

Reproducing Ulama through Pesantren-Based Madrasah Curriculum Development

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ABSTRACT

Pesantren exist to reproduce ulama, yet the formalization of madrasah education has raised a real worry that this founding mission may erode once a national curriculum enters the classroom. This study asks whether a formal madrasah can still form ulama, and how. Using a qualitative multi-site case study, it examined two pesantren-based madrasahs with strong classical traditions. Data came from in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document review, and were validated through source and method triangulation, then analyzed through single-site and cross-site analysis. Three findings emerged. Curriculum orientation is deliberately directed at preserving the pesantren's intellectual tradition, its values, and the social competence of religious guidance. Implementation keeps the pesantren curriculum dominant while absorbing the national curriculum selectively, with progress gated by rigorous, tiered evaluation centered on classical texts. The outcomes are stronger student academic quality, deep community trust in graduates, and institutional growth. The study proposes a conceptual model of the ulama-cadre madrasah curriculum. Its implication is that ulama reproduction can be managed as a planned curricular outcome, offering formal madrasahs a workable path to meet national standards without surrendering the substance of pesantren education.

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INTRODUCTION

The pesantren is the oldest indigenous Islamic educational institution in Indonesia, and its founding purpose has always been to deepen religious knowledge, *tafaqquh fi al-din*, and to reproduce ulama who serve as heirs of the prophets (Fajarudin, 2024; Aziz & Ma'arif, 2025). For centuries this mission rested on the study of the kitab kuning, the classical texts transmitted through sorogan, bandongan, halaqah, and mudzakah, with the authority of the kiai as its guarantor (Zulmuqim, 2017; Arif et al., 2023). Ministry of Religious Affairs records show the scale of the tradition, with more than twenty-seven thousand madrasahs now operating nationally and around eighty percent of pesantren and madrasah graduates continuing to higher education (Hasriadi et al., 2023). Yet the same expansion has pulled the institution toward formal schooling, and the corpus that once defined its scholarly identity now competes for time with a state syllabus (Koh, 2017; Stengel, 2025). This tension frames the problem the present study examines.

The shift became structural after Law Number 20 of 2003 on the National Education System required formal recognition built around general and religious subjects, which



pressed many pesantren to run their education through a madrasah teaching two curricula at once (Powa et al., 2023). The reason this matters is that formalization risks displacing the very function that justified the pesantren's existence, turning a house of tafaqquh fi al-din into an ordinary school (Aziz & Ma'arif, 2025). Evidence of the strain is well documented: madrasahs now carry a doubled content load, reduced teaching hours, and parallel national and pesantren assessment demands (Amir, 2021; Murshed, 2025). The concern, in short, is not merely administrative but existential for the tradition. It raises a question that the pesantren community itself finds pressing, namely whether ulama can still be formed inside a formal madrasah.

Recent Scopus-indexed scholarship converges on three themes but stops short of that question. The first theme reads the encounter between state and pesantren curricula as contestation, showing that pesantren absorb formal schooling yet resist standardization by modifying the national curriculum to protect their religious identity (Hanif et al., 2024). The second theme treats integration as a route to competitiveness, arguing that madrasahs can blend traditional and modern education to produce graduates able to compete in a globalized era (Rohman et al., 2023). The third theme approaches the making of scholars directly, analyzing ulama cadre programs through the classic management functions of planning, organizing, implementing, and supervising (Berlian, 2022). Taken together, these studies establish that curriculum integration is contested, achievable, and manageable. What they leave open is whether an ordinary formal madrasah can convert that integration into ulama reproduction.

The gap is therefore specific rather than general. Studies of ulama formation concentrate on dedicated cadre programs or specialized institutions such as Ma'had Aly (Berlian, 2022), while studies of the ordinary Madrasah Tsanawiyah and Madrasah Aliyah under a pesantren frame them mainly through contestation or competitiveness rather than scholarly reproduction (Hanif et al., 2024; Rohman et al., 2023). No study has yet shown how a formal madrasah engineers ulama reproduction as a deliberate curricular outcome. This study addresses that absence through a multi-site case study of two formal madrasahs with strong classical traditions, Madrasah Muallimin Tambakberas Jombang, founded in 1953, and Madrasah Aliyah Mambaus Sholihin Gresik, founded in 1983. Its novelty lies in reframing curriculum development itself as the mechanism of ulama reproduction and in proposing a conceptual model of an ulama-cadre madrasah curriculum.

