

THE TRANSFORMATION OF PESANTREN EDUCATION FROM THE NEW ORDER TO THE REFORM ERA IN TERMS OF CURRICULUM, METHODS, AND ISLAMIC EDUCATIONAL IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT

The transformation of pesantren education cannot be separated from the pressures of educational policies during the New Order era, which emphasized standardization, depoliticization, and integration into the national education system, thereby potentially reducing institutional autonomy and the distinctiveness of Islamic scholarly traditions. In the Reformasi era, socio-political changes and globalization have further required pesantren to adapt more dynamically. This study aims to analyze how pesantren respond to these changes and their implications for curriculum, teaching methods, and Islamic educational identity. This research employs a qualitative historical approach through document analysis, policy review, and secondary literature. The findings reveal that pesantren function as adaptive and reflective educational actors through strategies of selective adaptation. This transformation has led to the emergence of a hybrid educational model that integrates Islamic intellectual traditions with the demands of modern education. These changes are not linear, but rather represent a process of negotiation between tradition, state policy, and global developments. The implications of this study highlight the importance of granting greater autonomy to pesantren, as well as the relevance of the hybrid model in developing Islamic education that balances tradition and modernity.

KEYWORDS

Pesantren Transformation, Islamic Education, Hybrid Model

ABSTRAK

Transformasi pendidikan pesantren tidak dapat dilepaskan dari tekanan kebijakan pendidikan pada masa Orde Baru yang menekankan penyeragaman, depolitisasi, dan integrasi ke dalam sistem pendidikan nasional, sehingga berpotensi mengurangi otonomi dan kekhasan tradisi keilmuan Islam. Pada era Reformasi, perubahan sosial, politik, dan globalisasi semakin menuntut pesantren untuk beradaptasi secara dinamis. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis respons pesantren terhadap perubahan tersebut serta implikasinya terhadap kurikulum, metode pembelajaran, dan identitas pendidikan Islam. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan historis kualitatif melalui analisis dokumen, kebijakan, dan literatur sekunder. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pesantren merupakan aktor pendidikan yang adaptif dan reflektif melalui strategi adaptasi selektif. Transformasi ini melahirkan model pendidikan hibrid yang mengintegrasikan tradisi keilmuan Islam dengan tuntutan pendidikan modern. Perubahan tersebut tidak bersifat linear, tetapi merupakan hasil negosiasi antara tradisi, kebijakan negara, dan perkembangan global. Implikasi penelitian ini menegaskan pentingnya pemberian otonomi yang lebih luas bagi pesantren serta relevansi model pendidikan hibrid dalam pengembangan pendidikan Islam yang seimbang antara tradisi dan modernitas.

KATA KUNCI:

Transformasi Pesantren, Pendidikan Islam, Model Hibrid

INTRODUCTION

Pesantren are among the oldest Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia, playing a strategic role in shaping Islamic scholarly traditions, transmitting religious values, and fostering the moral and social development of Muslim communities. Pesantren serve not only as centers of religious education but also as agents of social change deeply rooted in local culture and the network of Nusantara ulama. Throughout its history, the pesantren has demonstrated a high degree of adaptability in responding to political and social dynamics, as well as national education policies (Dhofier, 2011; Steenbrink, 1986).

During the New Order era (1966–1998), the national education system operated within a framework of state development that emphasized political stability, modernization, and ideological integration. In this context, pesantren occupied an ambivalent position: on the one hand, they were viewed as traditional institutions with the potential to support moral development; on the other hand, they were closely monitored to prevent them from evolving into an alternative political force. New Order education policies promoted curriculum standardization, the depoliticization of educational institutions, and the integration of pesantren into the formal education system through madrasahs and schools with Islamic characteristics (Azra et al., 2007; Azra, 2015; Hefner, 2011).

These structural pressures have driven pesantren to undergo transformation, particularly

in terms of curriculum. Pesantren that previously focused on the study of classical Islamic texts have begun integrating general subjects such as mathematics, science, and foreign languages to gain state recognition and enhance the social mobility of their students. This curricular transformation is not merely administrative but also reflects a shift in the educational orientation of pesantren from the mere transmission of classical knowledge toward strengthening competencies relevant to the needs of modern society (Bruinessen, 1994; Zarkasyi, 2015).

In addition to the curriculum, pesantren teaching methods have also undergone significant changes. Traditional methods such as sorogan and bandongan have begun to be supplemented with classical approaches, formal evaluation systems, and the use of educational technology. These changes reflect pesantren's efforts to adopt modern pedagogical practices without entirely abandoning the deeply rooted Islamic scholarly traditions. Thus, pesantren are developing a hybrid educational model that blends tradition and modernity (Raihani, 2012).

