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Balancing Tradition and Modernity: The Role of Aqidah Education Management in Shaping *Santri* Character

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Abstract:

This study aims to analyze the role of aqidah education management in building the character of students in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), with a focus on strategies and policies implemented to address the challenges of modern education. Amidst the challenges of Islamic education in balancing traditional religious teachings with modern academic demands, this study examines how a holistic approach to curriculum integration, the role of caregivers, and technological advancements can influence student development. This study uses a qualitative case study, with observation, interviews, and documentation for data collection. The findings indicate that the curriculum integration model effectively blends Islamic teachings with modern subjects, thus promoting the holistic development of students. Caregivers play a crucial role in fostering academic and moral growth, creating a supportive and conducive environment that encourages character development. Technological advancements, such as the use of YouTube and online learning media, increase learning flexibility and student engagement. This study contributes to the understanding of how Islamic boarding schools can adapt traditional educational practices to contemporary needs, offering a balanced approach that integrates faith and reason. This study recommends that Islamic boarding schools continue to refine their curriculum integration models and embrace technological tools to further improve student learning outcomes.

Keywords: *Aqidah Education Management, Character Development, Curriculum Integration, Caregivers*

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis peran manajemen pendidikan aqidah dalam membangun karakter santri di pesantren, dengan fokus pada strategi dan kebijakan yang diterapkan untuk menghadapi tantangan pendidikan di era modern. Di tengah tantangan pendidikan Islam dalam menyeimbangkan ajaran agama tradisional dengan tuntutan akademis modern, penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana pendekatan holistik terhadap integrasi kurikulum, peran pengasuh, dan kemajuan teknologi dapat memengaruhi perkembangan santri. Penelitian ini menggunakan kualitatif jenis studi kasus, dengan observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi untuk pengumpulan datanya. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa model integrasi kurikulum secara efektif memadukan ajaran Islam dengan mata pelajaran modern, sehingga mendorong perkembangan holistik santri. Pengasuh memainkan peran krusial dalam membina pertumbuhan akademis dan moral, menciptakan lingkungan yang suportif dan kondusif yang mendorong perkembangan karakter. Kemajuan teknologi, seperti penggunaan

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YouTube dan media pembelajaran daring, meningkatkan fleksibilitas belajar dan keterlibatan santri. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada pemahaman tentang bagaimana pesantren dapat mengadaptasi praktik pendidikan tradisional dengan kebutuhan kontemporer, menawarkan pendekatan seimbang yang mengintegrasikan iman dan akal. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan agar pesantren terus menyempurnakan model integrasi kurikulum dan merangkul perangkat teknologi untuk lebih meningkatkan hasil belajar siswa.
Kata Kunci: *Manajemen Pendidikan Aqidah, Pengembangan Karakter, Integrasi Kurikulum, Pengasuh*

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INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized era, Muslims face a variety of challenges that extend beyond political or military domination. While many Muslim-majority countries gained independence in the mid-twentieth century, their intellectual and cultural spheres remain influenced mainly by Western paradigms (Tisnawati et al., 2024; Wangi & Wajdi, 2022). Education, particularly Islamic education, has become a field where this hegemony is most evident (Khasanah et al., 2024; Zaini & Fahmi, 2023). The prevailing worldview within the education management systems of many Islamic institutions has often been shaped by secular, neoliberal principles that emphasize individual freedom, economic productivity, and competition, rather than spiritual growth and divine orientation (Pawelay et al., 2024; Sit et al., 2022).

This issue raises significant concerns, as the primary goal of Islamic education is not merely to prepare individuals for worldly success but to cultivate believers who are faithful, knowledgeable, and morally upright, seeking the pleasure of Allah SWT. The management of *aqidah* education lies at the heart of this tension. Ideally, it should strengthen the foundations of faith. However, in many educational systems, *aqidah* education has often been sidelined, marginalized by the secularization of knowledge in modern times (Pohan & Wisda, 2024; Syafi'i et al., 2022). This calls for a re-evaluation of the management of *aqidah* education, ensuring that it remains central to the mission of Islamic educational institutions.