Building on that gap, the study pursues three explicit aims: to analyze the orientation of curriculum development directed at reproducing ulama, to examine how that curriculum is implemented in practice, and to identify its outcomes at the two sites. The central argument is that ulama reproduction in a formal madrasah is neither accidental nor dependent on a single charismatic figure, but a managed result of a curriculum that keeps the classical core dominant while absorbing the national curriculum selectively. For qualitative inquiry, the focus is interpretive, seeking to understand how actors design, justify, and sustain this arrangement in their own institutional settings. The academic contribution is a curricular model of scholarly reproduction; the practical contribution is a transferable template for madrasahs that must meet national standards without surrendering their scholarly mission. The following section sets out the methodological design used to pursue these aims.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a qualitative approach with a multi-site case study design. The qualitative approach was chosen because the aim was to understand the meanings, processes, and lived practices of curriculum development within their natural institutional settings rather than to measure variables (Tracy, 2025; Birnbaum, 2022). A multi-site design allowed the same phenomenon, the development of a curriculum oriented toward the reproduction of ulama, to be examined across two institutions that share this orientation but differ in

history, institutional structure, and local context, which strengthens the transferability of the findings (Afandi & Sayyi, 2025; Ningtyaz et al., 2025). The two sites were Madrasah Muallimin Tambakberas, within Pondok Pesantren Bahrul Ulum in Jombang, and Madrasah Aliyah Mambaus Sholihin, within Pondok Pesantren Mambaus Sholihin in Suci, Gresik, East Java. Both were selected purposively because they are formal madrasahs embedded in a strong classical pesantren culture and are recognized for preparing graduates who go on to fill religious roles in society.

Data were collected through three techniques so that each source could be checked against the others (Jentoft & Olsen, 2017; Dzwigol, 2022; Ogunkan & Akinpelu, 2025). In-depth interviews explored the philosophy, orientation, and implementation of curriculum development and the outcomes participants perceived; informants were selected purposively and included the kiai and pesantren caretakers, madrasah heads, curriculum developers, senior *ustadz*, alumni, and community figures active in the curriculum process. Participant observation covered learning activities, classical-text study, assessment sessions, and the wider madrasah and pesantren culture. Document review examined curriculum masterplans, subject structures, evaluation instruments, institutional profiles, and graduate records. The researcher served as the key instrument throughout, from setting the focus and choosing informants to gathering and interpreting the data, supported by interview guides, field notebooks, an audio recorder (Ademolu, 2023; Rossiter et al., 2018). The profile of the key informants is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Profile of research informants

Code	Role / position	Institution	Interview date
W1	Head of Madrasah	Madrasah Muallimin Tambakberas	14 October 2024
W2	Pesantren Caretaker and Board of Curriculum	MA Mambaus Sholihin	28 October 2024
W3	Vice Head of Curriculum	Madrasah Muallimin Tambakberas	15 October 2024
W4	Senior <i>Ustadz</i> and Chief Examiner	MA Mambaus Sholihin	29 October 2024
W5	Community figure (district-level religious council)	East Java	12 November 2024

Data were validated through source and method triangulation, comparing accounts from different informants and cross-checking interviews against observation and documents (Hamilton, 2019; Natow, 2019; Jentoft & Olsen, 2017). Analysis then moved through two levels: a single-site analysis that built an account of each madrasah on its own terms, followed by a cross-site analysis that identified the patterns common to both and the features distinctive to each (Winskell et al., 2018; Sechelski & Onwuegbuzie, 2019). Within each level, analysis followed the interactive model of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing with verification, carried out continuously rather than as a final step, and repeated until the data reached saturation. This layered procedure is what allowed the recurring orientations, the shared implementation logic, and the convergent outcomes reported below to be established as cross-site findings rather than as observations tied to a single institution.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

Orientation Toward Ulama Reproduction

At both sites, curriculum development began from one commitment: to protect the pesantren's intellectual heritage while answering the religious needs of the surrounding community. The two goals were never separated. Mastery of the classical tradition was treated as the ground on which graduates would later stand as guides for society, not as learning pursued for its own sake.