The 1998 Reform became a pivotal turning point in the history of Islamic education in Indonesia. The collapse of the New Order regime opened up space for democratization, educational decentralization, and broader institutional freedom for Islamic boarding schools. In the Reform era, pesantren no longer merely adapted defensively to state policies but began to emerge as active actors in educational innovation, the development of contextual

curricula, and the expansion of their socio-economic roles (Azra et al., 2007).

In this context, the educational identity of Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) undergoes a process of renegotiation. *Pesantren* not only preserve their traditional Islamic identity but also build an image as inclusive, moderate educational institutions responsive to global challenges such as democracy, pluralism, and the knowledge-based economy. The identity of *pesantren* has become increasingly fluid, dynamic, and layered, in tandem with their engagement in national and global discourses on Islam and education (Hefner, 2011).

The transformation of *pesantren* during the Reform era is also marked by the strengthening of institutional networks, whether with the state, civil society organizations, or international institutions. This has driven the diversification of *pesantren* models, ranging from Salafi and Khalafi *pesantren* to modern and entrepreneurship-based *pesantren*. This variation demonstrates that *pesantren* are not homogeneous entities but rather institutions that continue to evolve in accordance with their socio-historical context (Fauzi, 2018).

Although various studies have examined the modernization and transformation of Islamic boarding schools, there are inconsistencies in the findings and methodological limitations that point to research gaps that have not yet been adequately addressed. A number of studies confirm that post-Reform *pesantren* have been strengthened

through curriculum integration and learning innovations, while other studies indicate a potential reduction in the authenticity of classical scholarly traditions due to the penetration of the formal education system. On the other hand, most studies tend to adopt a partial approach—focusing solely on aspects such as curriculum, methods, or identity—without integrating them into a single, comprehensive, and cross-period analytical framework. Another prominent weakness is the dominance of a synchronic approach that situates *pesantren* changes within a specific time phase, thereby neglecting the diachronic dimension essential for understanding continuity and disruption across political regimes. Consequently, the transformation of *pesantren* is often reduced to a technical response to educational policies or globalization, rather than a complex historical process laden with identity negotiations. Therefore, research is needed that is not only comprehensive in scope but also methodologically rigorous, integrating cross-regime historical-comparative analysis to uncover the dynamics of *pesantren* transformation in a more holistic and critical manner.

Several previous studies have shown that the transformation of *pesantren* education is a process of continuous adaptation to changes in education policy, socio-political dynamics, and global demands. Hidayah and Sutrisno (2021) explain that post-Reformasi *pesantren* have developed an integrative curriculum that

combines classical Islamic studies with 21st-century competencies, aligning with the focus on curriculum change in this article, although this has not yet been analyzed historically across regimes. Arifin (2022) identifies a shift in pesantren teaching methods from traditional patterns toward participatory and student-centered approaches as an implication of national educational reform; while sharing methodological similarities, this approach lacks emphasis on the identity dimension of Islamic education. Basri and Rahman (2023) assert that pesantren actively negotiate their identity as moderate Islamic institutions through formal curricula and institutional culture, which is relevant to identity studies but is not situated within a New Order–Reform era comparative framework. Hasanah et al. (2024) demonstrate that the transformation of pesantren is influenced by the interaction between national policies and global discourses on Islamic education; however, their approach is comparative and fails to delve into the internal dynamics of the pesantren. Meanwhile, Yulianto and Rahmat (2020), within a national context, highlight that the modernization of pesantren from the end of the New Order era through the Reform era has driven changes in educational management, evaluation systems, and graduate orientation, but has not yet integrated analyses of curriculum, methods, and identity simultaneously.

The novelty of this study lies in its cross-regime historical-comparative approach, which

simultaneously analyzes the transformation of pesantren education from the New Order era to the Reform era through three main dimensions: curriculum, teaching methods, and the construction of Islamic educational identity. Unlike recent studies, which are generally partial—focusing on a single aspect of change (e.g., curriculum or methods) or limited to the post-Reform era—this article situates pesantren transformation within a continuous historical trajectory of educational policy and politics. *State-of-the-art* studies on pesantren tend to view their modernization as a technical response to policy demands or educational globalization, without deeply linking it to shifts in political regimes and their implications for the redefinition of Islamic educational identity. By integrating analyses of structural, pedagogical, and Islamic identity changes within a cross-temporal framework, this study offers a new understanding that the transformation of pesantren is not merely a pragmatic adaptation process, but a historical strategy that reshapes the position of pesantren as a resilient, autonomous, and relevant Islamic educational institution within Indonesia’s national educational landscape.