Islamic educational institutions today must confront the reality that many youths, especially in urbanized and globalized contexts, exhibit fragmented worldviews in which the Islamic faith is often compartmentalized or secondary to secular concerns (Purbiyanto & Pamungkas, 2024; Qodri et al., 2022; Suandi, 2023). Modern universities, once envisioned as centers for holistic education, now increasingly emphasize performance indicators aligned with neoliberal agendas, such as employability, market competitiveness, and economic output. As a result, Muslims may excel in technical and professional fields but remain deficient in the foundational aspects of *aqidah*, *adab*, and spirituality (Arifudin, 2022; Suprapti et al., 2022). Similarly, Syafaruddin et al. (2022) and Al Maqi (2024) underline that the secularization of knowledge corrodes the spiritual foundation of Muslim societies. This disconnection manifests in identity crises, intellectual dependence on Western frameworks, and internal religious conflicts stemming from a lack of a deep understanding of Islamic theology.

Within this modern context, Islamic education faces significant tensions when confronted with secular educational models. One key challenge is the marginalization of core theological foundations in the curriculum of many Islamic institutions. The Islamization of knowledge remains a central theme in Islamic educational management, especially as institutions strive to balance modernity with tradition (Al Rasyid & Kamaluddin, 2024; Hossein Golzar, 2024). The influence of neoliberalism on Muslim higher education has been shown to compromise the spiritual dimensions of learning (Fareeda & Ahmed, 2024). Additionally, the challenge lies in reconciling longstanding Islamic traditions with the demands of modernity in Southeast Asia, as educational reforms risk compromising theological integrity.

In the modern context, the principles of Islamic education often encounter tensions when confronted with secular models. Mirza (2024) examined curriculum design in Islamic schools and identified a tendency toward the marginalization of core theological foundations. Furthermore, the Islamization of knowledge and its implications for educational management remain a central theme (Mala & Hunaida, 2023), as Mohiuddin (2024) highlighted the impact of neoliberalism on Muslim higher education, demonstrating how market-oriented values may undermine spiritual dimensions of learning. The role of classical scholars in shaping faith-based education also continues to hold relevance, with Ahmad et al. (2023) evaluating governance in Islamic institution and outlining the challenges of preserving theological integrity. In addition, the reform of Islamic education in Southeast Asia presents both opportunities and risks, particularly in striking a balance between long-standing traditions and the demands of modernity.

Most studies on Islamic educational management tend to focus on broader reform efforts or the Islamization of knowledge, often overlooking the practical ways in which traditional teachings are integrated into contemporary educational models. The novelty of this study lies in its examination of the management of aqidah education in the context of *Pesantren* Nurul Jadid, a prominent Islamic boarding school in Indonesia. This research aims to explore the role of *aqidah* education in optimizing the character formation of *santri* (students) amidst the pressures of modernity, particularly through a focus on curriculum integration, the role of educators, and the influence of the *pesantren* environment.

This study examines the role of *aqidah* education management in shaping the character of santri in Pesantren Nurul Jadid, with a focus on three key areas. First, it analyzes the model of curriculum integration used by the pesantren, specifically how *aqidah* education is integrated with character-building subjects. Second, it explores the role of the *pesantren's* educators (*pengasuh*) and the unique environment of the *pesantren* in shaping the character of *santri*. Third, it investigates the use of technology as a learning tool, examining how advancements in technology can be leveraged to enhance the delivery of *aqidah* education in the modern era.

The originality of this research lies in its approach to analyzing how traditional Islamic educational practices are adapted to meet the needs of contemporary society. This study seeks to bridge the gap between classical Islamic educational values and the challenges posed by modern, secular influences. The

study highlights the potential for *pesantren*-based education to serve as a model for integrating Islamic values with the demands of modernity, providing a sustainable framework for strengthening the aqidah and character of Muslim youths in contemporary society. This study will offer a comprehensive analysis of the management of *aqidah* education in Pesantren Nurul Jadid, focusing on curriculum integration, educator roles, and the effective use of technology. By examining these dimensions, the research offers practical recommendations for Islamic educational institutions seeking to preserve their spiritual and intellectual integrity while navigating the challenges of modernity.

