



Traditions and Transformations of Qur'anic Education in Two Pesantren

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Abstract

This study examines the dynamics of tradition and transformation in Qur'anic education in two types of pesantren in East Java: the traditional (salaf) Langitan pesantren and the modern Al-Muhibbin pesantren. The study is driven by the urgency to critically assess how traditional religious institutions respond to socio-cultural changes that affect the transmission, authority, and meaning of Qur'anic education. The research aims to identify the forms of preservation and shifts in Qur'anic educational practices, while analyzing the ideological framing of modernization within the pesantren context. A qualitative approach is employed, utilizing participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. The findings reveal that the salaf pesantren consistently maintain classical educational structures based on sanad, ritual, and scholarly authority, whereas the modern pesantren develop adaptive innovations that are not always accommodating of traditional values. The novelty of this study lies in its critical reading of the transformation process, which is often simplistically equated with progress, as well as in its conceptual proposal of a synthesis between value preservation and pedagogical innovation. This research contributes theoretically to Islamic education studies by emphasizing the necessity of epistemic continuity amid educational change.

Keywords: Al-Qur'an, Education, Pesantren, Tradition, Transformation

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji dinamika tradisi dan transformasi dalam pendidikan al-Qur'an pada dua tipe pesantren di Jawa Timur: pesantren salaf Langitan dan pesantren modern Al-Muhibbin. Studi ini berangkat dari pentingnya menilai secara kritis respons institusi keagamaan tradisional terhadap perubahan sosial dan kultural yang memengaruhi pola transmisi, otoritas, dan makna pendidikan al-Qur'an. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah mengidentifikasi bentuk-bentuk pelestarian dan pergeseran praktik pendidikan al-Qur'an, serta mengkritisi ideologisasi modernisasi dalam ruang pendidikan pesantren. Pendekatan yang digunakan adalah kualitatif dengan metode observasi partisipatif, wawancara mendalam, dan studi dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pesantren salaf mempertahankan struktur pendidikan berbasis sanad, ritual, dan otoritas klasik secara konsisten, sedangkan pesantren modern mengembangkan model inovatif yang bersifat adaptif, namun tidak selalu akomodatif terhadap nilai-nilai tradisi. Kebaruan studi ini terletak pada pembacaan kritis terhadap proses transformasi pendidikan al-Qur'an yang kerap disimplifikasi sebagai kemajuan, serta pada usulan sintesis konseptual antara pelestarian nilai tradisional dan inovasi pedagogis. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi teoretis terhadap studi pendidikan Islam dengan menyoroti pentingnya kontinuitas epistemik dalam proses perubahan.

Kata kunci: Al-Qur'an, Pendidikan, Pesantren, Tradisi, Transformasi



A. INTRODUCTION

This study explores both the epistemological and sociological problems inherent in the practice of Qur'anic education at two types of pesantren in East Java: the traditional *salaf* pesantren of Langitan and the modern pesantren of Al-Muhibbin. These two institutions represent contrasting paradigms of response to the dynamics of contemporary times, particularly in confronting the increasingly complex pressures of social, cultural, and pedagogical change (Hasyim, 2008a) & (N. Rahmah, personal communication, Desember 2024).

Amid the currents of value globalization, the pressures of educational modernization, and the demands for pedagogical efficiency, *salaf* pesantren continue to preserve their traditional epistemic structure grounded in *sanad* transmission, teacher authority, and continuous ritual practice. Meanwhile, modern pesantren seek to transform Qur'anic education by adopting innovative approaches such as multisensory methods, thematic-integrative curricula, and the teaching of the Qur'an within both local and global linguistic contexts (Dhofier, 1982 ; Ahimsa-Putra, 2012)

In the context of national law, the direction of pesantren educational transformation is firmly grounded within Indonesia's national education system. Law No. 18 of 2019 on Pesantren affirms that pesantren function as institutions of education, religious propagation (*da'wah*), and community empowerment that play a vital role in preserving the Islamic scholarly tradition while simultaneously fostering educational innovation. Article 3 of the law stipulates that the implementation of pesantren education must be based on *tafaqquh fi al-din* (profound understanding of religious knowledge) while also accommodating the development of general and modern sciences (Noor, 2018).

Furthermore, Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System (Sisdiknas), Article 3, states that the purpose of national education is to develop the potential of learners so that they become individuals who are faithful, pious, noble in character, competent, creative, and independent. This principle provides a legal foundation for Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) to continuously transform while remaining rooted in spiritual and moral values. Therefore, the modernization of *pesantren* should not abandon the essence of Qur'anic education, but rather expand its

scope of implementation in accordance with constitutional mandates and contemporary needs. (INDONESIA, 2006).

