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## The Implementation of the Sorogan Method for Islamic Boarding School Students in Studying Kitab Kuning

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### *Abstract*

*This study investigates the quality of santri's (students) literacy of Kitab Kuning through the Sorogan method. To collect the data, observation was conducted in twenty pesantren (Islamic Boarding Schools) in West Java and in-depth interviews with Kiai, santri, alumni, and some local societies around the pesantren. The data collected were then analyzed with a descriptive narrative. This study found that the santri's literacy level to understand Kitab Kuning decreased. It was aligned with the change of teaching methods from the Sorogan to the classical method. This issue negatively impacted the transferring knowledge process, such as misconceptions about understanding Islamic law.*

*Keywords: Sorogan Method; Santri's Literacy; Kitab Kuning; Pesantren*

## A. Introduction

In the *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) tradition, understanding the *Kitab Kuning* (Yellow Book) is mandatory for *santri* (students) to study Islamic law after the Qur'an and Hadith. Dhofier (1999) described the main terms in *pesantren*; the classical Islamic books (*Kitab Kuning* or Yellow Book in Arabic script), the student or follower within a *pesantren* (*santri*), and the person who delivers sermons on religious topics (in this case, is Islam) to an assembly of people (preacher), and the principal of *pesantren* (*Kiai* or '*Ulama*'). Furthermore, *Kitab Kuning* contains various kinds of Islamic knowledge, such as Islamic ethic (*akhlak*), the principles of Islamic jurisprudence (*Fiqh*), the science of Islamic mysticism (*tassawuf*), *hadith studies*, *tafsir*, *history*, *muamalah*, and many more.

The method of learning *Kitab Kuning* used by the preacher or *Kiai* then significantly influences *santri's* literacy in reading the *Kitab Kuning* appropriately. Especially in Indonesia, most *pesantren* use two methods to learn *Kitab Kuning*: *Bandongan* and *Sorogan*. The *Bandongan* method is reading *Kitab Kuning* by way of the preacher or *Kiai* presenting the contents or text of the book to a group of *santri* in a class (Fakhrurrazi, F., & Sebgag, 2020). Meanwhile, the *Sorogan* method is when *santri* face the *Kiai* individually to present their readings to the *Kiai* (Afif, 2019), and they get direct supervision from *Kiai* if there are mistakes (Muizzuddin, dkk., 2019). Therefore, the *Sorogan* method is one of the frequent methods used by *pesantren* and is considered effective (Shokhibul Fakhor, 2019)

Moreover, *santri* can remind each other of the words they have read in the book during deliberations, which also helps *santri* who struggle to understand *Kitab Kuning*. *Santri* can also help one another understand and become stronger at embodying each sentence and text in *Kitab Kuning*. Finally, *santri* can debate the direction and purpose of *Kitab Kuning's* text.

*Deliberations* amongst groups of *pesantren* in Indonesia are essential for learning religious knowledge because these groups represent the Muslim community. In this case, *bahtsul masail* was conducted by going over the issues raised in the deliberation forum, which comprised representatives from *pesantren*. Following responses to the issues raised, there was a deliberation of problem-solving using a variety of *Kitab Kuning* as the deliberation material, presented using a reference to the *Kitab Kuning mu'tabaroh* as a theological argument that supports or undermines the proposed answer.

These are the previous studies of the *Sorogan* method. Muizzuddin, Juhji, and Hasbusllah (2019) researched the comparison of the *Sorogan* and *Bandongan* methods with sixty participants in *pesantren* of Nurul Hidayah Banten. The study revealed a positive

correlation between the *Sorogan* method and *santri*'s understanding of reading *Kitab Kuning*. Thus, the *sorogan* method is considered to increase the ability of *santri*'s literacy in *Kitab Kuning*. Similarly, Afif (2019) found that implementing the *Sorogan* method in *pesantren* of Tarbiyatun Nasyi'in could train *santri* to be patient, diligent, and active in learning. On the other hand, Wakit (2016) reported that the *Sorogan* method was used to learn math. Thus, the *Sorogan* method could increase the ability to read, understand, and explain the content of *Kitab Kuning* appropriately.

As a religious institution, learning *Kitab Kuning* is a must and always requires *santri* to understand the *Kitab Kuning* in accordance with *Kiai*'s explanation. Hence, *santri*'s literacy in *Kitab Kuning* is essential to understanding either the implied or explicit meaning of *Kitab Kuning*. However, many senior *santri* and those who have graduated from *pesantren* cannot read *Kitab Kuning* appropriately. It is because they tend to use another method rather than *Sorogan*.

