

Empowering Pesantren Institutions through Community-Based Curriculum Reform and Quality Assurance

Musolli¹, Rifqotul Husna²

Universitas Nurul Jadid, Probolinggo^{1,2}
{musolli@unuja.ac.id¹, rifqotulhusna@unuja.ac.id²}

Submission: 2026-03-30

Received: 2026-06-29

Published: 2026-06-30

Keywords: *Community-Based Participatory Research; Curriculum Development; Internal Quality Assurance; Pesantren.*

Abstract. *The limited capacity of Dewan Masyayikh in developing standardized curricula and internal quality assurance systems remains a critical challenge for many Islamic boarding schools pesantren in Indonesia, particularly in implementing the mandate of Law No. 18 of 2019 on Pesantren. This community engagement program aimed to strengthen the capacity of Dewan Masyayikh to develop a moderation-based curriculum and an Internal Quality Assurance System (IQAS) tailored to the characteristics of pesantren. The program employed a Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) approach consisting of four stages: needs assessment, participatory program design, implementation through field visits, focus group discussions, training workshops, and mentoring, followed by evaluation and follow-up. The program involved seven pesantren in the Tapal Kuda region of East Java, Indonesia. The results demonstrated that all participating pesantren successfully produced draft moderation-based curriculum documents and preliminary IQAS documents, established an inter-pesantren collaboration network, and improved participants' capacity to formulate quality standards, evaluation indicators, and internal quality audit mechanisms. Furthermore, each participating pesantren initiated the implementation of an internal quality evaluation cycle as part of its institutional governance. The participatory approach, which actively engaged pesantren leaders, Dewan Masyayikh, and other stakeholders, strengthened institutional commitment and promoted the sustainability of the program. This community engagement model offers a contextual, participatory, and sustainable framework that can be replicated in other pesantren to enhance educational governance, curriculum development, and quality assurance practices while preserving the distinctive values and traditions of Islamic boarding schools.*

Katakunci: *Dewan Masyayikh; Kurikulum Moderasi; Penjaminan Mutu Internal; Pesantren.*

Abstrak. *Penguatan kapasitas Dewan Masyayikh dalam menyusun kurikulum dan sistem penjaminan mutu masih menjadi kebutuhan mendesak karena sebagian besar pesantren belum memiliki dokumen kurikulum yang terstandar maupun mekanisme penjaminan mutu internal sesuai amanat Undang-Undang Nomor 18 Tahun 2019 tentang Pesantren. Program pengabdian ini bertujuan meningkatkan kapasitas Dewan Masyayikh dalam*

merumuskan kurikulum berbasis moderasi beragama dan mengembangkan Sistem Penjaminan Mutu Internal (SPMI) yang sesuai dengan karakteristik pesantren. Kegiatan dilaksanakan menggunakan pendekatan Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) melalui empat tahapan, yaitu pemetaan kebutuhan, perancangan program secara partisipatif, pelaksanaan pendampingan berupa kunjungan lapangan, focus group discussion, pelatihan, dan lokakarya, serta evaluasi dan tindak lanjut. Program melibatkan tujuh pesantren di wilayah Tapal Kuda, Jawa Timur. Hasil pendampingan menunjukkan seluruh pesantren mitra berhasil menyusun draft kurikulum berbasis moderasi dan dokumen awal SPMI, terbentuk jejaring kolaborasi antar-Dewan Masyayikh, serta meningkatnya kemampuan peserta dalam menyusun standar mutu, indikator evaluasi, dan mekanisme audit mutu internal. Selain itu, setiap pesantren mulai mengimplementasikan siklus evaluasi mutu sebagai bagian dari tata kelola pendidikan. Pendekatan partisipatif yang melibatkan pimpinan pesantren, Dewan Masyayikh, dan pemangku kepentingan terbukti meningkatkan komitmen serta keberlanjutan implementasi program. Model pendampingan ini memberikan alternatif pengembangan kapasitas yang adaptif, kontekstual, dan berkelanjutan sehingga berpotensi direplikasi pada pesantren lain untuk memperkuat tata kelola pendidikan, implementasi kurikulum, dan budaya penjaminan mutu berbasis nilai-nilai pesantren.

1 Introduction

In recent years, Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) in Indonesia have faced increasing demands to improve their institutional relevance, meaning their ability to provide educational programs that respond to contemporary societal needs while maintaining their religious identity. These demands also reflect broader sociocultural imperatives, including the need to promote religious tolerance, social cohesion, intercultural understanding, and graduates equipped with competencies relevant to the modern workforce in Indonesia's pluralistic society. At the same time, pesantren are confronted with ideological contestation, referring to the growing influence of religious extremism, intolerance, and competing interpretations of Islamic teachings disseminated through digital media and transnational movements. Consequently, pesantren are expected not only to preserve their traditional religious pedagogies but also to function as responsive, accountable, and quality-oriented

educational institutions capable of addressing these contemporary challenges. Within this context, the enactment of Law No. 18 of 2019 concerning Pesantren represents a significant milestone, as it formally recognizes the autonomy of pesantren while requiring them to develop curriculum reform and internal quality assurance systems based on the principles of religious moderation, national integration, and institutional sustainability (Undang-Undang Nomor 18 Tahun 2019 tentang Pesantren, 2019).