Madrasah Muallimin Tambakberas built its orientation on four elements: scholarly learning, the internalization of pesantren values, social competence, and attention to students' readiness to learn. The madrasah set out to produce a cadre of religious teachers who could pass Islamic knowledge on to the wider community, so the social sciences and pedagogical disciplines were given real weight alongside intensive study of the classical subjects. The Head of Madrasah Muallimin put it this way:

"The historic mandate of Muallimin since 1953 has been *tafaqquh fid-din* and the preparation of instructors (*mu'allim*). We do not teach santri to understand classical texts in isolation; we require them to hold the methodology to teach and guide (*kifayah al-ta'lim*). The national curriculum is accommodated as a formal instrument, but the institutional core stays the formation of *mutafaqqih fiddin* cadres who master pedagogical ethics (*adab al-mu'allim*), so their scholarship reaches society directly." (W1, Head of Madrasah Muallimin, 14 October 2024)

Madrasah Aliyah Mambaus Sholihin grounded its orientation in integration, social piety, and *tafaqquh fi al-din*. Its aim was to form students who were academically able and, at the same time, active agents of guidance in society. That aim was operationalized through the triadic graduate profile: *alim* (competent in religious knowledge), *salih* (consistent in spiritual and moral practice), and *kafi* (self-reliant and able to guide the community). The pesantren caretaker stated the foundational position plainly:

"A madrasah inside a pesantren cannot reduce its dignity to chasing diplomas or civil-service exams. The orientation has to produce figures who are *alim* in *turats*, *salih* in character, and *kafi* in solving problems in society. If our graduates only memorize texts but lack the resilience to preach in remote regions or run a religious assembly, that is a failure of education. We structure the curriculum so every santri carries scholarly authority together with real usefulness at the grassroots." (W2, Pesantren Caretaker and Board of Curriculum, MA Mambaus Sholihin, 28 October 2024)

Documentary analysis confirmed that these institutional philosophies are formally codified in the Institutional Operational Curriculum (KOM/KTSP) at both sites. The Madrasah Muallimin Tambakberas Curriculum Masterplan (Doc-MM/02/2024) states the vision as an educational center for *mutafaqqih fiddin* cadres who excel in Islamic classical literacy, model noble character, and hold professional teaching competencies. The Academic Guidelines of MA Mambaus Sholihin (Doc-MS/01/2024, p. 7) set out the *Trilogi Santri* (*alim*, *salih*, *kafi*) as the primary key performance indicator for evaluating both intra-curricular learning and co-curricular boarding routines.

Across the two sites, the same three orientations recur. The first preserves the pesantren's intellectual tradition as the basis for sustained *kitab kuning* literacy. The second carries pesantren values into the everyday learning culture of the madrasah. The third points graduates toward the practical skills of religious guidance, or *dakwah*, that let them serve their communities. None of this was an accidental by-product of meeting state standards. It was the conscious design goal, steering curriculum development toward the reproduction of ulama rather than toward administrative compliance.

Dominant Pesantren Curriculum, Tiered Evaluation

Implementation at both madrasahs followed one structural logic. The pesantren curriculum was embedded within the state-mandated framework so that the pesantren component stayed dominant rather than parallel or peripheral. State subjects were scheduled to meet accreditation requirements and national examinations, while the classical, ulama-forming core held the larger share of credit hours, cognitive load, and institutional attention.

