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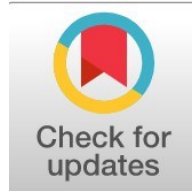
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The Dynamics of Pesantren Curriculum Reform in Integrating General and Religious Knowledge Towards a Balanced Curriculum Design

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Abstract

General Background: Rapid social and technological developments have driven transformations in Islamic education systems, particularly within pesantren institutions. **Specific Background:** Traditionally characterized by textual-conservative orientation, pesantren curricula are increasingly adapting to integrate general knowledge, religious studies, and digital literacy. **Knowledge Gap:** However, empirical evidence on how this integration produces a balanced and adaptive curriculum design remains limited. **Aims:** This study aims to analyze the dynamics of pesantren curriculum reform in integrating general and religious knowledge toward a balanced curriculum design responsive to global changes. **Results:** Using a qualitative case study approach with data collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation, and analyzed via the Miles and Huberman interactive model, the findings reveal a paradigm shift toward an integrative and contextual learning model. This shift has produced a hybrid curriculum combining religious scholarship, general education, and digital competencies, ensuring both relevance to 21st-century skill demands and continuity of Islamic intellectual traditions. **Novelty:** The study offers an empirical model of hybrid curriculum reform within pesantren, demonstrating a structured integration of diverse knowledge domains. **Implications:** These findings provide a reference framework for policymakers and practitioners in developing adaptive and balanced Islamic education systems aligned with contemporary global challenges.

Highlights:

- Paradigm transition from conservative textual learning to contextual integrative models.
- Hybrid structure combining religious scholarship, general studies, and digital competencies.
- Empirical framework proposed for adaptive Islamic education development.

Keywords: Pesantren Curriculum, Knowledge Integration, Islamic Education, Hybrid Curriculum, Global Disruption.

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Introduction

Social and technological developments over the past decade have prompted Islamic boarding schools to adapt their learning approaches. In a number of institutions, learning patterns that were previously centered on textual studies have begun to move towards a more integrative model by connecting Islamic scientific traditions and general knowledge. Classroom observations show that students not only study texts literally, but are also encouraged to link them to economic and social issues, as well as the latest technological developments. The use of case studies, digital presentation media, and the involvement of teachers from various disciplines in a single learning session mark the pesantren's academic response to global competency demands, such as analytical skills, technological literacy, and an understanding of contemporary issues.

This transformation goes hand in hand with a restructuring of the curriculum. A number of Islamic boarding schools have added general subjects such as applied mathematics, information technology, and modern economics to the learning structure. This step shows a new orientation to prepare graduates who not only master religious sciences but also have professional skills relevant to the needs of society. This change is reflected in the development of learning modules that combine normative Islamic principles with contemporary scientific approaches, so that students have more space for social mobility and competition in various sectors of modern life.

In addition to changes in structure and material, the pattern of teacher-student relationships has also been revitalized. Academic collaboration between teachers from religious and general disciplines has become more prominent, especially in the formulation of an integrated competency map. The integration of the curriculum and learning with the team teaching method has become a strategy that strengthens the substantive connection between fiqh, tafsir, and modern social theory. This situation shows that curriculum reform is not only about adding content, but also about forming a more collaborative and interdisciplinary academic culture.

At the same time, there has been a significant shift in the orientation of graduate profiles. Pesantren graduates are now expected to be able to act as agents of social change with multidisciplinary capabilities, not just as religious experts. Educational leaders emphasize the importance of digital literacy, social analysis, and adaptive skills in responding to changes in this era of disruption. Some Islamic boarding schools have even set new graduation standards that require students to be able to interpret social phenomena while applying religious values in various professional contexts.

This dynamic is reinforced by the increasing use of digital technology in learning. The use of laptops, electronic teaching materials, access to online journals, and digital assignment collection show that technology has become an integral part of the teaching process. The availability of digital knowledge sources allows students to enrich their understanding of classical literature while accessing contemporary academic references, thereby forming a religious learning paradigm that is more open, dynamic, and adaptive to global developments.