RESEARCH METHOD

The material object of this research is the educational system implemented at Pesantren Nurul Jadid, particularly the management of *Aqidah* education and its role in shaping the character of *santris* in the face of modern challenges. The research focuses on three key findings: the curriculum integration model, the role of caregivers and the *pesantren* environment, and the use of technology as a learning tool. This study adopts a qualitative research approach, aiming to explore the processes, perceptions, and phenomena surrounding the management of *Aqidah* education within the *pesantren* (Klingberg et al., 2024). The type of research employed is a case study, as it examines a specific instance of an Islamic boarding school, offering an in-depth understanding of the management strategies and their impact on character development. This case study enables a comprehensive examination of how traditional Islamic teachings are integrated with modern educational practices, and how these elements contribute to the development of well-rounded students.

Data collection in this research involves multiple techniques to ensure a thorough and multifaceted approach. The primary techniques used are observation, interviews, and document analysis. Observations were conducted at Pesantren Nurul Jadid, where the researcher attended classes and educational activities to understand how the curriculum is delivered and how caregivers interact with students. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants, including teachers, caregivers, and students, to gather insights into their experiences, perceptions, and roles in the educational process. Document analysis was employed to review existing educational materials, curriculum documents, and other relevant texts to gain a deeper understanding of the formal structure of the *Aqidah* education program. This triangulation of data collection methods ensures that the findings are robust and reflective of multiple perspectives.

Data analysis in this research follows the approach outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994), which involves three primary stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Ruffa & Evangelista, 2021). Data reduction involves filtering out irrelevant or repetitive data and identifying key themes related to the research objectives. This process ensures that only the most relevant and insightful data is retained for further analysis. The second stage, data display, involves organizing the reduced data into a comprehensible format, such as matrices or tables, which facilitates the comparison and interpretation of

findings. The final stage, conclusion drawing/verification, involves synthesizing the data and making sense of the findings to draw conclusions that are both credible and aligned with the research questions. Verification is achieved through cross-checking data and ensuring consistency across various data sources, including interviews, observations, and documents. This rigorous analysis process helps ensure that the research results are valid and reliable.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Curriculum Integration Model

The model emphasizes the harmonious fusion of religious education, moral development, and modern knowledge. The curriculum integrates traditional Islamic studies with subjects relevant to the challenges of contemporary society. It reflects an approach that fosters balanced development in students, addressing both spiritual and intellectual growth. This model is designed to produce well-rounded individuals who can navigate modern societal issues while upholding Islamic values.

Findings gathered during site visits and interactions with educators made it evident that the curriculum at Pesantren Nurul Jadid successfully blends Islamic teachings with modern education. Subjects such as Aqidah (Islamic creed), Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), and Qur'anic studies were harmonized with subjects like science, mathematics, and computer technology. Teachers facilitated lessons that linked the relevance of Islamic teachings to contemporary life. The students appeared to be more engaged and motivated when they understood the connection between their faith and the modern knowledge they were acquiring.

Table 1. Integration Approach

Subject Area	Integration Approach	Objective
Aqidah	Traditional Islamic studies blended with current issues	To strengthen students' faith while addressing modern challenges
Fiqh	Application of Islamic law in contemporary settings	To ensure that religious practices remain relevant
Science	Integration of scientific principles with Islamic views	To develop critical thinking in students through a faith-based lens
Technology	Use of modern tools like computers, digital media	To equip students with necessary skills for the future

The findings in Table 1 suggest that Pesantren Nurul Jadid adopts a unique, integrative approach to curriculum development. This approach effectively combines religious studies with secular subjects, thereby addressing the dual educational needs of its students. The successful integration of these elements contributes to the holistic development of students, reinforcing the importance of both faith and reason in shaping their character and intellect.