Nowhere is this dual imperative more pronounced than in the Tapal Kuda region of East Java, which is home to one of the largest concentrations of pesantren in Indonesia. According to data from the Ministry of Religious Affairs, East Java hosts more than 6,700 pesantren, with the Tapal Kuda area accounting for nearly 2,000 institutions. Despite this numerical strength, structural disparities persist in terms of institutional readiness, particularly in relation to curriculum development and internal quality assurance mechanisms. While a few prominent pesantren have initiated steps toward formalizing their educational practices, the vast majority continue to operate within fragmented curricular structures and lack sustainable quality assurance systems. This fragmentation creates a systemic vulnerability, especially as pesantren are increasingly called upon to serve as bulwarks against religious extremism, incubators of moderate Islamic values, and providers of competitive education for diverse career pathways (Hefner, 2021); (Kholis et al., 2020).

Scholarly engagement with the governance and educational transformation of pesantren has expanded in the last decade. However, a significant portion of existing studies remains normative or prescriptive, focusing on ideal models of governance, standard-setting, or curriculum integration, often drawing from the formal education sector without adequately accounting for the epistemological and operational distinctiveness of pesantren. Studies by (Rahmah & Prasetyo, 2022), (Ijah et al., 2021), and (Chudzaifah et al., 2022), for instance, have attempted to transpose university-style quality assurance models or national accreditation frameworks such as the IASP-2020 into pesantren settings. While informative, these approaches often neglect crucial

elements such as the role of kyai authority, the embeddedness of kitab kuning-based learning, and the socio-religious lifeworld of santri, leading to limited uptake and questionable sustainability. (Fawaid, 2019)

Meanwhile, several interventions reviewed in contemporary literature tend to lack participatory depth and contextual sensitivity. Studies by (Ahmadi, 2023), (Khoiriah & Zulmuqim, 2021), (Rohman, 2021), (Mukaffa, 2023), and (Rizaldi, 2023) illustrate a tendency to impose top-down reform. Meanwhile, several interventions reviewed in the contemporary literature tend to lack participatory depth and contextual sensitivity. Studies by (Ahmadi, 2023), (Khoiriah & Zulmuqim, 2021), (Rohman, 2021), (Mukaffa, 2023), and (Rizaldi, 2023) illustrate a tendency to adopt top-down reform models in which government agencies, universities, or external experts dominate the design and implementation of educational reforms, leaving limited space for meaningful participation by key stakeholders within the pesantren, particularly the Dewan Masyayikh. This institution—legally mandated by Law No. 18/2019 and Ministerial Decree No. 1154/2021—serves as the internal governance body responsible for curriculum development, quality assurance, and educational evaluation in each pesantren. However, its role is often constrained by three interrelated factors: the dominance of externally driven reform agendas, limited institutional capacity and technical expertise in curriculum and quality assurance, and the paternalistic leadership culture common in many pesantren, where strategic educational decisions remain highly centralized under the authority of the kyai. These conditions reduce the opportunity for the Dewan Masyayikh to exercise its statutory responsibilities, thereby widening implementation gaps and creating disparities in institutional capacity across pesantren.

This research emerges from a recognition of these limitations and seeks to contribute an empirically grounded, participatory model for curriculum and quality assurance reform rooted in pesantren realities. It builds upon a community-based participatory research (CBPR) methodology that engages the Dewan Masyayikh as co-researchers and co-designers, rather than mere beneficiaries or implementers. The Tapal Kuda region provides an ideal setting for such inquiry due to its

institutional diversity, historical depth, and strategic significance within the national discourse on Islamic education reform.

Unlike previous community engagement initiatives that primarily focused on transferring standardized quality assurance frameworks or delivering one-off training programs, this service introduces a collaborative governance model that positions the **Dewan Masyayikh** as co-designers of curriculum reform and internal quality assurance through a Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) approach. Rather than adapting external educational standards to pesantren, the program facilitates the co-creation of moderation-based curriculum frameworks, context-sensitive quality assurance instruments, and an inter-pesantren learning network that enables continuous peer learning and mutual evaluation. This participatory ecosystem transforms the **Dewan Masyayikh** from passive recipients of policy into institutional change agents capable of sustaining curriculum innovation and quality improvement. Consequently, the novelty of this community engagement lies not merely in producing curriculum and quality assurance documents, but in establishing a scalable governance model that integrates participatory decision-making, local religious authority, and collaborative institutional learning within the unique socio-cultural context of Indonesian pesantren.

Accordingly, this community engagement program aims to strengthen the institutional capacity of the *Dewan Masyayikh* in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) to develop a moderation-based curriculum and establish an internal quality assurance system in accordance with the mandate of Law No. 18 of 2019 on Pesantren, while preserving the distinctive educational traditions of pesantren. Specifically, the program seeks to enhance the knowledge and technical competencies of the *Dewan Masyayikh* in curriculum development, facilitate collaborative governance among pesantren stakeholders through a Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) approach, and support the establishment of sustainable institutional mechanisms for curriculum implementation, internal quality evaluation, and continuous quality improvement. Ultimately, the program is expected to strengthen educational

governance and introduce a participatory quality assurance model that can be adapted and replicated by other pesantren across Indonesia.