At Madrasah Muallimin, the curriculum kept its classical architecture and fitted the

national subjects around it, adding core pedagogical subjects such as *Ushul al-Tarbiyah* (Foundations of Education), *Nafsiyah al-Ta'lim* (Educational Psychology), and *Thariqah al-Tadris* (Didactics and Teaching Methodology). Evaluation ran through rigid, multi-layered stages, as the vice head of curriculum described:

"We give more than 65 percent of instructional hours to religious and linguistic *turats*. State subjects are grouped into practical modules so they do not crowd out the classical corpus. Our evaluation cannot be cleared by standard multiple-choice testing alone. For promotion from grade 5 to grade 6 [senior high school level], a santri must sit *imtiḥan ḥifḍ al-nadẓm*, memorizing all 1,002 verses of the *Alfiyah Ibn Malik* with random cross-questioning, then read *kitab gundul* aloud in public without vocalization marks, and finally complete *amaliyat al-tadris*, a peer-teaching practicum in Arabic and English. If the pedagogical performance or the grammar is flawed, the santri does not graduate, however high the national-subject scores are." (W3, Vice Head of Curriculum, Madrasah Muallimin, 15 October 2024)

At Madrasah Aliyah Mambaus Sholihin, the structure was organized into three academic streams: Religious Sciences (Keagamaan), Natural Sciences (MIPA), and Social Sciences (IPS). Across all three, the model combined the national curriculum (Ministry of Religious Affairs and Kemendikbudristek) with an intensive local *turats* curriculum. Analysis of the MA Mambaus Sholihin syllabus (Doc-MS/Cur-04) showed that while the Religious stream studies advanced texts such as *Fath al-Wahhab* and *Jam' al-Jawami'*, students in the Science and Social streams are still required to master intermediate classical jurisprudence (*Fath al-Qarib*), hadith (*Bulugh al-Maram*), and Arabic morphology and syntax (*Kailani*, *Amrithi*, and *Alfiyah*).

Evaluation at Mambaus Sholihin rests heavily on the *imtiḥan amaly*, the practical exit examination. The senior evaluation coordinator explained how the layers work:

"The tiered evaluation keeps the screening continuous. Besides the end-of-semester written papers, students face weekly *tasmi'* for *nadẓm* memorization, then open oral testing (*ikhtibar syafahi*) before a board of examiners. The final stage is the *imtiḥan amaly* before graduation, which tests three required domains: public lecture delivery without notes (*khitabah* in Arabic, English, and local dialects), *janaẓah* mortuary management with the accompanying religious rituals, and classical-text defense (*munaqasyah al-ḥutub*). If a student cannot read the assigned page of *Fath al-Mu'in*, or fails the situational *dakwah* scenario, certification is suspended until remedial mastery is verified." (W4, Senior Ustadz and Chief Examiner, MA Mambaus Sholihin, 29 October 2024)

Review of the examination dossiers at both institutions (Doc-MM/Eval-2024; Doc-MS/IA-2024) confirmed standardized rubrics covering phonological accuracy (*makharij al-buruf*), grammatical analysis (*tarkib i'rab*), contextual meaning (*fahm al-ma'na*), and rhetorical delivery in *amaliyat al-tadris*.

The comparative configuration of the two curriculum systems appears in Table 2.

Table 2. Cross-site comparison of curriculum orientation, implementation, and evaluation

Dimension	Madrasah Muallimin Tambakberas, Jombang	Madrasah Aliyah Mambaus Sholihin, Gresik
Year established	1953	1983
Curricular orientation	Scholarly learning; internalization of pesantren values; social and pedagogical competence; developmental readiness	Triadic integration (<i>alim, salib, kafi</i>); social piety; advanced <i>tafaqquh fi al-din</i>
Curricular dominance	Pesantren core (approx. 65–70% of total credit load); national subjects fitted contextually	Pesantren core (approx. 60–65% of credit load); national subjects met for state certification and exams
Distinctive	Classical <i>turats</i> integrated with Islamic	Three streams (Religious, Natural, Social)