Theologically, the foundation of the transformation of Qur'anic education is based on the principle of *al-muhafazhah 'ala al-qadim al-shalih wa al-akhdu bi al-jadid al-ashlah* — preserving valuable traditions while embracing innovations that bring greater benefit. (Dhofier, 1982 ; Ahimsa-Putra, 2012).

However, the transformation carried out by modern *pesantren* does not necessarily guarantee the continuity of meaning or the epistemological sustainability of Qur'anic education itself. There are indications that some of these reforms tend to be merely cosmetic or administrative in nature, rather than addressing the deeper levels of values and the transmission of knowledge (Mastuhu, 1994a). From a theological perspective, the Qur'anic and Prophetic texts provide a normative foundation that rejects any rigid dichotomy between tradition and innovation. QS. *Ali Imran* [3]:104 underscores the necessity of a community that safeguards religious moral authority, yet this command does not imply a merely mechanical preservation; rather, it intersects with the imperative of intellectual elaboration through the commands to read, inquire, and reflect upon revelation (QS. *Al-'Alaq* [96]:1; QS. *Muhammad* [47]:24). These verses affirm that the Qur'anic tradition is a living tradition—one that demands the continual reproduction of meaning within every new context. Moreover, QS. *Ar-Ra'd* [13]:11 explicitly positions internal transformation as a prerequisite for social improvement, such that total resistance to change stands in direct contradiction to the very principles of transformation articulated by the Qur'an itself. On the other hand, total resistance to change within *salaf* *pesantren* also carries the risk of stagnation if it is not accompanied by a re-actualization of the meaning of tradition within a contemporary context. Thus, the issue of Qur'anic education does not merely lie in the *salaf-modern* dichotomy, but more profoundly in the discursive struggle between the preservation of traditional authority and the demands of pedagogical innovation (Mastuhu, 1994a; Qomar, 2002a).

Pondok Pesantren Langitan and Pondok Pesantren Al-Muhibbin Tuban were selected as research sites because they represent two dominant typologies of Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) in Indonesia: the *salaf (traditional)* and modern *pesantren*. This selection is significant due to its geographical and historical position and it serves to

effectively illustrate the entire scope of responses to contemporary challenges in Qur'anic education. Pondok Pesantren Langitan, founded in 1852 by KH. Muhammad Nur in Mandungan Village, Widang District, Tuban Regency, is one of the oldest and most influential *pesantren* in Indonesia. As a *salaf* educational institution, Langitan continues to maintain its traditional system of instruction based on *sanad* (chain of transmission) and classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*), taught through classical methods such as *sorogan*, *bandongan*, *wetonan*, and *ḥalaqah*. These methods not only reflect the epistemological continuity of the classical Islamic scholarly tradition but also serve as a medium for manifesting the ritual values and spirituality deeply rooted in the *pesantren* tradition (Hasyim, 2008b).

The uniqueness of Pondok Pesantren Langitan lies in its ability to maintain symbolic and scholarly authority through a contextual-cultural approach to understanding religious texts, without compromising classical epistemic principles. The Qur'anic recitation tradition in this environment function not as mere ritual activity, but as an essential epistemic mechanism for the authoritative transmission of Islamic knowledge, based on the legitimacy of *sanad* and the teacher-student (*talāqī*) relationship. In this context, Langitan exemplifies a form of productive resistance to the hegemony of educational modernization, which often standardizes learning systems based on administrative efficiency and quantitative outcomes (ato', personal communication, April 7, 2024).

In contrast, Pondok Pesantren Al-Muhibbin Tuban established in 2006 exemplifies a modern *pesantren* paradigm defined by pedagogical innovation and managerial transformation. Its educational model integrates religious and general formal curricula alongside multilingual instruction in Arabic, English, Japanese, and Mandarin. Reform efforts extend beyond curriculum to institutional management. Al-Muhibbin governance model transitioned from relies on singular *kyai authority* to a *decentralized* collective management structure, thereby improving institutional efficiency and responsiveness to modern demands (lely, personal communication, July 7, 2024).

Nevertheless, the innovations carried out by Al-Muhibbin also present certain challenges, particularly concerning the epistemic continuity of Qur'anic education. The modernization of methods and systems does not always correspond directly with the

strengthening of substance or the depth of meaning in Qur'anic learning. Here lies the problematic issue: is the transformation undertaken by modern pesantrens truly a form of epistemological evolution, or is it merely a structural compromise to the demands of an era characterized by technocratic pressures?