2 Method

This community engagement program employed a **Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR)** approach, which emphasizes equitable collaboration between researchers and community partners throughout the planning, implementation, and evaluation processes (Moh. Ansori et al., 2021). The program was conducted over eight months (September 2024–April 2025) and involved the *Dewan Masyayikh* from seven Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) in the Tapal Kuda region of East Java, Indonesia. As the primary community partners, the *Dewan Masyayikh* collaborated with researchers, pesantren leaders, and education experts to develop a moderation-based curriculum and an internal quality assurance system tailored to the characteristics of pesantren.



Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the CBPR Method

The implementation followed four stages adapted from the CBPR framework (Marquez et al., 2022): (1) establishing partnerships and identifying stakeholders; (2) conducting participatory needs assessments through field observations, focus group discussions (FGDs), and institutional mapping; (3) co-designing and implementing capacity-building activities, including training workshops, mentoring, and collaborative curriculum and quality assurance development; and (4) evaluating the outcomes through reflective discussions, stakeholder feedback, and follow-up planning. Activities were delivered using a hybrid format that combined face-to-face field visits with online

workshops and coordination meetings to ensure broad participation across partner institutions.

Continuous evaluation was integrated throughout the program to assess participant engagement, institutional progress, and the effectiveness of the collaborative process. Feedback from the *Dewan Masyayikh* and other stakeholders was used to refine the mentoring model and support the sustainability of curriculum implementation and internal quality assurance practices.

3 Results

The initial assessment revealed substantial disparities in institutional readiness among the seven participating pesantren. Before the mentoring program, none of the partner institutions had a formally documented moderation-based curriculum or a structured Internal Quality Assurance System (IQAS). Curriculum implementation relied primarily on traditional instructional practices, while quality assurance activities were conducted informally without documented standards, performance indicators, or systematic evaluation procedures. Participatory mapping also identified limited technical capacity among the *Dewan Masyayikh* in curriculum design, quality assurance planning, and institutional documentation. These findings confirmed the need for a structured capacity-building program tailored to the specific characteristics of pesantren.

Following eight months of mentoring, measurable improvements were observed across all participating institutions. All seven pesantren successfully produced draft moderation-based curriculum documents and preliminary IQAS manuals, established quality standards and evaluation indicators, and initiated internal quality evaluation cycles. In addition, an inter-pesantren collaboration network involving the *Dewan Masyayikh* was established to facilitate knowledge sharing and continuous peer learning, while a prototype digital quality assurance tool was introduced to support institutional documentation and monitoring. Feedback collected during the final evaluation indicated increased confidence among *Dewan Masyayikh* members in curriculum development and quality assurance implementation, as evidenced by the

completion of institutional quality documents, active stakeholder participation during mentoring activities, and each pesantren's commitment to integrating the developed quality assurance mechanisms into its regular educational governance practices.

A critical starting point in the mentoring intervention was the inkulturasi phase—a context-anchored immersion process wherein the mentoring team embedded themselves within each pesantren's cultural and pedagogical environment. This stage was vital in capturing tacit knowledge, pedagogical patterns, and institutional aspirations that do not typically surface in formal assessments. Conducted through focus group discussions (FGDs), participant observation, and open-ended interviews with teachers and *masyayikh*, this phase revealed a prevalent reliance on traditional *turats*-based instruction, with minimal integration of national curriculum standards or measurable learning outcomes. While this approach preserved religious authenticity, it limited the pesantren's ability to engage with broader educational reforms. (Ahmad fawaid, 2024) The inkulturasi stage thus became not merely an assessment tool, but a relational and epistemological bridge, building trust between facilitators and pesantren communities, while generating context-specific data that would later guide reform strategies.

The next phase of the program focused on collaborative design and development of a moderation-based curriculum framework. FGDs were again employed, this time to co-create curriculum outlines that embedded pesantren values while aligning with UU No. 18/2019 mandates. (Dzulfikar, 2023) The sessions were organized thematically, enabling pesantren to reflect on their educational visions and to articulate learning goals that balanced Islamic ethical instruction with contemporary civic and intellectual competencies. A key output of this stage was the adoption of an integrated curriculum matrix that mapped competencies across religious, social, and academic domains. Several pesantren, notably Nurul Jadid and Salafiyah Syafi'iyah Sukorejo, began drafting syllabi with clearly stated learning outcomes, evaluation methods, and pedagogical strategies. These outputs signified a paradigmatic shift: pesantren were no longer mere transmitters of

traditional knowledge but were actively reconfiguring their pedagogical systems to meet both internal and external quality expectations.