This study aims, first, to analyze how government policies during the New Order era influenced the formation and development of the pesantren educational model; second, to examine the dynamics of curriculum changes as well as teaching methods in pesantren from the Reform era to the contemporary period; and

third, to explain how this series of transformations shapes and reconstructs the identity of Islamic education in pesantren within the current context.

In practical terms, this study offers strategic insights for pesantren administrators and educational stakeholders in formulating adaptive institutional development strategies without compromising their Islamic values. The findings can serve as a reference for designing an integrative curriculum that balances the preservation of classical scholarly traditions with the demands of modern competencies, while also fostering innovative, contextual, and participatory learning methods. Furthermore, for education policymakers, the results of this study offer a reflective foundation for formulating policies that are more inclusive and responsive to the characteristics of pesantren as community-based educational institutions. Additionally, this research provides practical implications for strengthening the identity of Islamic education in pesantren to remain relevant in the face of global challenges, without getting trapped in the dichotomy between tradition and modernity.

THEORY DESCRIPTION

The transformation of pesantren education in the context of social and political change can be understood as part of the dynamics of change within Islamic educational institutions as they interact with state policies and societal developments. As traditional educational institutions, pesantren possess distinctive

characteristics, such as an emphasis on mastering classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*), the use of the *sorogan* and *bandongan* methods, and an orientation toward deepening religious knowledge (*tafaqqub fi al-din*). In their development, these characteristics are not static but open to change in accordance with the surrounding socio-historical context.

In educational studies, these changes can be analyzed through the perspective of educational modernization, which views educational institutions as undergoing a process of adaptation to the demands of rationalization, efficiency, and the needs of modern society. Educational modernization is often marked by the emergence of structured curriculum systems, standardized learning, and the integration of religious and general knowledge. In this context, pesantren can be positioned as institutions that interact with the currents of modernization without completely abandoning their traditional character (Lukens-Bull, 2001; Tan, 2014).

Furthermore, changes in teaching practices can be explained through constructivist theory, which emphasizes that the learning process is an active endeavor in which learners construct knowledge through interaction with their environment and learning experiences. This approach positions learners as the subjects of their own learning and encourages the use of more dialogic, participatory, and contextual methods. Within this framework, the variety of teaching methods in Islamic boarding schools can be understood as part of the development of pedagogical approaches that are more centered on

the learning process (Burhanuddin, 2012; Pohl, 2006).

On the other hand, the aspect of Islamic educational identity in pesantren can be analyzed through the perspective of the social construction of identity. Identity is understood as something that is not fixed but is shaped through the interaction between traditional values, the demands of modernity, and relationships with the social and political environment. Thus, the identity of Islamic education in pesantren can be seen as the result of a dialectical process between efforts to preserve Islamic scholarly traditions and the need to respond to the changing times (Hefner, 2009; Nilan, 2009).

Based on the above discussion, the theoretical framework of this study utilizes the perspectives of educational modernization, constructivism, and the social construction of identity as the basis for analysis. These three perspectives are used to conceptually understand changes in the curriculum, teaching methods, and the identity of Islamic education in pesantren, not to draw empirical conclusions, but rather as a foundation for interpreting the phenomena under study.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a historical-social research design to analyze the transformation of pesantren education from the New Order era to the Reform era. This approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to situate changes in the curriculum, teaching methods, and the Islamic educational

identity of pesantren within the context of power relations, state policies, and the surrounding social dynamics over time. Within this framework, the historical approach refers to the thought of Sartono Kartodirdjo (1993), which emphasizes historical analysis based on a social science approach, thereby enabling an interpretation of changes in pesantren education not only chronologically but also contextually and analytically.

The data sources for this study consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data includes official documents such as national education regulations, government policies related to Islamic education, and pesantren institutional documents relevant to the new order and reform periods. Secondary data, on the other hand, includes scholarly books, articles in reputable journals, research reports, and other academic works discussing pesantren education and its transformation. The selection of data sources was conducted purposively, taking into account historical relevance, the authors' authority, and their contribution to the issues under study (Kartodirdjo, 1993). Data collection was conducted using *document analysis*, a systematic method for examining and interpreting documents as research data sources, as described by Glenn A. Bowen (Bowen, 2009). This approach allows researchers to examine documents not only as texts but also as social products that carry specific meanings and significance.