The curriculum integration model employed at Pesantren Nurul Jadid represents an innovative and balanced approach to education. It ensures that students are not only well-versed in Islamic teachings but also equipped with the skills needed to thrive in a modern world. This integration model could serve as a valuable blueprint for other Islamic boarding schools aiming to provide well-rounded education to their students.

The Role of Caregivers and the Islamic Boarding School Environment

The second key finding is the crucial role of caregivers and the overall environment in shaping the character and academic performance of students at Pesantren Nurul Jadid. Caregivers, including teachers, administrative staff, and even senior students, play an integral role in ensuring that the values taught are upheld in daily life. Additionally, the environment of the *pesantren*, which includes the mosque, dormitories, classrooms, and outdoor spaces, has a significant influence on the behavior and mindset of the students. The school's nurturing and disciplined environment supports the overall development of the *santris*.

Interviews with teachers, caregivers, and students revealed that the *pesantren's* strong sense of community was vital for the students' development. The caregivers not only impart academic knowledge but also serve as role models for ethical behavior and personal integrity. Senior students also take on mentorship roles, guiding newcomers in both religious practices and social behaviors. The school's environment fosters a sense of belonging, discipline, and responsibility, which are crucial for shaping the students' character in line with Islamic teachings.

This research highlights that the caregivers at Pesantren Nurul Jadid serve a multidimensional role in the development of students. Beyond academics, they guide students in applying Islamic values in their daily lives. The environment of the *pesantren* plays an equally important role, as it provides a structure that encourages discipline, community, and personal growth.

The findings indicate that the success of the *pesantren's* educational model is not solely dependent on the curriculum. The environment, which is imbued with Islamic values, coupled with the guidance of dedicated caregivers, is equally important in nurturing students' academic and personal growth. This underscores the importance of holistic care and the need for a well-rounded approach in managing a *pesantren*.

The caregivers and the environment at Pesantren Nurul Jadid are essential elements that complement the curriculum. Their role in instilling values, discipline, and responsibility ensures that students are not only academically competent but also possess the strong character necessary to navigate the complexities of modern life while adhering to Islamic principles.

Technological Advances as a Learning Tool

The use of digital platforms, such as the *pesantren's* YouTube channel, online learning modules, and digital classrooms, has become an integral part of the educational process. This modern approach helps bridge the gap between traditional religious studies and contemporary knowledge, allowing students to access a broader range of learning resources. Observations of the Pesantren Nurul Jadid YouTube channel and other digital resources revealed that the *pesantren* has effectively adopted technology in its teaching practices. The YouTube channel features recorded lectures, Quranic recitations, discussions on Islamic topics, and even live-streamed events. These digital tools provide students with additional resources for learning, particularly for those who may have missed physical

classes or need further clarification on topics discussed during the day. The ability to access educational content at any time helps foster independent learning and reinforces classroom teachings.

In addition to serving as an internal learning medium within Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), YouTube is also an effective means of disseminating Islamic knowledge more broadly to the community. Through official channels, Islamic boarding schools can reach audiences beyond their student population, including alums, guardians, and the general public interested in Islamic studies. With its free access and global reach, Islamic da'wah and educational content can be accessed by anyone, at any time, without the constraints of time and space.

Using YouTube also enables two-way interaction between teachers and their audiences. Comments, live chat, and collaboration with other content creators open up constructive discussions on Islamic topics. This not only strengthens understanding but also encourages the creation of an active digital learning community. Thus, YouTube serves not only as a medium for disseminating knowledge but also as a means to build a more inclusive da'wah network that adapts to the needs of modern society. Furthermore, YouTube's presence as a medium for disseminating Islamic knowledge helps address the limited access to literature for some communities. Many people struggle to obtain scriptures, reference books, or attend in-person study groups due to geographic or economic constraints. Through digital content, Islamic boarding schools can present religious knowledge in an accessible and engaging audio-visual format.