Various recent studies emphasize the importance of transforming the pesantren curriculum in response to the needs of modern society [1], [2]. Rohman (2020) found that the process of integrating general knowledge into the pesantren curriculum often faces cultural resistance, especially regarding concerns about the decline of the position of the yellow book as the epistemological foundation of the pesantren. In line with this, Rahayu and Yusuf (2021) emphasize that the success of curriculum integration depends not only on teaching materials but also on the application of contextual pedagogy and the use of digital technology [3], [4]. Abdullah (2022) shows that effective curriculum renewal is characterized by adaptive academic governance and collaborative work patterns among teachers [4], [5], [6]. Meanwhile, Hasan and Nurdiansyah (2023) highlight the role of visionary leadership in maintaining a balance between Islamic scientific traditions and modern competency demands. Overall, these findings indicate a deep need to understand how Islamic boarding schools conduct internal negotiations, institutional adaptations, and the implementation of curriculum integration at the practical level.

These changes indicate that Islamic boarding schools face the challenge of restructuring their educational direction in order to remain relevant amid rapid social change. Relying on traditional learning patterns is no longer sufficient to produce graduates who can play a role in various sectors of society. The need for a curriculum that combines depth of religious knowledge with breadth of general knowledge is increasingly urgent, especially with the advent of information technology and the demand for multidisciplinary competencies in today's global landscape. To that end, this study seeks to examine the dynamics of pesantren curriculum reform, with a focus on the integration of general and religious knowledge in order to formulate a balanced curriculum design that is relevant, applicable, and competitive.

Method

The location of this study was purposively selected at the Medina Ummah Cendikia Islamic Boarding School in Batam City, Riau Islands. This location was chosen based on the characteristics of the institution, which is currently implementing curriculum reform through the integration of religious and general knowledge, thus providing a relevant empirical context for examining the dynamics of Islamic boarding school curriculum reform. The learning environment that is adaptive to modernization, structural support from the pesantren leadership, and the active involvement of educators and students make this location representative in providing authentic field data. The existence of an integrated education program that is currently being implemented also provides an important observation space for researchers to observe the transformation of the curriculum in a factual and comprehensive manner.

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to gain an in-depth, contextual, and holistic understanding of the curriculum reform process [7], [8]. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation,

and documentation studies of curriculum instruments, learning processes, and classroom dynamics. In addition, secondary data were obtained from academic literature, reputable journal articles, policy documents, and institutional archives to strengthen the analytical framework and increase the validity of the findings [9], [10], [11]. This approach allows researchers to construct a comprehensive picture of curriculum integration practices in Islamic boarding schools, including policy rationality, implementation processes, and stakeholder responses.

Data analysis was conducted using Miles and Huberman's interactive model, which includes the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing [12], [13], [14]. Data reduction was carried out continuously from the early stages of data collection through the selection of relevant information, grouping of patterns, and identification of key themes related to curriculum reform [15], [16], [17]. The reduced data was then presented in the form of analytical narratives, matrices, and thematic categorizations to facilitate the interpretation process. The final stage of drawing conclusions was carried out through a process of repeated verification by comparing field findings, observation notes, and interview results, resulting in credible and scientifically accountable interpretations. This analysis model enabled the study to produce a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of curriculum change and its implications for the learning process in Islamic boarding schools.

Table 1. List of Research Informants

No	Informant Code	Position/Role	Data Collection Technique
1	KY	Head of Islamic Boarding School	In-depth interview
2	UST-1	Religious Educator	Interview and observation
3	UST-2	General Subject Teacher	In-depth interview
4	SN-1	Senior Student	Interview and informal discussion
5	SN-2	Middle Class Student	Interview

Research informants were selected using purposive sampling techniques, taking into account their authority, strategic position, and the relevance of each informant's contribution to the pesantren curriculum reform process [18], [19], [20]. KY informants, as pesantren leaders, were the main source of data through in-depth interviews that revealed institutional orientation, epistemological foundations, and the direction of curriculum transformation policies. Informant UST-1, as a senior educator, and UST-2, as a general subject lecturer, played a role in explaining the dynamics of the implementation of scientific integration at the level of learning practice, including pedagogical strategies, material adaptation mechanisms, and methodological obstacles encountered in interdisciplinary learning.