Data analysis was conducted through several interrelated stages: historical

contextualization, thematic coding, and cross-period comparative analysis. In the initial stage, the data is situated within the socio-political context of each regime to understand the structural backdrop of changes in pesantren education. Subsequently, the data is analyzed thematically to identify patterns of curricular change, shifts in pedagogical methods, and the formation of Islamic educational identity. The final stage employs comparative analysis to examine *continuity and change* between the New Order era and the Reform era. The analysis process is conducted iteratively and reflectively to build a scientific argument that is not merely descriptive but also interpretive and critical of the transformation of the pesantren as an Islamic educational institution negotiating with the state and modernity (Miles et al., 2014; Silverman, 2016). To ensure data validity, this study employs source triangulation, observational persistence, and audit trails. These principles align with the concept of *trustworthiness* in qualitative research proposed by Yvonna S. Lincoln and Egon G. Guba (1985), which encompasses credibility, dependability, and confirmability as primary indicators of data validity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Influence of New Order Government Policies on the Pesantren Education Model

This study found that New Order education policies shaped a hybrid pesantren education model, which selectively integrates the state's formal educational structure with Islamic

scholarly traditions. This integration includes the adoption of a standardized curriculum, a classical system, and modern administration, without eliminating the teaching of classical Islamic texts, traditional methods, and the authority of the kiai. These findings indicate that the transformation of pesantren occurred through selective adaptation, not the replacement of traditions.

During the New Order era, education was positioned as a strategic instrument of the state to support political stability, economic development, and ideological integration. The government developed a centralized and uniform national education system, with an emphasis on state control over educational institutions, including religious education. In this context, pesantren—as Islamic educational institutions that developed autonomously within society—faced structural pressure to align with state educational policies (Noer, 2015).

One of the New Order's key policies was the standardization of the education system through a national curriculum. This standardization aimed to create ideological uniformity and ensure graduates' competencies, while minimizing the potential for political resistance from non-state educational institutions. Pesantren that previously operated an education system based on classical Islamic scholarly traditions began to be encouraged to adopt a formal curriculum in order to gain state recognition and access to educational assistance (Sirozi, 2004).

Within this framework, the New Order government also implemented a policy of depoliticizing religious institutions. Islamic education was directed to avoid becoming a medium for political mobilization, instead focusing on moral and spiritual development. Pesantren were positioned as politically “safe” institutions as long as they did not engage in practical political activities. This situation encouraged pesantren to assert their identity as educational and da’wah institutions, while simultaneously limiting their political expression in the public sphere (Effendy, 2003).

The policy of integrating pesantren into the national education system became a crucial instrument in this transformation process. Through the recognition of Islamic-characterized madrasahs and schools, the state opened avenues for pesantren to manage formal education according to national standards. This integration was not merely administrative but also carried structural implications for the learning system, institutional governance, and the educational orientation of pesantren (Maksum, 1999).

As a consequence of this integration, many pesantren began adopting a classroom-based system in their learning processes. Individual teaching methods such as *sorogan* and *bandongan* were gradually supplemented with a classroom system, educational grade levels, and a structured learning schedule. These changes reflect the pesantren’s efforts to adapt to the

logic of modern education without completely abandoning traditional methods (Ziemek, 1986).

In addition to the traditional system, Islamic boarding schools have also begun to implement a formal education system that follows the national education structure, such as elementary, middle, and high school levels. The implementation of these levels allows pesantren graduates to obtain state-recognized diplomas, thereby opening broader access to higher education and formal employment. Thus, this change contributes to increased social mobility for santri within the social structure of the New Order (Sirozi, 2004).

Another significant transformation was the implementation of modern educational administration within pesantren. Institutional management, which had previously been personal and based on the authority of the kiai, began to be supplemented with written administrative systems, record-keeping, formal curricula, and a more bureaucratic organizational structure. This practice reflects the internalization of state bureaucratic rationality into pesantren institutions (Noer, 2015).

The process of pesantren adaptation to New Order policies did not occur entirely or without resistance. Pesantren selectively adopted elements of modern education deemed compatible with Islamic values and the pesantren’s scholarly traditions. The authority of the kiai remained preserved as the center of decision-making, particularly regarding scholarly

matters and the moral guidance of students (Effendy, 2003).

The teaching of classical Islamic texts remains the primary foundation of pesantren education, even though it coexists with general subjects. Classical texts in the fields of fiqh, tafsir, hadith, and tasawuf continue to be taught as the basis for shaping the students' scholarly knowledge and religious ethos. This indicates that the modernization of pesantren during the New Order era was additive, not substitutive, to tradition (Maksum, 1999).

New Order policies shaped a hybrid model of pesantren education. On one hand, pesantren internalized the national educational structure through the curriculum, the classical system, and modern administration. On the other hand, pesantren maintained their traditional identity through the authority of the kiai, the tradition of teaching religious texts, and the distinctive pesantren culture (Ziemek, 1986).