Dimension	Madrasah Muallimin Tambakberas, Jombang	Madrasah Aliyah Mambaus Sholihin, Gresik
academic content	pedagogy (<i>Ushul al-Tarbiyah</i> , <i>Thariqah al-Tadris</i> , <i>Dars al-Tarbiyah</i>)	Sciences); all streams required to complete designated <i>turats</i> tiers
Core classical texts (<i>turats</i>)	<i>Alfiyah Ibn Malik</i> (grammar), <i>Fath al-Mu'in</i> (fiqh), <i>Bidayat al-Hidayah</i> (tasawwuf), <i>Jawahir al-Bukhari</i> (hadith), <i>Ghayat al-Wushul</i> (ushul fiqh)	<i>Alfiyah Ibn Malik</i> (grammar), <i>Fath al-Qarib</i> / <i>Fath al-Wahhab</i> (fiqh), <i>Tafsir Jalalain</i> (exegesis), <i>Riyadh al-Shalihin</i> (hadith)
Evaluation components	Semester written exams; 1,002-verse <i>Alfiyah</i> memorization; unvocalized text reading; <i>amaliyat al-tadris</i> (teaching practicum)	Written exams; Qur'anic recitation and memorization; <i>Alfiyah</i> memorization; dual-language exams; <i>imtihan amaly</i> (applied <i>dakwah</i> and rituals)
Promotion and graduation standard	Strict, multi-tiered; no tolerance for failure in core linguistic and jurisprudential competencies	Strict, multi-tiered; mandatory completion of <i>imtihan amaly</i> and a field <i>dakwah</i> assignment

The cross-site pattern is consistent. Both institutions put a strong pesantren intellectual tradition first, add only the national subjects that state recognition requires, and test learning through several layers at each stage. Promotion requirements were strict at both, so a student who advanced had already shown solid academic quality. At the center of the whole arrangement sat the mandatory, sustained study of *turats* texts, the epistemic core that neither madrasah was willing to dilute.

Academic Quality, Community Trust, Institutional Growth

Curriculum development at both sites produced three outcomes that reinforced one another: stronger student academic quality, settled community trust, and organic institutional growth. The academic evidence shows that the emphasis on classical texts did not hold back achievement on broader measures. Tracking of institutional records (Doc-MM/L-2024; Doc-MS/Prest-2024) showed a 100 percent completion rate for the mandatory exit examinations, with more than 88 percent of final-year students at both madrasahs reaching high-tier competence (*jayyid jiddan* or *mumtaʿ*) in the internal oral examinations on classical texts.

Student competence was also validated externally. Between 2022 and 2024, Madrasah Muallimin Tambakberas took 14 regional and national trophies in the National *Musabaqah Qira'atil Kutub* (MQK) and first place in national Arabic debate tournaments. Over the same period, MA Mambaus Sholihin recorded consistent podium finishes in the provincial Madrasah Science Competition (KSM) in mathematics and biology, alongside national Arabic and English speech competitions. The record indicates that mastery of classical texts reinforced general analytical reasoning rather than competing with it.

Community trust translated directly into the absorption of graduates. Instead of meeting diploma friction, alumni from both madrasahs were recruited into religious and community leadership roles on a continuing basis. A local religious figure who heads a community mosque network observed:

"Whenever our foundation needs a madrasah teacher or a leader for a *majelis taklim*, we look first to graduates from Muallimin Tambakberas or Mambaus Sholihin. Their classical footing is not in doubt; they can read standard commentaries without hesitation, their rulings stay within moderate traditions, and, just as important, their character and their readiness to serve without a commercial motive set them apart. The community trusts their integrity without needing to ask." (W5, Community Leader and District MUI Head, Gresik, 12 November 2024)

This trust is mirrored in the alumni deployment records of MA Mambaus Sholihin (Doc-MS/Alum-2023/2024). Under the *Khadam Ma'had* program, between 45 and 60 senior graduates are dispatched each year to community development and religious teaching assignments in outer-island regions, including East Nusa Tenggara, South Kalimantan, and

Papua.

Programmatic success also drove institutional expansion. Alongside continuous modernization of the central campuses, including dedicated digital-*turats* libraries and language laboratories, Mambaus Sholihin grew into a network of eight official branch pesantren across Java and the outer provinces: Mambaus Sholihin 2 (Blitar, East Java), 3 (Benjeng, Gresik), 4 (Balongpanggang, Gresik), 5 (Kudus, Central Java), 6 (Bintan, Riau Islands), 7 (Cianjur, West Java), 8 (Lampung, Sumatra), and 9 (Banyuwangi, East Java). Institutional auditing confirmed that all eight branches replicate the same curriculum matrix, text selection, and tiered evaluation standards set by the mother institution.