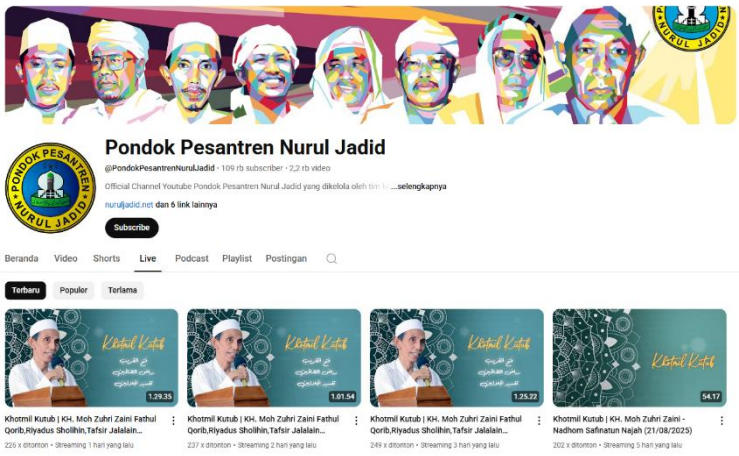


Figure 1. YouTube as a Digital Educational Resource

The use of various digital platforms at Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School demonstrates a fundamental transformation in learning methods. Each digital medium is utilized according to its function, both to support formal classroom learning and to expand access to knowledge sources outside of face-to-face hours, as shown in Table 2. Thus, technology is not merely a complement but has become an integral part of the Islamic boarding school's educational system.

Table 2. The Function of Digitalization

Digital Platform	Purpose	Impact on Students
YouTube Channel	Recorded lectures, Quranic recitations	Provides flexibility and supports self-study

Online Learning Modules	Access to lessons and assignments	Encourages self-paced learning and deeper engagement
Digital Classrooms	Real-time classes via video conferencing	Facilitates direct interaction with teachers remotely
Educational Apps	Islamic learning tools and resources	Enhances understanding of religious content with multimedia

The integration of technology at Pesantren Nurul Jadid significantly enhances the learning experience. The findings demonstrate that technology has expanded the reach of educational resources, making learning more accessible and flexible for students. Digital tools, including online platforms and apps, are integral in supporting the pesantren's curriculum, allowing students to engage in continuous learning outside of traditional class hours.

The use of technological advancements in Pesantren Nurul Jadid has proven to be an effective tool for enriching the educational experience. It supports students' academic growth by providing them with additional learning resources and opportunities to engage with content at their own pace. This integration of technology offers a model for other pesantrens seeking to modernize their educational approach while maintaining traditional values.

Discussion

The integration of traditional Islamic teachings with modern educational subjects has become an essential element in ensuring that students receive a comprehensive and holistic education. In the context of Pesantren Nurul Jadid, this integration enables students to acquire both spiritual guidance and practical knowledge, preparing them for life beyond the *pesantren*. By merging Quranic studies, fiqh, and moral teachings with contemporary disciplines such as science, technology, and social studies, students develop a well-rounded perspective. The importance of integrating traditional Islamic teachings with modern educational subjects to ensure that students receive a holistic education (Gschwandtner, 2021). The benefits of such integration in promoting a well-rounded educational environment. Both studies support the findings of this research, emphasizing that a curriculum that merges religious and modern knowledge prepares students for the challenges of contemporary society.

Integrating Islamic teachings with modern subjects fosters critical thinking and social responsibility in students (Al Rasyid & Kamaluddin, 2024; Eggen, 2021). The findings of this research align with those of these studies, demonstrating that Pesantren Nurul Jadid's curriculum model is consistent with global educational trends that emphasize a balance in the development of academic and moral aspects. It illustrates how *pesantren* can adapt to global educational trends while still maintaining their religious identity and preserving their traditional values.