Meanwhile, SN-1 and SN-2, as representatives of advanced and intermediate students, provided empirical data through interviews and informal discussions regarding their perceptions, responses, and adaptation processes to the changes in learning patterns initiated by the curriculum reform. The diversity of the informants' positions and characteristics allows for strong triangulation of perspectives, thereby increasing the credibility of the findings and producing a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of pesantren curriculum reform [21].

Results and Discussion

A. Transformation of the Pesantren Curriculum Paradigm

The transformation of the pesantren curriculum paradigm shows that the ongoing reforms are not merely technical and administrative in nature, but reflect changes in the structure of consciousness and responses to the evolving social needs of Indonesian Muslims [22], [23]. The main findings of this study indicate a paradigm shift from a traditional curriculum orientation that emphasizes mastery of texts and in-depth Islamic studies [24], [25], [26], towards an interdisciplinary curriculum design that opens up space for synergy between religious studies, general studies, technology, and the development of 21st-century professional competencies [27], [28].

This paradigm shift was driven by the demands of modernity, the dynamics of globalization, and the transformation of the digital economy, which placed Islamic boarding schools in a strategic position to prepare graduates who not only had religious authority but also intellectual capacity and skills that were competitive in the wider community. Empirically, this transformation is reflected in the integration of general subjects, the application of project-based learning, the strengthening of digital infrastructure, and the development of academic partnerships with various higher education institutions. Thus, the reform of the pesantren curriculum can be understood as a visionary response that affirms the position of pesantren as Islamic educational institutions that are capable of maintaining their intellectual traditions while being adaptive to the modern national educational landscape [29], [30].

This view is confirmed by the leader of the Medina Ummah Cendikia (KY) Islamic Boarding School, who stated:

“If Islamic boarding schools only focus on studying religious texts and memorizing the Qur'an without opening up space for general disciplines and technology, then students will lose their competitiveness. Today's society demands graduates who are able to play a role in various sectors of life, not just in the field of religion.” (KY)

This statement shows an institutional awareness that an exclusive pesantren curriculum that is closed to scientific developments has the potential to reduce the relevance and competitiveness of graduates. This awareness encourages pesantren to no longer position themselves as purely conservative institutions, but rather as educational institutions that are adaptive to social changes and the needs of the times.

The views of the pesantren leaders are reinforced by the statement of Ustadzah Seli (UST), one of the educators at the Medina Ummah Cendikia Islamic Boarding School, who said:

“The new learning methods encourage students to be more active and reflective, and to begin to connect religious studies with current issues such as the digital economy, popular culture, and contemporary social problems.” (UST)

The interpretation of these interview findings shows that pesantren curriculum reform is a logical consequence of the need to increase the relevance of pesantren education in the context of broader social change [31]. Changes in learning methods have not only impacted the curriculum structure, but also the learning patterns of santri, who have become more active, critical, and contextual. Thus, the transformation of the pesantren curriculum has begun to be internalized in daily learning practices and has become an important foundation for strengthening the capacity of pesantren as modern, adaptive, and competitive Islamic educational institutions.

B. Integration of General Knowledge and Religion as a Response to Global Disruption

The integration of general knowledge and religion in the pesantren curriculum reflects a strategic response to external pressures triggered by globalization, digital economic development, and accelerated technological transformation, which increasingly influence the national education landscape [32], [33], [34], [35], [36]. The findings of this study indicate that the integration of general knowledge into the pesantren curriculum is not merely understood as an academic innovation, but as an institutional strategy to ensure that santri remain relevant and competitive amid the dynamics of global competition.

In this era of disruption, society demands that Islamic boarding school graduates not only have a mastery of religious knowledge, but also analytical skills, digital literacy, and professional skills that are in line with the needs of the modern workplace. These demands have prompted Islamic boarding schools to make substantial adjustments to their curricula. Empirically, these changes are reflected in the addition of general subjects, the opening of vocational-based majors, the utilization of digital learning platforms, and the strengthening of cooperation with universities and professional institutions in order to improve curriculum capacity. These developments also reflect a shift in public perception, whereby Islamic boarding schools are now seen as educational institutions capable of producing graduates who are ready to take part in broader social, economic, and professional spheres.