This hybrid model allowed pesantren to survive under repressive political conditions while simultaneously gaining state legitimacy. Pesantren were not only able to avoid open conflict with the state but also utilized the available space to strengthen their institutional capacity. This strategy demonstrates the institutional ingenuity of pesantren in facing the structural pressures of the New Order (Noer, 2015).

From a broader perspective, New Order policies helped shape the long-term direction of pesantren education. The structural

transformations that occurred during this period laid the foundation for educational innovations in pesantren during the Reform era. In other words, the changes triggered by New Order policies did not end with that era but continued and evolved within the more democratic political context following 1998 (Sirozi, 2004).

The integration of pesantren into the national education system also carries the risk of homogenization and a reduction in the autonomy of Islamic education. The standardization of curricula and evaluation standards has the potential to erode the distinctiveness of pesantren if not managed critically. Therefore, the selective stance of pesantren in adopting state policies becomes a key factor in maintaining the sustainability of their identity (Effendy, 2003).

The risk of homogenization arising from the integration of pesantren into the national education system is not merely conceptual but is also evident in daily educational practices. When the national curriculum is made the primary reference, the creative space for pesantren to design learning structures based on students' needs and local contexts becomes increasingly limited. Consequently, the orientation of education tends to shift toward meeting administrative standards rather than strengthening the character and distinctive academic traditions of the pesantren.

In the long term, this standardization may lead to a shift in educational priorities. Pesantren risk placing greater emphasis on

formal academic achievements, such as graduation and certification, rather than fostering a scholarly ethos, spiritual depth, and moral discipline—which have long been the hallmark of pesantren education. This shift in orientation can gradually alter how students perceive the learning process as a transformative activity, rather than merely an instrument of social mobility.

The reduction in the autonomy of Islamic education is also reflected in the diminished flexibility of pesantren to determine the content, pace, and methods of learning. Reliance on state regulations often forces pesantren to align their academic calendars, subject structures, and evaluation systems with external standards. This situation risks diminishing the pesantren's ability to maintain an educational rhythm previously tailored to the internal needs of the pesantren community.

Homogenization does not always occur uniformly across all pesantren. Differences in institutional capacity and the leadership vision of the kiai play a significant role in determining the extent to which state policies are adopted. Pesantren with strong leadership and a clear educational vision tend to be better able to filter external policies and integrate them selectively without sacrificing their institutional identity.

This selective approach is reflected in the practice of distinguishing between administrative aspects and the substance of education. Pesantren are generally willing to adapt to formal aspects such as administration,

reporting, and diploma recognition, yet they maintain autonomy in determining core academic content and the patterns of student mentoring. This strategy allows pesantren to secure state legitimacy while preserving the continuity of Islamic scholarly traditions.

Selectivity is also evident in how pesantren interpret evaluation standards. Rather than treating formal exams as the sole measure of educational success, many pesantren continue to rely on assessments based on conduct, discipline, and mastery of religious knowledge. Thus, formal evaluations are treated as a supplement, not a replacement for the pesantren's internal assessment system.

This negotiation process between state policies and the interests of pesantren creates a dynamic dialectical space. Pesantren are not entirely in a passive position but actively formulate adaptation strategies aligned with their educational vision. This negotiation reflects the capacity of pesantren as social institutions possessing agency in confronting structural pressures.

In the context of identity, this selective stance contributes to the formation of a reflective pesantren identity. Islamic educational identity is not understood as something static, but as the result of a process of reinterpreting tradition and modernity. Pesantren build their identity through conscious choices in accepting, rejecting, or modifying external policies.

The experience of facing this risk of homogenization actually strengthens pesantren's

awareness of the importance of educational autonomy. This awareness drives some pesantren to formulate internal curricula, strengthen teacher training, and develop alternative learning systems rooted in Islamic values and the needs of the surrounding community. The risk of homogenization does not always lead to the weakening of pesantren. When managed critically and reflectively, the pressure to integrate actually becomes a catalyst for pesantren to reaffirm their identity as autonomous, distinctive Islamic educational institutions capable of adapting without losing their historical and cultural uniqueness.

Changes in Pesantren Curricula and Teaching Methods Since the Reform Era

This study found that the Reformation era spurred significant changes in the curriculum and teaching methods of Islamic boarding schools, moving toward a more integrative and adaptive model. Policies on educational decentralization and regional autonomy created opportunities for pesantren to develop curricula and teaching approaches tailored to local needs and institutional visions, free from the strict standardization pressures of the New Order era (Tilaar, 2012).