Figure 2. The Hybrid Implementation Process of Curriculum Development Mentorship Based on the Principles of Religious Moderation

Parallel to curriculum design, substantial effort was dedicated to developing Internal Quality Assurance Systems (SPMI). At the onset, none of the pesantren had formally documented SPMI mechanisms, although informal evaluations—such as teacher reviews and student performance appraisals—were in place. The mentoring team facilitated workshops on quality assurance frameworks, introducing concepts such as academic benchmarks, cyclical evaluation, and performance indicators. A differentiated approach was used: pesantren with relatively advanced educational infrastructures received advanced modules on data-driven quality assurance, while those with limited capacities were supported in establishing foundational policies. The transformation was most visible in institutions like Pondok Pesantren Walisongo and Nurud Dhalam, where SPMI documents were produced and integrated into institutional policy. The formalization of these practices not only improved accountability but also strengthened the role of Dewan Masyayikh as governance actors in educational quality management.



Figure 3. Hybrid Briefing by the Majelis Masyayikh to the Dewan Masyayikh

The progress achieved in curriculum and quality assurance development is summarized in the figure below. As shown, all seven pesantren successfully completed the initial draft of their moderation-based curriculum documents. However, only five of them—Zainul Hasan Genggong, Nurul Jadid, Salafiyah Syafi'iyah Sukorejo, Nurud Dhalam, and Walisongo—had reached the stage of drafting formal SPMI documentation. The remaining two pesantren were in various stages of conceptualizing their quality systems. This disparity illustrates the differential institutional capacities that shaped the pace of implementation. The figure also highlights the tangible outputs of the intervention, reinforcing the value of a flexible mentoring model that adapts to the contextual realities of each pesantren. These outputs formed the basis for institutional transformation, as curriculum and SPMI documents are not only technical tools but also symbols of evolving educational accountability and professionalism within pesantren ecosystems. (Haidar Idris, 2024)

In tandem with technical capacity building, the initiative fostered institutional innovation through the establishment of Internal Working Groups (Biro or another name) within each pesantren. This biro functioned as operational arms of the Dewan Masyayikh, tasked with coordinating curriculum revisions, monitoring implementation, and proposing quality benchmarks. Their composition varied, typically including senior teachers, administrators, and masyayikh who were trained during earlier workshops. One notable example emerged at

Pondok Pesantren Nurud Dhalam, where the biro institutionalized bi-monthly review sessions to reflect on pedagogical practices and student outcomes.(Fauzi Ahmar, 2024) These sessions adopted a reflective-inquiry model, enabling educators to evaluate their methods, identify gaps, and collaboratively propose solutions. Through this mechanism, pesantren began moving away from individualistic teaching models toward collective pedagogical leadership. The operationalization of biro signaled a shift from personality-based governance to structured collegial accountability, a development that holds promise for long-term sustainability.

A key element in institutional transformation was the emergence of local leadership within the Dewan Masyayikh structure. Certain figures organically assumed leadership roles by actively championing the reform agenda, mediating between tradition and innovation, and fostering dialogue across generational divides. KH. Minhaji from Sukorejo, for instance, consistently positioned himself as a reform catalyst, facilitating not only internal discussions but also inter-pesantren coordination. These local leaders became embodiments of transformative agency, exemplifying how charismatic authority in pesantren can evolve into strategic leadership aligned with modern governance norms.(Minhaji, 2024) Their presence helped mitigate resistance from more conservative factions within pesantren, who often viewed reforms as externally imposed. Moreover, these leaders contributed to the sustainability of reform by institutionalizing leadership succession, mentoring junior members of the Dewan Masyayikh, and building alliances with external stakeholders, including higher education institutions and religious authorities.

The mentoring program also catalyzed the formation of a peer-learning ecosystem among the seven pesantren. Initially designed as a knowledge-sharing platform, this informal consortium evolved into an inter-pesantren support network that facilitated the exchange of best practices, co-development of tools, and mutual encouragement. Group chats, collaborative workshops, and peer evaluation sessions fostered a culture of horizontal learning. The establishment of this network was a significant outcome, as it marked a departure from the traditional

insularity of pesantren governance toward a more open, dialogical mode of institutional development. For example, when Pondok Pesantren Bustanul Makmur struggled to articulate its curriculum indicators, (Endi Aunullah, 2024) senior figures from Nurul Jadid shared annotated syllabi and offered peer review. Such exchanges not only accelerated progress but also cultivated a spirit of collegial solidarity, reinforcing the notion that pesantren reform is a collective endeavor grounded in mutual respect and shared vision.

Alongside institutional restructuring, the program facilitated a profound pedagogical shift among teaching staff. Prior to the intervention, instructional approaches in most pesantren were predominantly lecture-based, with minimal student engagement or critical reflection. Through participatory training, teachers were introduced to learner-centered methodologies such as project-based learning, inquiry dialogue, and contextual assessments. These approaches were not imposed as rigid alternatives but were contextualized within pesantren pedagogical ethics. In Nurul Jadid, for instance, a senior ustadzah integrated thematic debates into kitab kuning lessons, encouraging students to critically relate classical texts to contemporary issues. (Ahmad fawaid, 2024) Such innovations reflect not merely a methodological shift but a reorientation in the epistemological stance of pesantren educators—where authority is no longer absolute, and students are invited into the process of knowledge construction. This transformation holds long-term implications for cultivating independent, reflective learners within pesantren systems.