By comparing these two institutions ethnographically and critically, this study not only offers a description of the dynamics of Qur'anic education but also provides a deep reflection on how tradition and modernity are negotiated, transformed, or even contested within contemporary Islamic educational spaces.

Several relevant studies have made important contributions to understanding the evolution of pesantren education in responding to the challenges of modernity. Masrufah (2025), for instance, in her study of Pesantren Maudzul Amin, reveals how the institution successfully integrates the salaf approach with a modern curriculum without undermining its spiritual foundations and classical scholarly traditions. This study demonstrates that pedagogical synthesis is possible when a pesantren is able to manage innovation contextually (Masrufah, 2025). Meanwhile, Shalahuddin (2024), in the journal *Warunayama*, highlights the progress of pesantrens in responding to globalization through the digitalization of learning systems as well as the simultaneous integration of science and religious education.

In another context, Akmansyah et al. (2025) compare the spiritual pedagogical approaches of two tahfizh pesantrens in Lampung, which adopt memorization methods based on emotional and affective engagement to strengthen students' attachment to the Qur'an—an effort that emphasizes psychopedagogical success in the transmission of the sacred text (Akmansyah et al., 2025).

Nevertheless, the common thread among these three studies still reveals a primary focus on structural and administrative adjustments, or on the technical success of learning innovations. Few studies have examined in depth how modernization within Qur'anic educational spaces carries specific ideological implications such as shifts in scholarly authority, the desacralization of the sanad method, and epistemic fragmentation in the understanding and internalization of the Qur'anic text. This aspect has been largely overlooked, as many studies tend to position pesantrens as

administratively adaptive entities, without critically addressing the epistemo-cultural consequences of such adaptations.

Thus, this study offers a distinct and more critical contribution: the research not only captures the dynamics of methodological changes in Qur'anic education but also explores the accompanying ideological dimensions. Through a qualitative approach involving field observations and in-depth interviews in two types of pesantrens—salaf (Langitan) and modern (Al-Muhibbin)—this study seeks to reveal that changes in pesantren are more than methodological or structural, they involve deep tensions, resistances, and ideological negotiation within the process of Qur'anic transmission. Ultimately the study demonstrates that transformation in contested space where traditional conservation meets powerful modernizing forces.

Building on the problematic framework outlined above, this study is designed to address three interrelated objectives. First, to identify and analyze patterns of tradition and innovation in Qur'anic education across two types of pesantrens with distinct characteristics and orientations: the salaf Langitan pesantren, which embodies a classical-traditional approach, and the modern Al-Muhibbin pesantren, which is adaptive to new pedagogical approaches. Second, to critically assess the substantive impact of institutional transformations, focusing specifically on epistemic continuity defined as the preservation of established knowledge structures and the authentic transmission of authority alongside the necessity of maintaining the inherent spiritual values crucial to Qur'anic education. Third, to offer a conceptual framework for synthesizing the preservation of traditional values with the need for pedagogical renewal, ensuring that the transformations implemented go beyond cosmetic or administrative changes and genuinely strengthen the position of Qur'anic education within the landscape of contemporary Islamic education.

With this approach, it is expected that the study will provide a theoretical contribution to the field of Islamic education, particularly focusing on the relationship between tradition and modernity within the context of pesantrens. Beyond that, the findings are expected to serve as a practical reference for Islamic educational institutions in formulating contextual pedagogical strategies that are rooted in authentic traditional values with necessary contemporary innovations. Furthermore, these findings can

strengthen policy recommendations for decision-makers in the realm of Islamic education, ensuring that modernization efforts are not merely instrumental but have substantive impacts on the scholarly character, spirituality, and educational culture of Islam in Indonesia.

B. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach with a comparative case study strategy. This approach was chosen to enable an in-depth exploration of Qur'anic educational practices in two distinct types of pesantrens in East Java: Pondok Pesantren Langitan, representing the salaf model, and Pondok Pesantren Al-Muhibbin Tuban, representing the modern model. The case study design allows the researcher to capture the complexity of social contexts, local values, and the dynamics of interaction between tradition and transformation in Qur'anic educational practices—phenomena that cannot be adequately addressed through a quantitative approach.

This study combines a descriptive-critical strategy with a phenomenological approach within an interpretative framework. The phenomenological element is employed to explore the subjective experiences and meanings constructed by educational actors—particularly the kiai, ustadz, and students—in responding to changes in Qur'anic educational practices. Through this approach, the research not only documents factual data but also captures the affective and reflective dimensions of pesantren actors as they negotiate between the preservation of traditional values and the need for pedagogical renewal.