Caregivers in Islamic boarding schools play a vital role in shaping both the academic and moral development of students. At Pesantren Nurul Jadid, caregivers provide guidance that extends beyond classroom instruction, offering mentorship and personal support to help students internalize the values taught in the curriculum. Their presence ensures that learning is not only theoretical but also practical, as students can observe and emulate good conduct in daily life. The

critical role of caregivers in shaping the academic and moral development of students in Islamic boarding schools (Nufus et al., 2023; Tisnawati et al., 2024). The findings from this research are consistent with the journal articles, which emphasize the importance of caregivers and the environment in supporting holistic student development.

The environment, including the *pesantren's* facilities and atmosphere, influences student discipline and behavior (Mirza, 2024; Purbiyanto & Pamungkas, 2024). This research aligns with these findings, suggesting that the caregivers and environment at Pesantren Nurul Jadid provide a strong foundation for student growth, both academically and personally. This research aligns with those findings, suggesting that the structured environment at Pesantren Nurul Jadid contributes to the cultivation of discipline, responsibility, and moral strength. Furthermore, caregivers help bridge the gap between formal education and personal development by reinforcing life skills such as respect, cooperation, and independence. The combination of supportive caregivers and a nurturing environment thus creates a strong foundation for student growth. This dynamic demonstrates how *pesantren* remain influential not only in transmitting knowledge but also in shaping character.

Technology has emerged as a transformative tool in modern Islamic education, enriching learning experiences and making knowledge more accessible to a broader audience. At Pesantren Nurul Jadid, digital platforms, including YouTube, online learning modules, and virtual classrooms, have been integrated to complement traditional instructional methods. These platforms provide flexibility, enabling students to access recorded lectures, Quranic recitations, and other educational content at any time, thereby reinforcing classroom learning and supporting independent study. Technology can enhance the learning experience in religious educational institutions, showing that digital tools promote student engagement (Pawelay et al., 2024). The findings from this research support these conclusions, indicating that Pesantren Nurul Jadid's use of digital platforms, such as YouTube and online modules, contributes to more flexible and accessible learning opportunities.

The role of technology in modernizing Islamic education is increasingly emphasized due to its ability to enhance student engagement and learning. By utilizing various digital tools, access to learning materials can be expanded while encouraging active participation in the learning process. Geographical barriers can be bridged, allowing students who cannot physically attend to remain connected and engaged in learning activities. The idea is that technology, when integrated into traditional religious education, not only improves accessibility but also fosters deeper engagement with content (Ashimi, 2023; Azka & Abu Bakar, 2023; Saputra et al., 2022), discusses how Islamic boarding schools can benefit from digital resources in enhancing student learning outcomes. The use of technology in Pesantren Nurul Jadid aligns with these findings, demonstrating how digital tools can enhance the learning experience and enable students to learn independently.

The research findings provide valuable insights for the future of Islamic education. The integration of religious and modern subjects through a well-structured curriculum, the importance of caregivers and a supportive

environment, and the effective use of technology all contribute to enhancing the educational experience at Pesantren Nurul Jadid. These elements can serve as a model for other pesantrens seeking to modernize their educational approach while maintaining traditional values. The research highlights the importance of a holistic, integrated approach to education in addressing the complexities of modern life.

CONCLUSION

This research has underscored the crucial importance of curriculum integration, caretakers, and technology improvements in the administration of *Aqidah* education at Pesantren Nurul Jadid, consequently influencing the character development of *santris*. The integration of traditional Islamic teachings with modern subjects fosters a holistic educational experience. At the same time, caregivers and the *pesantren* environment play a significant role in the development of strong moral values. The incorporation of technology as a learning tool has enhanced student engagement, offering flexibility and broader access to educational resources. However, there are limitations to this study, primarily the focus on a single *pesantren*, which may not fully represent the diversity of educational practices across other *pesantrens*. Future research could expand to include multiple *pesantrens* to explore how these findings may vary across different contexts. Furthermore, further investigation into the long-term impacts of technology integration in Islamic education could yield valuable insights. It is recommended that *pesantren* continue to adopt and refine curriculum integration models while embracing modern learning tools to better equip students for both spiritual and academic success in an increasingly digital world.

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