Beyond internal pedagogy, the ripple effects of institutional transformation extended to pesantren–community relations. Improved documentation and structured communication mechanisms enhanced transparency and parental engagement. Parents' associations, which had previously functioned informally, began organizing regular consultations with the Dewan Masyayikh, providing feedback on student learning and institutional priorities. In some pesantren, alumni networks became active stakeholders in educational governance, offering mentorship, fundraising, and even participating in curriculum review processes. (Keputusan Menteri Agama RI Nomor 1104 Tahun 2024

Tentang Standar Mutu Pendidikan Pesantren, 2024) This broadened stakeholder involvement signals the democratization of educational space within pesantren, wherein governance is no longer confined to internal elites but becomes a shared community enterprise. These dynamics indicate a deepening of pesantren's societal embeddedness, not only as spiritual centers but also as responsive educational institutions accountable to their constituencies.(Munif, 2020)

The evolution of pesantren identity emerged as one of the most profound social transformations induced by the mentoring program. No longer confined to their traditional role as guardians of religious orthodoxy, participating pesantren began reimagining themselves as community-driven educational institutions aligned with both Islamic values and national developmental goals. This shift was particularly evident in their external communications—both oral and written—where leaders now articulated visions of pesantren that emphasize moderation (*wasathiyah*), civic responsibility, and global citizenship. Public seminars and interfaith discussions were initiated as part of curricular enrichment, reflecting a commitment to inclusivity and contextual responsiveness.(Sulistiyaningsih et al., 2020) These new discursive practices underscore an epistemic shift wherein pesantren increasingly view reform not as an abandonment of tradition but as its organic extension, made relevant to contemporary realities through critical engagement and adaptive learning.

Despite the significant gains, challenges to reform persisted, particularly in navigating institutional conservatism and reconciling traditional authority structures with modern governance mechanisms. Some pesantren actors expressed skepticism regarding formal documentation, perceiving it as bureaucratic and potentially disruptive to long-established pedagogical autonomy. Others questioned the applicability of quality assurance concepts, which they feared might standardize practices at the expense of spiritual depth. These concerns were addressed through dialogical sessions that emphasized contextual adaptation rather than procedural compliance. The mentoring team adopted a non-prescriptive stance, focusing instead on showcasing successful internal models. Over time, resistant actors began to see value

in selective adoption, especially when improvements in student performance and institutional credibility became evident. This gradual shift from resistance to reflective accommodation illustrates the importance of culturally sensitive engagement in religious educational reform.

A particularly innovative aspect of the intervention was its use of narrative-based documentation to capture institutional change. Rather than relying solely on formal metrics, the mentoring process encouraged pesantren to chronicle their journey of transformation through storytelling, reflective journaling, and multimedia documentation. These narratives provided qualitative insights into how reforms were experienced, negotiated, and localized within each pesantren. For instance, the storytelling of curriculum development at Assunniyyah Kencong highlighted the tensions and resolutions among different generational cohorts of educators. These accounts were later compiled and shared across institutions, fostering a repository of lived experiences that enriched the collective learning process. The integration of narrative evidence into quality assurance practices signals a methodological innovation, allowing for the inclusion of affective and relational dimensions of institutional transformation often overlooked by conventional evaluation frameworks.

From a systems perspective, the mentoring initiative succeeded in repositioning the Dewan Masyayikh as a central node of institutional governance. Initially perceived as symbolic or peripheral, the Dewan gradually assumed strategic roles in planning, implementation, and evaluation. Their responsibilities expanded from merely endorsing curriculum plans to actively shaping pedagogical direction and institutional identity. This functional recalibration was supported by the formalization of their roles in organizational charters, improved reporting structures, and the introduction of annual self-assessments. In some pesantren, the Dewan Masyayikh began serving as liaisons to external partners, representing their institutions in policy dialogues and academic forums. (Dzulfikar, 2023) This enhanced visibility, and functionality strengthened the institutional legitimacy of the Dewan, embedding them as enduring agents of quality assurance and reform.

Their evolution reflects the broader success of the CBPR model in transforming latent institutional potential into durable organizational change.

In conclusion, the mentoring initiative demonstrated that community-based, participatory approaches to curriculum and quality assurance reform can yield substantive institutional transformation within traditional Islamic educational settings. By fostering collaborative design, local leadership, and peer-based learning, the program activated internal capacities that were previously dormant or underutilized. The changes observed across the seven pesantren—ranging from documentation practices and pedagogical methods to community engagement and organizational governance—signal a multidimensional reconfiguration of the pesantren ecosystem. While challenges remain, particularly regarding scalability and sustainability, the evidence affirms that reform rooted in respect for local wisdom and driven by co-ownership can bridge the gap between religious authenticity and educational modernity. These findings have implications not only for Islamic education in Indonesia but also for broader discourses on community empowerment, institutional resilience, and grassroots educational innovation.