Data were collected using three main techniques: participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Observations were conducted over a period of more than three months in both pesantrens to capture interactions, atmospheres, and learning practices directly. In-depth interviews were carried out from 12 key informants, including kiai, caretakers, Qur'an teachers, and senior students in each pesantren. Document analysis focused on internal curricula, learning records, and educational policies in place at both institutions.

The primary instrument in this study was the researcher, assisted by observation guidelines and semi-structured interview protocols developed based on the research

focus. Data analysis employed the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, encompassing three stages: data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusions. The analysis process was conducted simultaneously with data collection to allow for a continuously updated and reflective contextual understanding.

Data validity was ensured through triangulation of sources, methods, and time. The researcher also maintained a reflective stance and a neutral position at each stage of the study to avoid bias and strengthen interpretative objectivity.

With this methodology, the study is expected to provide a comprehensive and nuanced portrayal of the contestation between the preservation of traditional Qur'anic educational values and the transformative pressures driven by contemporary dynamics, as well as the accompanying epistemological and ideological implications.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Pesantrens are the oldest Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia, functioning as centers for knowledge transmission, moral development, and the preservation of Islamic scholarly traditions. According to (Dhofier, 2011) *pesantrens* are not merely educational institutions but also socio-religious systems that cultivate an epistemic habitus through the relationships among the *kiai*, *santri*, classical texts, and the tradition of *tafaqquh fi'd-din*. In this context, *tafaqquh fi'd-din* is understood as the process of deepening religious knowledge integrally—encompassing intellectual, spiritual, and moral dimensions.

The scholarly tradition of *pesantrens* is built through the *sanad* system of knowledge, a chain of scholarly authority that ensures epistemic continuity between teacher and student. Within this system, knowledge is understood not only as rational understanding but also as *barakah* (blessing) transmitted through proper conduct (*adab*) and exemplary behavior (Van Bruinessen, 1994). Therefore, transformations in *pesantren* education cannot be separated from the dynamics of scholarly authority and the ways in which tradition is reinterpreted in response to modernity.

The transformation of Qur'anic education can be understood as a process of change in epistemic structures, pedagogical methods, and the social orientation of

education, all grounded in revealed values. Mastuhu (Mastuhu, 1994b) describes pesantren transformation as an effort to preserve the essence of Islamic education while adapting to the challenges of the times. From Qomar's perspective (Qomar, 2002b) transformation does not merely imply technical modernization but rather an educational paradigm renewal aimed at maintaining meaning continuity—the continuity of spiritual meanings and values in every change.

This study reveals the dynamics of tradition and transformation in Qur'anic education across two pesantren models representing the spectrum of orthodoxy and modernity: the *Salaf Langitan Pesantren* and the Modern Al-Muhibbin *Pesantren*. The findings are systematically organized based on field data obtained through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis, which were subsequently reduced and thematically categorized. The analysis was conducted using a qualitative approach supported by phenomenological methods to capture the meanings constructed by educational actors concerning the continuity of tradition and their responses to change.

The presentation of the findings is provided in the form of a comparative table to illuminate the contrasting epistemic structures and pedagogical approaches of the two pesantrens. Langitan Pesantren uphold consistency through its *sanad*-based transmission model, reliance on classical *kitab* texts, and authoritative kiai-santri relationships. Conversely, Al-Muhibbin Pesantren implements modern innovations in Qur'anic learning methodologies including multisensory methods, foreign language integration, and digitalization of teaching and learning processes. Critically, the findings reveal these modernization often do not guarantee the continuity of spiritual values; in potentially leading to fragmentation of meaning and disruption of traditional scholarly authority.

The following discussion highlights how these differences represent two main strategies in responding to modernity: adaptive conservation and structural transformation. The research findings are also interpreted within the theoretical frameworks of Islamic education, traditional epistemology, and the discourse on authority and change in religious institutions. Through this approach, the study not only

identifies technical or administrative differences between the pesantrens but also implies the ideological and cultural layers accompanying the process of change.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that transformations in Qur'anic education are not always linear or progressive. In certain contexts, modernization can lead to the decontextualization of texts and the weakening of authoritative relationships between teachers and students. On the contrary, the steadfastness of tradition in Salaf pesantrens can serve as an epistemic stronghold but also risks stagnation if not accompanied by the capacity to articulate responses to modern challenges. Accordingly, this discussion leads to a central thesis: the tension between tradition and innovation in Qur'anic education requires a synthetic, rather than dichotomous, approach, enabling pesantrens to preserve the integrity of their scholarly heritage while responding to change in a thoughtful and visionary manner.