Read together, these findings establish that graduates of both madrasahs acquired the cognitive grounding, the normative character, and the social and pedagogical competence expected of religious scholars. Widening public trust kept enrollment rising, so that the academic quality of graduates, the trust of the surrounding community, and the growth of the institution moved together rather than in isolation. Across the three themes, the orientation, the implementation, and the outcomes converge on a single pattern: at both sites, the formation of ulama is treated as a deliberate object of curriculum work rather than a hoped-for side effect.

Discussion

The three themes do not carry equal analytical weight. The orientation theme establishes what the two madrasahs intend, and the outcome theme records what they achieve, but the implementation theme is where the central contribution lies, because it explains how the reproduction of ulama actually works inside a formal school. Table 3 sets out this relative weighting before the discussion turns to each element in turn.

Table 3. Relative significance of the three themes in the study's argument

Theme	Core finding	Role in the argument	Significance
Orientation toward ulama reproduction	Curriculum is intentionally designed to preserve the pesantren's intellectual tradition, its values, and <i>dakwah</i> competence	States the intent	Foundational
Dominant pesantren curriculum, tiered evaluation	The classical core stays structurally dominant over national subjects and is gate-kept by rigorous, multi-layered evaluation, above all the <i>imtibhan amaly</i>	Explains the mechanism	Central
Academic quality, community trust, institutional growth	Graduates gain scholarly, moral, and social competence, and community trust and institutional expansion follow	Confirms the result	Corroborating

The three themes do not carry equal analytical weight. The orientation theme establishes what the two madrasahs intend, and the outcome theme records what they achieve, but the implementation theme is where the study's central contribution lies, because it explains how reproduction of ulama actually works inside a formal school. Both madrasahs keep the classical *turats* curriculum structurally dominant, giving it the larger share of instructional time and cognitive weight, while national subjects are fitted around it to satisfy state recognition rather than to reshape the institutional core. That dominance is then protected by a tiered evaluation regime in which memorization, unvocalized text reading, and applied examinations such as the *imtibhan amaly* act as gates that a student cannot pass on the strength of national-subject scores alone. A protected classical core joined to rigorous, competence-based screening is what allows scholarly authority to pass down within a formal structure. This mechanism is the empirical basis for the model this study proposes, the ulama-cadre madrasah curriculum, which the discussion below situates against curriculum theory and prior work on pesantren education.

The orientation found at both sites confirms that curriculum decisions are never value-free; they carry the philosophical commitments and social expectations of the

community that makes them (Hordern et al., 2021; Reda & Reid, 2020). Classical curriculum theory holds that development should begin from a diagnosis of needs and move through the formulation of objectives, the selection of content, and the assessment of results, all resting on philosophical, psychological, and socio-cultural foundations (Hordern et al., 2021; Thorburn, 2018). Both madrasahs follow this logic, but they anchor it in a religious mandate to deepen knowledge of God and to guide the community, and in the sociological expectation that a pesantren graduate will one day hold religious authority. Compared with studies that read curriculum integration mainly as policy compliance (Ayanwale et al., 2025; Kitagawa et al., 2016), the present case shows orientation working the other way around: the state framework is absorbed into a pre-existing scholarly mission rather than the mission bending to the state.

This reading aligns with work on cultural and social reproduction in pesantren, where the authority of the kiai and the values of the tradition are transmitted to santri as habitus (Fathurrohman & Arifi, 2024). Curriculum orientation, on this view, is the deliberate management of that reproductive process. It also fits the picture of curriculum as contested ground, where the state pursues standardization while the pesantren defends its scholarly purpose (Hos & Kaplan-Wolff, 2020; Hughes & Lewis, 2020). What the two sites add is that the noble values and social piety embedded in the orientation are not treated as character-education add-ons; they are part of the ulama-forming design itself, echoing findings that pesantren character strategies shape the disposition of santri through habituation and example (Anwar et al., 2023).