These changes are reflected in a shift in the orientation of pesantren curricula from a dominance of the transmission of classical Islamic knowledge toward an integrative curriculum that combines religious and general studies. This integration represents an effort to

bridge the strengthening of Islamic scholarship with the demands of modern academic competencies (Muhaimin, 2015). Classical texts are still taught as a foundation, but are enriched with science, mathematics, foreign languages, and social sciences, thereby encouraging a more contextual and applied approach (Anwar, 2016).

Additionally, the pesantren curriculum is evolving toward strengthening life skills, including entrepreneurship and vocational skills, in response to socio-economic needs (Zaini, 2019). Pesantren are also beginning to integrate 21st-century competencies, such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and digital literacy, through both curricular and extracurricular activities (Suyanto & Hisyam, 2020).

As the curriculum has changed, teaching methods have also undergone a transformation. Traditional methods such as *sorogan* and *wetonan* have been retained, but supplemented with a classical system, participatory learning, and a student-centered approach (Fauzan, 2017; Mulyasa, 2017). The use of educational technology is also growing, although it remains positioned as a tool without replacing the pedagogical relationship between the kiai, ustaz, and students (Burhanuddin, 2012).

This change has been accompanied by a more holistic evaluation system, combining formal academic assessment with aspects of etiquette, discipline, and mastery of religious knowledge. Greater autonomy also allows

pesantren to develop local curricula in line with the kiai's vision and community needs (Zaini, 2019).

However, this transformation has not been uniform. Differences in human resource capacity and institutional readiness have posed major challenges in the implementation of an integrative curriculum and modern pedagogy (Tilaar, 2012). Consequently, changes in the curriculum and teaching methods of pesantren since the Reform era have exhibited diverse patterns of adaptation, thereby underscoring that pesantren are dynamic and context-sensitive institutions. Overall, these findings indicate that the post-Reform era transformation of pesantren has led to an educational model that is more inclusive, adaptive, and oriented toward a balance between Islamic scholarly traditions and the demands of modernity.

The Transformation of Pesantren Education and the Formation of Contemporary Islamic Educational Identity

The transformation of pesantren education from the New Order era to the Reform era has not only impacted structural and pedagogical aspects but has also fundamentally shaped the identity of contemporary Islamic education in pesantren. This identity emerged from a long historical process, in which Islamic boarding schools continuously negotiated Islamic scholarly traditions with shifts in state policy and broader social dynamics. Thus, the identity of Islamic boarding school education is not static but rather the result of an interaction

between internal values and external demands (Azra, 2015).

During the New Order era, the identity of the pesantren tended to be constructed within a framework of subordination to the state, particularly through policies of educational standardization and the depoliticization of religious institutions. Pesantrens were required to present themselves as politically safe educational institutions focused on moral development. This context shaped the identity of the pesantren as a religious institution that was cautious in its socio-political expressions, yet strong in upholding its scholarly authority and internal traditions (Barton, 2014).

With the advent of the Reform era, changes in the political and educational landscape opened up space for a more diverse articulation of identity. Pesantren no longer merely adapt to the state but have begun actively defining their role in a democratic society. The educational identity of Islamic pesantren has shifted toward affirming the values of moderation, openness, and social participation, in line with increasing public demands regarding the role of pesantren in national life (Burhani, 2017).

Curriculum transformation has become one of the primary vehicles for shaping this identity. The integration of general studies, civic education, and national awareness into the pesantren curriculum reflects efforts to build an Islamic identity that aligns with national values and pluralism. The curriculum is not merely

understood as an academic instrument but also as a space for the production of meaning regarding how Islam is practiced and taught within the context of contemporary Indonesia (Latif, 2018).

On the other hand, the renewed emphasis on the study of classical texts underscores that the transformation of pesantren identity does not mean abandoning traditional roots. The *kitab kuning* (classical Islamic texts) remains a symbol of scholarly authority and the Islamic legitimacy of the pesantren. By preserving this tradition, the pesantren affirms epistemological continuity while distinguishing itself from fully modern or secular models of Islamic education (Ricklefs, 2012).

Teaching methods that are increasingly dialogic and participatory also help shape a more inclusive Islamic educational identity for pesantren. Students are no longer positioned as passive recipients of knowledge but as active participants in the learning process. This shift reflects Islamic values that emphasize consultation, critical inquiry, and individual responsibility in the learning process.