The key findings are presented in the following table:

Table 1. Comparison of Qur'anic Education Practices in Langitan and Al-Muhibbin Pesantrens.

Aspect	Langitan Pesantren (Salaf)	Al-Muhibbin Pesantren (Modern)
Teaching Method	<i>Sorogan, bandongan, wetonan, halaqah</i>	Formal classes, multisensory methods, digital learning
Epistemic Basis	Scholarly chain (sanad), kyai authority, classical tafsir	Integrative curriculum, contextual linguistic interpretation
Language Approach	Classical Arabic and <i>kitab gundul</i>	Arabic, English, Japanese, Mandarin
Teacher-Student Relationship	Hierarchical and charismatic	Cooperative and rational
Technology Integration	Minimal	Intensive: digital applications, multimedia, e-learning
Graduate Orientation	Traditional Islamic scholarship	Modern-religious professionalism

Organizational Structure	Centered on kyai authority	Collective under foundation management
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Source: Field Observation and Interview Results, 2024–2025

These findings reinforce that Langitan Pesantren consistently maintains a knowledge transmission model based on the sanad system, where scholarly authority is not only embedded in texts but also cultivated through the spiritual and pedagogical relationship between teacher and student. The Qur’anic educational process is not merely cognitive or technical; rather, it constitutes a formational experience encompassing ethical, spiritual, and cultural dimensions.

Teaching methods such as *sorogan*, *bandongan*, and *halaqah* applied at Langitan are not merely traditional techniques but form part of an epistemic habitus developed over centuries. They involve repetition that functions as the internalization of meaning, rather than mere memorization. Texts are read repeatedly under the direct guidance of the kyai, who not only corrects recitation according to tajwid rules but also embeds life values and proper conduct through contextual explanations.

In this context, the Qur’an is positioned as a living text, a text that comes alive within the teacher-student relationship and the daily life of the pesantren. The spiritual dimension of the Qur’an is not reduced to a mere competency tool; rather, it is nurtured as the center for moral formation and a lens through which to understand the world. This also illustrates how epistemic continuity is maintained through adherence to the scholarly chain (*sanad*), which is recognized as legitimate both spiritually and methodologically (Ahimsa-Putra, 2012b).

Langitan’s approach demonstrates a form of epistemological resistance to the dominant modernizing discourse in Islamic education, which often prioritize instrumental rationality. For this pesantren, Qur’anic education is fundamentally a long-term project of cultivating meaning rooted in tradition, rather than a mere accumulation of linguistic skills. Thus, its apparent institutional conservatism is, in fact, an alternative strength against pedagogical modernism that frequently neglects spiritual depth.

On the contrary, Al-Muhibbin Pesantren embodies a modern typology consciously employing an adaptive and integrative pedagogical approach to meet contemporary

demands. Its Qur'anic education incorporates innovative methods, such as meaning visualization, multimedia *tahsin* training, and cross-cultural linguistic competencies (Arabic, English, Japanese, and Mandarin). Thereby enhancing student readiness for globalization and expanding the institution's relevance of pesantren education in the modern public sphere (dimas, personal communication, mei 2024).

Nevertheless, this pedagogical flexibility leaves a significant epistemological problem. Although students' achievements in technical aspects such as fluency in tilawah, phonetic articulation, or literal translation skills are notable, field findings indicate a disconnection between meaning and spirituality in the learning relationship. Several informants, including teachers and senior students, reported that the transmission of religious values tends to become superficial, as it focuses excessively on academic performance, cognitive targets, and curriculum-based outcome achievement (lely, personal communication, July 7, 2024). This results in the learning practice losing the transformational aspect that has long been the primary strength of traditional pesantren.

Furthermore, the teacher-student relationship in this context does not fully operate within the framework of *ta'dzim* (respect) and *talqin ma'na* (meaning instillation), but rather shifts toward an administrative and functional dynamic. The presence of a managerial system collectively administered through a foundation, while bureaucratically efficient, also contributes to the erosion of the *kyai* figure as a symbol of spiritual and cultural authority. Within this framework, the Qur'an is treated more as a pedagogical commodity to be mastered through technique, rather than as the center of life transmitted through *adab* and inner experience.

Discussion

1. Pedagogical Modernization

Field findings show that the pedagogical transformation implemented at Al-Muhibbin Pesantren through Qur'anic meaning visualization, technology-based *tahsin* training, and the integration of a multilingual curriculum (Arabic, English, Japanese, and Mandarin) has produced positive effects on the cognitive and performative aspects of learning. Students demonstrate significant improvements in technical areas, such as pronunciation, literal interpretation, and linguistic skills, aligning with global competency demands. However, these technical achievements are not automatically

accompanied by a deepening of meaning or the continuity of spiritual values, which form the core of Qur'anic education in the classical pesantren tradition.