Thus, curriculum integration can be understood as a strategic agenda for Islamic boarding schools to assert their position as dynamic, adaptive, and responsive religious educational institutions in the face of global challenges, without losing their fundamental identity as centers of Islamic scholarship [37], [38].



Figure 1. Conceptual Visual of Reforming the Orientation of the Islamic Boarding School Curriculum.

Figure 1 represents the dynamics of the integration of general knowledge and religious knowledge in Islamic boarding schools as a response to global disruption characterized by globalization, digital economic development, and accelerated technological transformation [39], [40], [41]. In the pre-integration phase, the pesantren curriculum was strongly oriented towards mastery of Islamic sciences through traditional learning methods such as *bandongan* and *sorogan*, with printed books as the main medium. This orientation produced graduates with religious-normative competencies that were mainly directed towards traditional *da'wah* roles.

As external demands and community expectations regarding the relevance of pesantren graduates amid global competition increased, pesantren underwent curriculum transformation through the integration of general knowledge. This transformation is reflected in the enrichment of learning methods based on analytical discussions and case studies, the use of digital media, and the expansion of graduate competency orientation towards religious, analytical, and professional aspects. This visual emphasizes that curriculum integration is not merely an academic innovation, but an institutional strategy to ensure that *santri* have social, economic, and professional competitiveness, while maintaining their Islamic scholarly identity.



Figure 2. Integration of Classical Islamic Texts and Digital Technology in Santri Learning

Figure 2 shows visual documentation of curriculum integration at the Medina Ummah Cendikia Islamic Boarding School, which shows *santri* combining classical Islamic texts with the use of digital devices, such as laptops, to explore general knowledge in a contextual manner. This documentation reflects the implementation of the integration of general and religious knowledge at the operational level as an institutional strategy in response to global disruption.

The involvement of *santri* in independent learning that combines print and digital literacy sources shows the convergence of knowledge in daily learning practices. This phenomenon provides empirical evidence that the Medina Ummah Cendikia Islamic Boarding School is adaptively striving to produce graduates with multidimensional competencies, namely mastery of religious knowledge, analytical skills, and digital literacy relevant to the needs of the professional world, without eliminating Islamic scholarship as the fundamental identity of the boarding school [37], [38].

C. The Emergence of Contextual Learning-Based Hybrid Curriculum Design

The emergence of contextual learning-based hybrid curriculum design represents a shift in the orientation of pesantren education from a textual-conservative learning pattern to a more adaptive and responsive educational model [37], [38]. The findings of this study indicate a process of curriculum reconstruction that no longer focuses solely on mastery of classical

texts, but also emphasizes the ability of students to understand, interpret, and implement religious values in everyday life.

This change is driven by increasing demands from society, the world of work, and education stakeholders who want Islamic boarding school graduates to have 21st-century skills, such as critical thinking, collaboration, problem solving, and social sensitivity. In this context, Islamic boarding schools not only function as spaces for the transmission of religious knowledge, but also as arenas for the formation of contextual competencies relevant to contemporary social dynamics.

Empirical evidence was obtained through classroom observation, in-depth interviews, and learning documentation that showed the application of various innovative pedagogical strategies, such as case study-based learning, social project assignments, problem-based learning, and the integration of field experience with scriptural studies [42]. Teachers began to facilitate a dialogic learning process that encouraged students to relate religious arguments, theoretical frameworks, and contemporary social contexts. In addition, curriculum reform was also evident in the application of authentic assessment that evaluated students' ability to apply religious values in real-life situations.

Thus, the hybrid curriculum design based on contextual learning can be understood as an adaptive strategy of Islamic boarding schools in maintaining the relevance and sustainability of Islamic education, without abandoning the mandate of scientific tradition that has been a hallmark of Islamic boarding schools as classical Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia [43], [44].

