. Future studies could employ quantitative or mixed-methods designs to measure student outcomes in both classical and communicative Arabic, providing empirical evidence to guide curriculum development and educational policy in Indonesia.

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