The modernization implemented tends to operate within a framework of administrative efficiency and pedagogical rationality, emphasizing measurable outcomes, curriculum segmentation, and target-based management. In this context, the teacher-student relationship undergoes a paradigmatic shift. The *ta'dzimiyyah* relationship, which once positioned the *kyai* as both a spiritual and epistemic center, is now replaced by a more impersonal instructional model. Teachers are positioned as technical facilitators, while students become learning objects assessed based on academic achievement rather than the successful internalization of values. This shift marks what can be described as an "erosion of transcendental relations" within contemporary Islamic educational institutions (Al-Attas, 1991).

Direct observation of educational and cultural shifts, shows that modernization often appears as a fragmented reality a tension between technocratic efficiency and the existensial need for spiritual and substantive depth. Curricular optimization constantly proves inadequate unless it is accompanied by epistemic continuity that resonates with the consciousness of educational participants. Consequently, the central issue problem is not modernization itself, the lack of coherent epistemic framework that capable of establishing an organic, reflective connection between tradition and innovation, the technical goals and existential meaning.

2. Langitan Pesantren as an Antithesis

If modernization at Al-Muhibbin Pesantren tends toward technical rationalization and performance-based pedagogical relationships, Langitan Pesantren presents a strikingly antithetical position: the conservation of classical Islamic epistemic values, the preservation of traditional scholarly habitus, and the reproduction of spirituality within the teacher-student relationship. In this regard, Langitan not only maintains a learning system based on classical texts and methods such as sorogan, wetonan, and halaqah, but also sustains a structure of scholarly authority grounded in the sanad and spiritual obedience.

At Langitan, the Qur'an is not merely instructional material but a source of values lived throughout all aspects of pesantren life. The relationship between the *kyai* and students transcends the instructional dimension and enters what Tillich (1957) refers to as the ultimate concern an existential relationship with something regarded as sacred and absolutely meaningful. The values of *ta'dzim*, *barakah*, and *khidmah* are not merely interpersonal ethics, but epistemological dimensions that mediate the understanding and internalization of the Qur'an's meaning (James, 2003).

Unlike Al-Muhibbin, Langitan's pedagogy emphasizes the importance of knowledge as the propagation of authority, not simply the result technical skill or reasoning competence. The pesantren thereby sustain Al-Jabiri's (2000) distinction between '*aql bayani*, a form of textual reasoning , in opposition to '*aql burhani* (rationalistic reasoning) characteristic of modern education system. Langitan preserves '*aql bayani*, which is bound to the *sanad*, authority, and a collective system of meaning that spans generations. (Hayati, 2017).

Consequently, although Langitan may lag technically in terms of methodological innovation, in terms of continuity of meaning and Islamic epistemic identity, the pesantren successfully maintains value continuity. Qur'anic education at Langitan is not merely understood as a teaching-learning activity, but as an **epistemic ritual** that connects students with tradition, authority, and classical Islamic spirituality (Awang & Nuriz, 2020).

Langitan strengths lies in its ability to maintain Islamic epistemic identity and continuity of meaning even while demonstrating a a teacnical deficit in methodological innovation. Qur'anic education there is understood as an epistemic ritual that serves to connect students directly to the with traditional authority, and classical spirituality of Islam (Awang & Nuriz, 2020).

In daily practice, activities such as recitation, attentive listening, and memorization are not merely pedagogical processes, but inward encounters with a scholarly heritage transmitted across generations. Through personal relationships rooted in *adab*, students do not simply receive knowledge; they undergo a profound transformation involving emotional and spiritual dimensions. Rather than pursuing efficiency or innovation, Langitan emphasizes the importance of continuity of meaning,

where Qur'anic learning becomes a way to attach oneself to the *sanad* chain and to represent the presence of past authorities within the consciousness of contemporary students.

Langitan prioritize the continuity of meaning over efficiency or innovation, utilizing Qur'anic learning as a means to solidify the *sanad* chain and re-present of past-scholarly authorities in the consciousness of contemporary students. Tradition is thus viewed not as a historical burden, but as a regenerative and sustaining living space. The resultant intimacy between students, text, and teacher cultivates an affective and existensial depth that defies modern quantitative metrics. This approach preserves the regenerative power of tradition as a source of meaning and life orientation avoiding entrapment in instrumental logic.