The pairing of a dominant pesantren curriculum with a selective national one matches the adaptive pattern reported for Indonesian madrasahs, where recent work finds religious and national content integrated contextually, with pesantren-based models preferred for proportionate integration (Nurcendani & Ratnasari, 2020). The important nuance at both sites is that integration is calibrated so the classical, ulama-forming component stays dominant rather than merely balanced. Compared with the more even integration described in that literature, these two madrasahs deliberately tilt the balance toward the *turats*, and they defend that tilt through assessment. The sustained study of classical texts sits at the center of implementation, consistent with accounts of the kitab kuning as the strategic core of pesantren learning (Anwar et al., 2023) and with evidence that reading methods remain dynamic, combining sorogan and bandongan with newer accelerated modes (Arif et al., 2023). This calibrated blending of the classical corpus with selected national content also echoes documented efforts to integrate the national curriculum with a pesantren curriculum at the subject level (Nurcendani & Ratnasari, 2020).

The tiered evaluation regime is where this study departs most clearly from prior work. Existing critiques note that madrasah assessment still leans on cognitive and memorization-based testing and neglects affective, spiritual, and social domains (Fatmawati, 2025; Warsah, 2022). Set against that critique, the *imtihan amaly*, the public text defense, and the teaching practicum represent a competence-based model in which a student cannot graduate on strong national-subject scores alone. Assessment here is not a formality appended to instruction; it is the gate that guarantees the classical core is actually mastered, which is what makes the whole arrangement a working mechanism of reproduction rather than a statement of intent.

The gains in academic quality, community trust, and institutional development are consistent with research linking dual-curriculum, madrasah-based management to strong graduates and high stakeholder trust (Badrun, 2024). The emphasis on values and social piety at both sites also reflects how pesantren-based schooling habituates social character rather than treating it as an add-on (Anwar et al., 2023). Community trust matters most for ulama reproduction, since it is the strategic asset that a program earns by joining religious values to social skill (Arif et al., 2023). At both sites, graduates visibly took up religious roles, enrollment rose, and legitimacy accumulated. Compared with studies that treat trust as a general management outcome, the present case shows trust functioning as a specific signal

that the institution can form ulama, which then feeds back into demand. The expansion of Mambaus Sholihin into a network of branch pesantren illustrates how alumni networks and the ethic of *khidmah* carry scholarly authority across regions (Fathurrohman & Arifi, 2024; Halid, 2024), supporting the view that curriculum development is at once an academic, a social, and an institutional project (Arif et al., 2023).

Read as a whole, the three themes form a single connected model rather than three separate results. Orientation sets the intent, implementation supplies the mechanism, and outcomes both confirm the result and loop back to sustain the intent. Figure 1 presents this synthesis.