4 Discussion

The outcomes of this mentoring initiative underscore the critical importance of grounding educational reform in participatory, context-sensitive frameworks, particularly within pesantren ecosystems characterized by deep-rooted religious traditions. The use of Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) not only facilitated technical intervention but also nurtured relational trust and institutional co-ownership. Unlike top-down models often employed in public education reforms, this approach affirmed the agency of pesantren actors, especially Dewan Masyayikh, as legitimate stakeholders in shaping educational trajectories. The transformative results—ranging from the formalization of curricula to the emergence of collaborative governance—demonstrate that reform initiatives gain traction when epistemological pluralism is respected, and local voices are engaged as

co-creators rather than passive implementers. This finding echoes the theoretical stance of Freirean pedagogy, which emphasizes dialogue, conscientization, and praxis in community transformation.(Gadotti, 2017)

The success of the program in catalyzing structured documentation practices within pesantren—previously reliant on oral and lineage-based knowledge—speaks to the adaptive potential of traditional educational institutions when engaged through non-threatening pedagogical strategies.(Mukaffa, 2023) The process of curriculum drafting and internal quality assurance formulation was not merely technical, but deeply reflective, allowing institutions to re-express their identity in modern educational terms. This development aligns with the principles of transformative learning theory(Mezirow, 2018), wherein learning is understood not simply as acquisition of new content, but as a reframing of assumptions, practices, and institutional values. Through iterative mentoring and self-assessment, pesantren participants began rearticulating their mission in a way that resonated with both national policy demands and their own theological commitments.

A pivotal insight from the intervention is the role of leadership and institutional culture in enabling or constraining reform. The emergence of local reform leaders within the Dewan Masyayikh structure was not externally induced, but rather organically stimulated through collaborative exposure and cross-institutional learning. These individuals functioned as epistemic brokers—translating the language of policy and academic frameworks into operational strategies that could be internalized by pesantren stakeholders. Their agency highlights the importance of leadership development as a cornerstone of sustainable change. In line with Fullan's (Fullan, 2010) emphasis on moral purpose and capacity building in educational leadership, the study demonstrates that empowering local actors to lead from within can produce enduring institutional transformations, especially when accompanied by peer networks and community validation.

The emergence of peer networks among pesantren partners points to a latent but powerful collective capacity for institutional learning and

resilience. Traditionally, pesantren functioned in silos, often emphasizing autonomy and self-reliance. However, the mentoring initiative revealed that when structured forums for dialogue are created, these institutions are not only willing but eager to share best practices, co-develop tools, and engage in mutual critique. This phenomenon aligns with Wenger's theory of Communities of Practice, which posits that sustained learning and innovation occur when practitioners come together around shared goals and reflective practices. (Sarid & Levanon, 2022) The voluntary formation of inter-pesantren working groups and communication channels represents an organic movement toward collective governance—an important evolution in a sector historically characterized by fragmentation.

Despite these positive developments, the study also sheds light on the inherent tensions between institutional modernization and the preservation of pesantren's spiritual-cultural heritage. Some resistance to formal documentation and evaluation processes stemmed not from ignorance or inertia, but from a principled concern that standardization could dilute the spiritual essence of pesantren education. This concern reflects a broader epistemological divergence between Western-derived frameworks of quality and the Islamic tradition's emphasis on moral formation, *adab*, and community. The mentoring process addressed this tension not by dismissing it, but by providing integrative tools that honored pesantren traditions while enhancing accountability.

The institutionalization of Internal Working Groups (*Biro*) within pesantren provides a compelling case for understanding how governance innovation can emerge from within religious education systems. These *Biro*, initially formed to assist in curriculum revision and quality monitoring, evolved into platforms for continuous professional dialogue and decision-making. This mirrors Senge's concept of the "learning organization," where knowledge is not centralized in a single actor but distributed across collaborative units. *Biro* enabled pesantren to break from dependency on individual *kyai* authority and fostered a new culture of collective pedagogical accountability. The fact that *Biro* was not externally mandated but internally adopted reflects a shift in institutional ethos—from reactive compliance to proactive self-

governance. Their emergence signals that pesantren, when empowered and appropriately supported, are capable of institutional innovation while maintaining fidelity to their foundational religious commitments.

The pedagogical transformation observed during the program—particularly the adoption of student-centered and dialogical teaching methods—illustrates the potential for instructional renewal within pesantren traditions. These shifts did not replace classical turats-based instruction, but rather supplemented it with reflective, participatory approaches more aligned with contemporary educational paradigms. This blended model resonates with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, where learning is a socially mediated process, and with Al-Attas's conception of ta'dib, where the learner is shaped not just intellectually but morally. Teachers who engaged in the project began to see themselves not merely as transmitters of sacred knowledge but as facilitators of critical engagement. This redefinition of pedagogical roles—grounded in the lived culture of pesantren yet open to external innovations—demonstrates that meaningful change in instructional practice is possible without cultural dissonance, so long as the change process is participatory and reflexive.