These findings reinforce Hefner's (2020) argument that traditional pesantren possess adaptive strengths that do not necessarily lie in curricular modernization, but in symbolic flexibility and the resilience of religious culture, enabling them to respond to contemporary challenges in their own distinctive way. In this context, Langitan emerges as an epistemic bastion, resisting the strong currents of formalization in Islamic education that place excessive emphasis on cognitive competencies (HEFNER, 2022).

Furthermore, this echoes Nasr's (1993) critique of contemporary Islamic education, which, in its pursuit of relevance and efficiency, often neglects the transcendent dimension of the learning process. For Nasr, true education is not the mere transmission of data, but an initiation into metaphysical reality. Within this framework, Langitan represents a form of education that does not merely teach the Qur'an, but also shapes subjects who are spiritually and ethically connected to revelation (Anas, 2012).

Thus, while Al-Muhibbin seeks to address the challenges of modernity through instructional reform, Langitan demonstrates that resistance to formalization can serve as a strategy for epistemic preservation. These two approaches reflect two extreme poles within the spectrum of contemporary Islamic education in Indonesia: between innovation and conservation, between performance and meaning, and between global orientation and local continuity.

The findings of this study indicate that the dynamics of Qur'anic education at Langitan and Al-Muhibbin Pesantrens do not occur in isolation, but are directly related to

broader academic and social discourses on the transformation of pesantren education in Indonesia. Both exist within a spectrum of pesantren responses to modernity, which many scholars have mapped as a dialectical process between the preservation of tradition and the demands of reform (Hidayat et al. 2021; Masrufah 2025).

Within this framework, the results of this study reaffirm the general trends identified in previous research, namely that pesantrens face structural pressures to adapt to contemporary social, technological, and cultural developments. Curriculum modernization, diversification of teaching methods, and institutional governance reformulation have become common strategies employed by pesantrens to maintain their institutional relevance (Shalahuddin 2024; Akmansyah et al. 2025). This is clearly reflected in the innovations implemented by Al-Muhibbin Pesantren through the integration of technology-based learning, a multilingual approach, and the use of interactive methods in Qur'anic instruction.

However, beneath this alignment, the study also reveals a layer of reality rarely addressed in previous research: the epistemological and spiritual dimension, which experiences disruption in the modernization process. Al-Muhibbin Pesantren exhibits a shift from an authoritative-charismatic relational model toward an administrative and instructional relationship. This shift directly affects the transformation of the Qur'an's meaning in educational practice: from a revelation imbued with spiritual values and *adab* to a technical object approached cognitively and performatively. This phenomenon demonstrates that modernization is not merely a technical matter but also carries ideological implications for the structure of meaning and the patterns of Islamic knowledge transmission (Azra 2020; Zarkasyi 2019).

Langitan Pesantren emerges as a powerful antithesis to the efficient-driven, formalities tendencies prevalent in modern education. By rigorously preserving the *sanad system (the authentic chain of narration)*, Langitan ensures the continuity and authority of its transmitted knowledge. This adherence is structurally supported by traditional pedagogical methods such as *bandongan* (large group lectures), *wetonan* (reading classical text to kiai), and *sorogan* (individual reading). Furthermore, the institution cultivate profound teacher-student relationships founded upon *adab (proper conduct)* and *khidmah (devoted services)*. This holistic approach directly validates al-

Attas's (1993) argument that the primary goal of Islamic education extends beyond the mere accumulation of knowledge, rather its true objective is the internalization of *hikmah and adab* as indispensable foundation of religious life. Consequently, Langitan's educational practice is distinguished by its capacity to not only transmits intellectual content knowledge, but also to cultivate a way of being within that knowledge, fostering spiritual connectedness, and inner discipline among its santri.

3. Ideological Implications

The findings of this study reveal that the dynamics of tradition and transformation in Qur'anic education at Langitan and Al-Muhibbin Pesantrens not only reflect methodological differences, but also uncover the ideological layers underpinning the epistemic orientations of each institution. These differences represent two major paradigms in the discourse of Islamic education: a conservative-traditional ideology oriented toward the continuity of meaning and sanad authority, and a modern-progressive ideology emphasizing instrumental rationality, pedagogical efficiency, and social relevance.

This study paradigmatically challenge the optimistic claims in prior research regarding pesantren education modernization. Which often frame modernization as the solution to educational backwardness (Masrufah, 2025; Shalahuddin, 2024). Conversely this findings reveal a detrimental dimension of the process: the emergence of a void of meaning and a spiritual disconnection accompanying the adoption of performance- and technically-oriented pedagogical approaches.