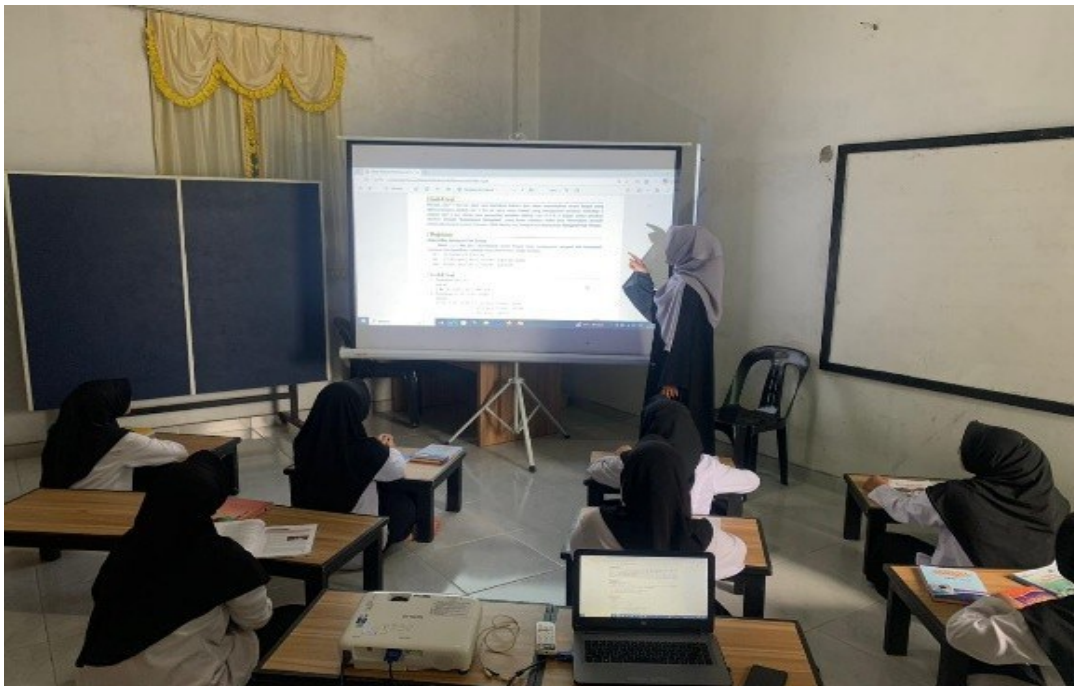


Figure 3. Implementation of Contextual Learning Based on a Hybrid Curriculum.

The visual documentation in Figure 3 reflects the actual implementation of a hybrid curriculum design based on contextual learning at the classroom level in response to the demands of global disruption [45], [46]. This phenomenon was recorded at the Medina Ummah Cendikia Islamic Boarding School, where the use of projectors as teaching media shows a pedagogical shift from a textual-conservative learning pattern to a more visual, dynamic, and interactive learning model.

The adoption of this learning technology facilitates a dialogical and reflective learning process, enabling educators to present contemporary issues, visual data, and case studies relevant to the lives of students. Through this approach, students are trained to connect scientific principles with social realities, while developing critical and analytical thinking skills. Thus, this learning setting affirms the pesantren's commitment to maintaining the relevance of Islamic education and strengthening students' capacity to face the challenges of the 21st century.

Conclusion

The paradigm shift in the curriculum at Pondok Pesantren Medina Ummah Cendikia reflects a strategic move in response to changes in the structure of public consciousness and the demands of 21st-century competencies. The shift from a textual-conservative orientation to an interdisciplinary design is realized through the implementation of a hybrid curriculum that integrates religious studies, general studies, and digital literacy as a form of adaptation to global disruption. The implementation of contextual learning and the use of technology encourages students to be more active and reflective, able to critically relate religious principles to contemporary issues. This configuration affirms the position of Islamic boarding schools as educational institutions that not only maintain the authority of Islamic scientific traditions but also produce graduates who are competitive, adaptive, and relevant to the dynamics of modern national education. However, this study has limitations in that it focuses on only one pesantren, so the findings cannot be generalized broadly, and the empirical data depends on observations and interviews that are potentially influenced by the subjectivity of the informants. Therefore, further research is recommended to expand comparisons between Islamic boarding schools with different characteristics, [ISSN 2714-7444 \(online\), <https://acopen.umsida.ac.id>](https://doi.org/10.21070/acopen.11.2026.13515), published by [Universitas Muhammadiyah Sidoarjo](https://www.muhammadiyah.org)

use a mixed-method approach to strengthen the validity of the findings, and further explore the long-term impact of curriculum integration on the competencies of alumni in various sectors.

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