Global social dynamics also play a significant role in shaping the identity of contemporary pesantren. The currents of globalization, the development of information technology, and transnational Islamic discourse are prompting pesantren to re-examine the position and orientation of their educational mission. In this context, pesantren strive to

build an Islamic identity that is open to the global world, yet remains rooted in local and national values (Fealy & White, 2008).

This process of identity negotiation does not always proceed without tension. Pesantren face a dilemma between upholding the traditional authority of the kiai and responding to demands for educational professionalism. This tension is managed through a flexible division of roles, in which scholarly authority remains with the kiai, while managerial and pedagogical aspects are developed collectively (Burhani, 2017).

The educational identity of Islamic pesantren is also shaped through their engagement with contemporary social issues, such as tolerance, social justice, and community empowerment. Pesantren function not only as educational institutions but also as spaces for fostering a moderate socio-religious ethos oriented toward the public good. This role reinforces the image of pesantren as key actors in strengthening moderate Islam in Indonesia (Latif, 2018).

The identity of the pesantren is increasingly linked to the narrative of a peaceful and inclusive Indonesian Islam. The state and civil society view the pesantren as a strategic partner in maintaining social cohesion and addressing the challenges of extremism. This perception also influences how the pesantren presents itself and formulates its educational orientation (Azra, 2015).

However, the identity of a pesantren is not formed in a homogeneous manner. Each pesantren develops its identity in accordance with its own history, scholarly networks, and social context. This diversity demonstrates that the Islamic educational identity of a pesantren is layered and contextual, rather than singular and uniform (Ricklefs, 2012).

This diversity of identity is precisely the strength of pesantren in facing change. The flexibility of identity allows pesantren to adapt to various demands without losing internal legitimacy. In this regard, educational transformation functions as a mechanism for both adaptation and institutional differentiation (Abdullah, 2017).

The ongoing transformation also strengthens pesantren's reflective awareness of their identity. Pesantren increasingly recognize that Islamic educational identity is not merely inherited but also constructed through conscious pedagogical and institutional choices. This awareness drives pesantren to adopt a more strategic approach in designing their educational direction (Barton, 2014).

The reflective awareness growing within the pesantren environment has fostered an evaluative attitude toward the educational practices that have long been in place. Pesantren are beginning to reassess whether the learning models, institutional structures, and curriculum orientations currently in use remain relevant to the needs of students and the community. This reflective process means that pesantren no

longer rely solely on old habits but consciously weigh the direction of change to be taken.

In the context of decision-making, this awareness has given rise to a more deliberative leadership style. Kiai and pesantren administrators are increasingly involving teachers, senior students, and even alumni in discussions about institutional development. This mechanism expands the scope of internal participation while enriching the perspectives used to formulate pesantren educational policies.

Reflection on identity also impacts how pesantren view tradition. Tradition is no longer understood as a legacy that must be rigidly preserved, but rather as a source of values that can be reinterpreted according to context. With this approach, pesantren are able to maintain the continuity of values without getting trapped in a romanticized view of the past that hinders innovation.

This reflective awareness also influences how pesantren interpret social change. Pesantren have become more attuned to contemporary issues such as shifts in family structures, economic dynamics, and technological advancements. This sensitivity enables pesantren to adapt their educational programs to remain contextually relevant and responsive to the realities faced by their students.

In the institutional sphere, self-reflection encourages pesantren to clarify their educational vision and mission. The pesantren's vision is no longer merely implicit in the figure of the kiai

but is explicitly formulated as a shared guide. This clarity of vision serves as the foundation for determining educational development priorities and resource allocation.

The reflective process also strengthens awareness of the importance of consistency between values and practices. Islamic boarding schools strive to ensure that the Islamic values taught are reflected in the institutional culture and social relationships within the boarding school environment. This consistency is a crucial component in building the boarding school's credibility as an Islamic educational institution.

This awareness drives pesantren to build a communicative identity. Pesantren do not merely define themselves for internal purposes but also consider how that identity is perceived by the broader public. This influences how pesantren interact with the public, establish partnerships, and convey their educational narrative.

Reflection on identity also creates space for differentiation among pesantren. Each pesantren feels the need to assert its own distinctiveness, whether in terms of academic focus, pedagogical approach, or social orientation. This differentiation helps pesantren find a unique position within the increasingly diverse landscape of Islamic education.

In the long term, reflective awareness strengthens the pesantren's adaptive capacity. By understanding that identity is constructed through conscious choices, pesantren become

better prepared to face unexpected changes. The ability to engage in continuous self-reflection becomes a vital asset for the institution's sustainability. Strengthening reflective awareness not only shapes how pesantren perceive themselves but also determines the direction of their future. Pesantren have evolved as Islamic educational institutions that do not merely inherit traditions but actively construct their identities through continuously updated processes of learning, management, and social interaction (Azra, 2006).