For Langitan Pesantren, tradition transcends mere heritage practice: its constitutes a form of epistemological resistance against the hegemony of modernity, which seeks to reduce religious education to mere technical competence. By maintaining the authority of the kyai and the *sanad* of knowledge, Langitan asserts its ideological stance effectively stance as a bulwark against the reduction of spirituality and the decontextualization of texts. Hence, tradition functions as both a cultural defense mechanism and a means of reinforcing a transhistorical Islamic scholarly identity.

In the opposite manner, Al-Muhibbin Pesantren represents an ideological effort to reconcile Islam with modernity through the adoption of technological innovations,

outcome-based learning, and a focus on religious-professional competence. However, this modern orientation implies a shift from epistemic authority to managerial rationality, where spiritual values and the dimension of *adab* in teacher-student relations risk being reduced by the logic of efficiency and performativity. The educational modernism ideology here constructs students as rational and productive subjects, rather than learners shaped through contemplative processes and spiritual relationality.

The ideological implications of these findings indicate that the modernization of Qur'anic education is not neutral, but invariably carries certain value agendas and epistemic paradigms. The tension between tradition and innovation in these two pesantren models demonstrates that the transformation of religious education is an arena of ideological contestation—between the preservation of transcendent meaning and the demands of adaptation to the modern world. Therefore, the ideal direction of Islamic educational reform should not be framed as a tradition–modernity dichotomy, but rather as the creation of an ideological synthesis that balances spiritual, intellectual, and social dimensions.

This transformation affects not only curriculum structures or teaching methods but also permeates the ways in which students and teachers make sense of their daily lives within the pesantren. Informal conversations and observations of daily activities reveal subtle yet significant phenomena: devotional focus in rituals gradually gives way to mechanical routines, and the organic inner relationality between teacher and student is slowly replaced by formal relationships oriented toward measurable outcomes. Students are no longer learning primarily to become spiritually whole individuals but are increasingly guided to become competent according to certain technical standards. In this context, modernization produces a paradox: instead of strengthening the depth of Islamic values, it generates a sense of estrangement among some educational actors toward traditions that were previously a primary source of meaning (dimas, personal communication, mei 2024).

The implementation of meaning visualization methods, digital interactions, and linguistic competency enhancement at Al-Muhibbin Pesantren indeed improves the technical efficiency and accessibility of Qur'anic learning. However, several informants explicitly noted that the teaching and learning process loses its dimension of *barakah*

(spiritual blessing), *ta'dzim* (reverence), and transcendent relationality, which have traditionally been central to Qur'anic education in the pesantren tradition. Teacher-student relations have shifted from charismatic, reverential interactions to procedural, functional, and administrative interactions.

This contradiction reinforces the argument that the transformation of Islamic education cannot be measured solely by performative indicators such as material retention, technological adoption, or linguistic competence. As Nasr (1993) cautioned, Islamic education severed from its spiritual roots loses its capacity to transform human beings authentically. Similarly, Hefner (2020) emphasizes that the success of Islamic education lies not merely in keeping pace with contemporary developments, but in the continuity of core values such as *adab*, the preservation of scholarly authority (*sanad*), and the epistemic integrity of Islam.

In the lived experiences of students, teachers, and educational communities, there is often a sense of emptiness amid the abundance of tools and methods. Technology is available, curricula are reorganized, and competencies are developed—yet underlying all this is an unspoken unease: *for what purpose, and toward what end?* This phenomenon indicates that Islamic education is not merely a cognitive event, but a holistic existential experience that engages the deepest dimensions of the human subject as a being who lives, feels, and seeks meaning.

When education is detached from its connection to sources of meaning—namely, spirituality grounded in the tradition of revelation and *adab*—the anticipated transformation does not truly touch its subjects. It becomes a sequence of indicators without inner resonance, and achievements without enlightenment. Therefore, any rethinking of the transformation of Islamic education must begin from the existential experiences of learners: how knowledge is internalized, values are felt, and wisdom is transmitted in an environment that remains open to the transcendent.

D. CONCLUSION

Islamic education in the modern era cannot be reduced to technical achievements such as content retention, technological proficiency, or global competencies. Authentic transformation occurs when education is grounded in spirituality and epistemic values that sustain the historical and existential continuity of Islamic knowledge. The study shows that without engaging spiritual depth and traditional continuity, learning can feel empty and mechanical. A “spiritual-intellectual transformation” approach emphasizes the integration of knowledge, ethics, and spirituality, centering meaningful experience while bridging classical traditions with contemporary demands. This underscores the need for educational paradigms that are both responsive to modernity and organically connected to the roots of Islamic scholarly identity. Future research could explore how pesantren transformations intersect with national education policies, particularly in negotiating the balance between modernization and traditional spirituality.

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