The reinforcement of pesantren–community relations represent another significant impact area of the intervention, as seen in the formation of parent forums, alumni involvement in curriculum review, and increased transparency. These developments suggest a democratization of educational governance wherein external stakeholders become co-owners of institutional development. From the perspective of institutional theory, this indicates a re-legitimation process, where pesantren reframe their identity in ways that attract and retain trust from their broader constituencies. The engagement of parents and alumni also points to an expanded accountability framework, moving beyond internal structures to include horizontal forms of oversight. These dynamics are particularly relevant in plural societies where religious education institutions are increasingly required to justify their relevance, inclusivity, and responsiveness. By opening spaces for dialogue with their communities, the participating pesantren

not only improved governance but also enhanced their social capital and legitimacy.

Despite these gains, concerns about the scalability and sustainability of reform remain salient. The depth of change achieved was partially dependent on the intensive, context-specific nature of the mentoring process, facilitated by university actors with longstanding relationships with the pesantren. Replicating such depth across thousands of pesantren nationwide would require systemic investments in human resources, contextualized training models, and decentralized support structures. This challenge mirrors what Hargreaves and Fullan (2010) describe as the “implementation dip” in large-scale educational reform—where initial gains may falter without institutional embedding. However, the intervention offers a scalable insight: sustainable change is more likely when institutions themselves become the drivers of reform. As demonstrated, the Dewan Masyayikh and Biro can serve as replicable governance models, provided they are supported through policy frameworks that respect pesantren autonomy while providing pathways for professionalization and inter-institutional learning.

Finally, this study contributes to the broader discourse on Islamic education reform by presenting an alternative model grounded in co-construction, relational ethics, and contextual pragmatism. Rather than adopting imported models of quality assurance or secularized curriculum standards, the program nurtured tools and systems that grew organically from within the pesantren. This approach reaffirms the validity of indigenous reform logics—change processes that emerge from within traditional institutions and are rooted in their moral, spiritual, and epistemological traditions. Such models are particularly valuable in the Global South, where education systems often straddle multiple knowledge traditions and cultural sensibilities. The findings suggest that a culturally embedded, dialogically engaged, and practically supported reform process can create a pedagogical ecosystem that is both authentically Islamic and educationally robust, capable of addressing 21st-century challenges without forfeiting its spiritual essence.

5 Conclusion

This study demonstrates that participatory mentoring effectively strengthened the institutional capacity of the *Dewan Masyayikh* in pesantren across the Tapal Kuda region to develop moderation-based curricula and internal quality assurance systems in accordance with national policy frameworks. Through a structured Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) approach, the *Dewan Masyayikh* evolved from symbolic actors into strategic agents of educational governance, enabling participating pesantren to formulate curriculum objectives, develop curriculum and quality assurance documents, and initiate internal evaluation and audit mechanisms while preserving their religious traditions. The mentoring program combined focus group discussions, field immersion, leadership facilitation, and collaborative working groups, creating a participatory learning environment that strengthened stakeholder engagement, fostered trust, and encouraged the co-creation of context-sensitive educational innovations. As a result, all participating pesantren established preliminary curriculum and internal quality assurance documents, strengthened collaboration through inter-pesantren networks, enhanced stakeholder participation, and introduced more systematic quality management practices. Beyond these institutional outputs, the program also promoted stronger local leadership, more participatory decision-making, and a shared commitment to continuous quality improvement. Although the program was limited to seven pesantren in the Tapal Kuda region and requires sustained institutional support to ensure long-term implementation, it offers a practical and replicable model of participatory educational governance that integrates Islamic boarding school traditions with contemporary quality assurance principles and can serve as a reference for similar pesantren development initiatives throughout Indonesia.

6 Acknowledgment

We would like to express our deepest gratitude to the Dewan Masyayikh, pesantren leaders, teachers, and educational staff across the Tapal Kuda region—including the districts of Pasuruan, Probolinggo, Lumajang, Bondowoso, Situbondo, Jember, and Banyuwangi—for their

active participation, commitment, and collaboration throughout the mentoring program on moderation-based curriculum development and internal quality assurance systems. We extend our sincere appreciation to the Directorate of Islamic Higher Education (DIKTIS) of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia for funding this community engagement initiative. We are also thankful to the facilitators, resource persons, and academic partners from various universities who provided invaluable technical expertise and guidance throughout the process. Furthermore, we acknowledge the support of local governments, donors, and other stakeholders who contributed moral, material, and logistical assistance to the program. Their collective contributions were instrumental to the success of this initiative and form a strong foundation for sustainable reform within the pesantren education system.

7 Reference

- Ahmadi, M. (2023). Analisis Tujuan Pendidikan Agama Islam Di Pesantren Berdasarkan Undang-Undang No. 18 Tahun 2019. *Literasi: Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan*, 14(1), 40–46. [https://doi.org/10.21927/literasi.2023.14\(1\).40-46](https://doi.org/10.21927/literasi.2023.14(1).40-46)
- Chudzaifah, I., Hikmah, A. N., & Ambarwati, A. (2022). Quality Management of Students in Islamic Boarding Schools. *Journal of Quality Assurance in Islamic Education (JQAIE)*, 2(2), 40–52. <https://doi.org/10.47945/jgaie.v2i2.666>
- Dzulfikar, A. R. (2023). *Sistem Penjaminan Mutu Pesantren*. CV kreator Cerdas Indonesia.
- Fauzi Ahmar. (2024). *Wawancara*.
- Fawaid, A. (2019). Kontra Narasi Ekstremisme Terhadap Tafsir Ayat Ayat Qitāl Dalam Tafsīr Al-Jalālayn Karya Jalāl Al-Dīn Al-Maḥallī Dan Jalāl Al-Dīn Al-Suyūṭī (Kajian atas Pemahaman Kiai Pesantren di Daerah Tapal Kuda Jawa Timur)[Disertasi]. *Pascasarjana Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel Surabaya*.
- Gadotti, M. (2017). The global impact of Freire’s pedagogy. *New Directions for Evaluation*, 2017(155), 17–30.