The following table presents a comprehensive summary of the transformation of pesantren education from the New Order era to the Reform era, along with its implications for the formation of contemporary Islamic educational identity. This table highlights three main aspects—curriculum, teaching methods, and Islamic educational identity—by showcasing the distinct characteristics of each era. The synthesis illustrates contemporary dynamics that balance classical scholarly traditions with modern pedagogical innovations, reflecting the pesantren as an adaptive, reflective, and contextual institution.

The transformation outlined in the table also indicates a significant shift in the orientation of pesantren toward greater institutional openness and societal engagement. During the Reform era, pesantren not only preserved their traditional roles in transmitting Islamic knowledge but also expanded their functions as agents of social change, educational

innovation, and community empowerment. This evolution demonstrates the increasing integration of global knowledge systems, digital technologies, and interdisciplinary approaches within pesantren education. Consequently,

pesantren have strengthened their position as dynamic educational institutions that negotiate continuity and change while maintaining their core Islamic values and responding effectively to contemporary educational demands.

Table 1. Dynamics of Pesantren Education from the New Order Era to the Reformation

No	Aspects	New Order Era	Reform Era	Contemporary Dynamics
1	Curriculum	Standardization of the curriculum by the state; Islamic boarding schools adopt a hybrid model, in which the curriculum follows state policy while incorporating Islamic traditions, while continuing to use classical Islamic texts.	Contextual integration of religious and general knowledge; strengthening of life skills and 21st-century skills.	The pesantren curriculum integrates general and religious studies in a balanced manner, while still preserving the <i>kitab kuning</i> as a distinctive feature and the foundation of tradition.
2	Methods	Implementation of a classical system and modern administration; depoliticization of teaching methods; selective adaptation without replacing traditions.	A combination of traditional methods (<i>sorogan, bandongan</i>) with participatory and innovative learning.	The learning method is hybrid: traditional and modern go hand in hand, with strategies of negotiation and selectivity regarding state policies.
3	Islamic Educational Identity	The pesantren's identity is formed as a result of negotiation between Islamic tradition and state policy; the authority of the kiai is maintained.	The pesantren's identity is shifting toward a moderate, inclusive, and socially oriented Islam.	The pesantren's identity is adaptive and reflective; it is consciously built through continuous evaluation and innovation, as well as the outcome of negotiations between tradition and modernity.

The table shows that Islamic boarding schools have not only undergone changes in structural and pedagogical aspects but have also significantly developed an adaptive, reflective, and sustainable Islamic educational identity. The transformations that have taken place demonstrate that pesantren are capable of responding to state policy pressures as well as demands for social change in a selective and contextual manner. Curricula and teaching methods have evolved into a hybrid form,

integrating traditional values—such as the teaching of classical Islamic texts and the authority of religious scholars—with modern innovations like participatory learning, the integration of general knowledge, and the strengthening of 21st-century skills. On the other hand, the identity of the pesantren continues to be shaped through a process of negotiation, evaluation, and reinterpretation of tradition and modernity. This enables the pesantren not merely to survive but also to

affirm its role as a dynamic, contextual, and relevant Islamic educational institution in facing the ever-evolving challenges of the times.

CONCLUSION

The transformation of pesantren education from the New Order era to the Reformation era underscores the key finding that pesantren are not merely objects of state policy, but rather educational actors possessing adaptive, reflective, and strategic capacities in responding to change. The most significant finding of this study is that the transformation of pesantren occurs through selective adaptation, giving rise to a hybrid model—namely, the integration of Islamic scholarly traditions (the authority of the kiai, classical Islamic texts, and pesantren culture) with the demands of modern education (the national curriculum, participatory methods, and the strengthening of contemporary competencies). Thus, changes in curriculum and teaching methods are not a linear path toward modernization but a dynamic process of negotiation between tradition, state policy, and global developments. This process ultimately shapes the dynamic, layered, and contextual identity of Islamic pesantren education, while strengthening its position as a relevant educational institution within Indonesia's national education system. The implications of these findings suggest that national education policy must grant pesantren broader autonomy to continue developing their epistemological and pedagogical distinctiveness without being

trapped in homogenization. Furthermore, the hybrid educational model developed by pesantren can serve as an alternative reference in designing a balanced Islamic education system that harmonizes tradition and modernity. Further research is recommended to develop comparative studies among pesantren with diverse backgrounds and to strengthen an empirical approach based on the experiences of students, educators, and alumni to gain a deeper understanding of the process of internalizing this transformation in daily educational practice.

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