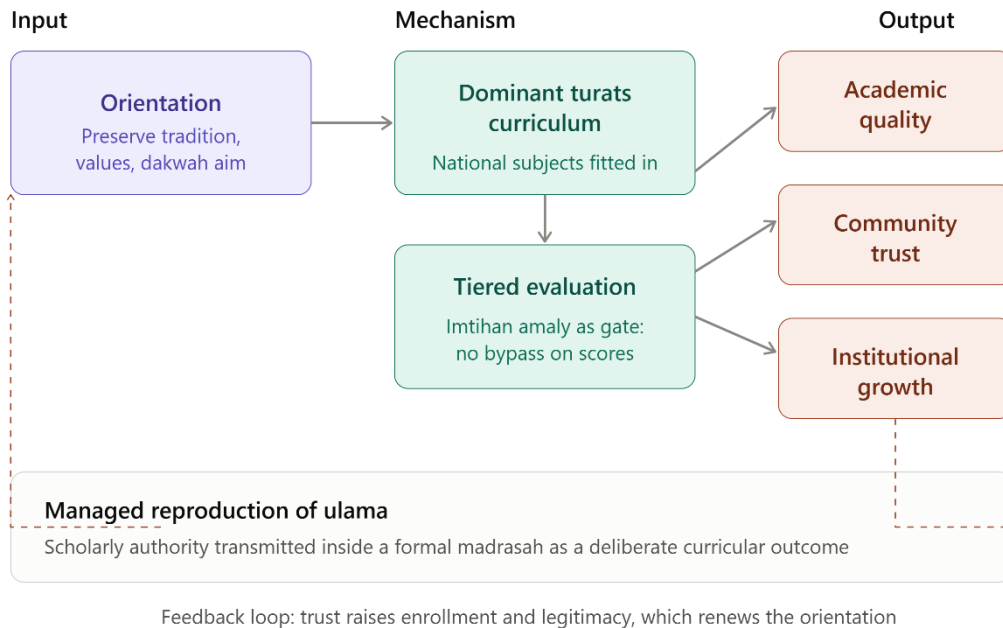


Figure 1. Synthesis model of the ulama-cadre madrasah curriculum

Figure 1 reads the three themes as one connected system. Orientation supplies the intent, the dominant *turats* curriculum and its tiered evaluation form the mechanism that converts intent into competence, and the three outcomes confirm the result. The dashed return path is the part that makes the model more than a linear pipeline: community trust raises enrollment and institutional legitimacy, which in turn renews the orientation at the input stage. This is why the same two madrasahs have sustained ulama formation across decades rather than producing a single strong cohort and fading.

The specific contribution of this study to Islamic education management is a shift in how ulama reproduction is understood. Prior work has largely treated the formation of scholars as the province of specialized institutions such as Ma'had Aly or dedicated ulama-cadre programs (Halid, 2024; Napitupulu et al., 2023), or has framed the ordinary pesantren-based madrasah mainly as a site of policy compliance and quality assurance (Badrin, 2024; Ihsan et al., 2021; Laila et al., 2025). Set against that literature, the present cases show something different. The reproduction of ulama here is neither an accident of a strong local kiai nor a by-product of general good management. It is a designed and managed curricular outcome, engineered through the deliberate dominance of the classical core, a calibrated absorption of the national curriculum, and an evaluation regime that certifies scholarly readiness before it certifies anything else. Compared with the assessment practices criticized in earlier studies for stopping at cognition and memorization (Fatmawati, 2025; Warsah, 2022), the model formalizes affective, spiritual, and social competence as graduation gates, which is what turns an intention into a reproducible result.

Framed for management theory, the finding reframes the madrasah curriculum as an instrument of institutional continuity rather than only of instruction. What Figure 1 captures is a governance design in which orientation, implementation, and outcome are aligned so tightly that scholarly authority is renewed each cycle rather than depending on any single figure. For practice, this offers other formal madrasahs inside pesantren a transferable template: protect the classical core structurally, integrate the national curriculum selectively, and gate graduation on demonstrated competence. The study therefore contributes a conceptual model, the ulama-cadre madrasah curriculum, that treats the making of scholars as something an institution can plan for and manage, not merely hope for. The claim is bounded, since it rests on two reputable East Javanese madrasahs with deep classical traditions and charismatic leadership, and its transferability to *salaf* or *muadalah* settings, and its resilience under the Merdeka Curriculum and digital transformation, remain open questions for later, ideally longitudinal, research.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to analyze the orientation of curriculum development aimed at reproducing ulama, to examine how that curriculum is implemented, and to identify its outcomes across two pesantren-based madrasahs. The three aims were met: orientation is deliberately directed at preserving the classical intellectual tradition, transmitting pesantren values, and building the social competence of religious guidance; implementation keeps the pesantren curriculum dominant while absorbing the national curriculum selectively and gating progress through rigorous, tiered evaluation; and the outcomes are stronger academic quality, deep community trust, and institutional growth. Several limitations qualify these findings. The study rests on two reputable East Javanese madrasahs with deep classical roots and charismatic leadership, so its qualitative, multi-site design supports analytical rather than statistical generalization. Future research should test the model in *salaf* and *muadalah* settings, examine how the Merdeka Curriculum and digital transformation reshape ulama formation, and trace graduates longitudinally to assess the long-term scholarly and social effects of this curricular design.

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