- Haidar Idris. (2024). *Laporan Hasil Sharing bersama Pengurus Dewan Masyayikh Tapal Kuda Jawa Timur*.
- Hefner, R. W. (2021). Islam and institutional religious freedom in Indonesia. *Religions*, 12(6), 415.
- Ijah, T., Florentinus, T. S., & Sudana, I. M. (2021). The quality assurance of Islamic boarding school based on total quality management (TQM). *Educational Management*, 10(1), 42–49.
- Keputusan Menteri Agama RI Nomor 1104 Tahun 2024 Tentang Standar Mutu Pendidikan Pesantren , Jakarta (2024).
- Khoiriah, K., & Zulmuqim, Z. (2021). Analisis Konseptual Manajemen Mutu Di Madrasah Dan Pondok Pesantren. *Profetika: Jurnal Studi Islam*, 22(1), 65–79.
<https://doi.org/10.23917/profetika.v22i1.14766>
- Kholis, N., Azra, A., Hasan, N., Qodir, Z., Qibtyah, A., Sadzali, A., & Min Fadhli Robby, H. (2020). *Islam Indonesia 2020*. UIN Press Yogyakarta.
- Marquez, E., Smith, S., Tu, T., Ayele, S., Haboush-Deloye, A., & Lucero, J. (2022). Step-by-Step Guide to Community-Based Participatory Research. *Nevada Minority Health and Equity Coalition. University of Nevada, Las Vegas*.
- Mezirow, J. (2018). Transformative learning theory. In *Contemporary theories of learning* (pp. 114–128). Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315147277-8>
- Minhaji. (2024). *Wawancara*.
- Moh. Ansori, Agus Afandi, Ries Dyah Fitriyah, Rizka Safriyani, H. Farisia. (2021). *Pendekatan-pendekatan dalam University-Community Engagement* (W. Br. Z. Siregar, Ed.). UIN SUNAN AMPEL PRESS.
- Mukaffa, Z. (2023). Implementasi Nilai Religius yang Bersumber dari Pancasila dalam Sistem Pendidikan Pondok Pesantren dapat Melahirkan Santri yang Memiliki Wawasan Kebangsaan. *Walagri Kebangsaan*, 1(1), 36–42.

- Munif, M. (2020). Strategi Internalisasi Nilai-Nilai Agama Islam kepada Masyarakat melalui Pengajian Jum'at di Kraksaan Probolinggo. *GUYUB: Journal of Community Engagement*, 1(1), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.33650/guyub.v1i1.1253>
- Rahmah, S., & Prasetyo, M. A. M. (2022). Quality Islamic Boarding School Model: Linking the Principles of Teacher Professionalism and Organizational Management. *Al-Hayat: Journal of Islamic Education*, 6(2). <https://doi.org/10.35723/ajie.v6i2.249>
- Rizaldi, M. (2023). Efektivitas Dewan Masyayikh Sebagai Penjamin Mutu Pendidikan Pesantren Berdasarkan Undang-Undang Nomor 18 Tahun 2019 dalam Deradikalisasi Agama di Pesantren. *INTEGRATIA: Journal of Education, Human Development, and Community Engagement*, 1(2), 165–178. <https://doi.org/10.71155/integratia.v1i2.48>
- Rohman, M. A. (2021). Manajemen Peningkatan Pemahaman Islam Moderat Melalui Konsep Pembelajaran Kitab Fathul Qarib Di Pondok Pesantren Arbai Qohhar. *Inisiasi: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam*, 1(1), 16–24.
- Sarid, A., & Levanon, M. (2022). Rethinking the theory of communities of practice in education: Critical reflection and ethical imagination. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 54(10), 1693–1704. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2021.1935234>
- Sulistiyarningsih, R., Eva, N., Qoyyimah, N. R. H., Ar-Robbaniy, N. A., & Andayani, S. (2020). Mengembangkan Kecerdasan Majemuk pada Generasi Milenial Siswa Sekolah Dasar Islam Terpadu (SDIT) Insantama Malang. *GUYUB: Journal of Community Engagement*, 1(3), 157–166. <https://doi.org/10.33650/guyub.v1i3.1563>
- Undang-Undang (UU) Nomor 18 Tahun 2019 Tentang Pesantren, Pub. L. No. LN.2019/NO.191, TLN NO.6406, JDIH.SETNEG.GO.ID : 27 HLM., Undang-Undang (2019).