Research presentations that strengthen this research provide solutions to the problem of weak *pesantren* in mastering the *Kitab Kuning*. In fact, *pesantren* contribute to providing intelligence with an understanding of the *Kitab Kuning* texts. It will be assisted by effective methods that have been going on for a long time but are fading in some *pesantren* today. For this reason, this research strengthens the *Sorogan* method, which is important to continue and not be abandoned along with the times. In this case, the only way to improve *santri*'s reading skills is for teachers to focus on really looking ahead to *santri*, whether wrong or right and then immediately give input to the wrong and right problems, as researched by Muizudin about effective methods. This method is also vital in supporting the ability to read and understand the *Kitab Kuning* of *santri*, and this method is very effective, especially when *santri* read and understand the *Kitab Kuning* in front of the teacher. *Santri* read what has been read by the teacher, and this activity is carried out continuously so that *santri* are at the level of understanding of the text and describing the context. In addition, the *santri* comes in front of the teacher and reads what the teacher has read, then reads it again until he understands.

Furthermore, most graduated *santri* no longer use *Kitab Kuning* as their reference to understand Islam. Thus, this study investigates the quality of *santri*'s literacy of *Kitab Kuning* through the *Sorogan* method. Then, the research question is how the *Sorogan* method implementation can significantly affect *santri*'s literacy. Based on the phenomenon discussed in the previous studies, it is interesting to do a broader study about this issue in different contexts.

This study involved twenty participants with the same ideological and emotional connection as the researchers. The same ideology between the *santri* and the *pesantren* community is with the same name of God, namely Allah SWT, and the same way of worship. In

comparison, the emotional bond unites individuals and creates a sense of kinship between *santri*. In this study, one author is an alumnus of a boarding school, a *Kitab Kuning* teacher at several traditional *pesantren*, and a curriculum development team at these *pesantren*, such as PP Babakan Ciwaringin, Arjawinangun, Kempek, Balerante, and Buntet. The author also often conducted religious discussions with several alumni and *Kiai* of the *pesantren*, doing actual community problem-solving. Thus, this study involved *Kiai*, *santri*, graduated *santri*, and local societies which benefit from the alumni from *pesantren*. All participants came from several *pesantren* in West Java, Indonesia (i.e., Daruttauhid Arjawinangun, Rodhotut Tholibin Babakan Ciwaringin, Salafiyah Kempek, Khatulistiwa Kempek, Assalafiyah Bode Lor, Darul 'Ulum Assyar'yyah Bode Lor, Darul Ulum Bunder Susukan, Gedongan, Benda Kerep, Madinaturosul Babakan Ciwaringin, Buntet, and Nurul Iman GSI). These *pesantren* have similarities in learning the *Kitab Kuning* because of the same lineage and *sanad*, Hadhrotusyaikh KH. Hasyim Asy'ari and KH. Choli Bangkalan.

This research was a type of field research, which was qualitative. Data collection was carried out in an in-depth interview, observation, and focused discussion. The observation was conducted from early 2019 to 2020 with *santri* and graduated *santri* (i.e., alumni). Other than that, data were collected through semi-structured interview techniques with *Kiai* and the preachers teaching *Kitab Kuning* for several years. To enrich the data, a small discussion was conducted with some alumni who taught in their *pesantren*. The researchers also used a semi-structured interview technique to make the situation more comfortable when conducting the interviews. The following are discussed:

1. The issue of implementing the *Sorogan* method in *Kitab Kuning*
2. The factors causing the low *santri's* literacy towards *Kitab Kuning*
3. The cause of the abandonment of the *Sorogan* method in learning *Kitab Kuning*
4. The probability of *pesantren* with charismatic leadership of *Kiai* willing to re-apply the *Sorogan* method in the *pesantren*

Likewise, the discussion was carried out with the alumni who had returned to their hometown and became holders of *pesantren* and institutions schools. This discussion was conducted to seek a similar perspective about the urgency and function of the *Sorogan* method to shape *santri* and alumni of *pesantren* to have good literacy in reading *Kitab Kuning*.

The data collected were then analyzed with narrative analysis. Some data were presented with a table to have a clear explanation. The result data focused on the effectiveness

of implementing the *Sorogan* method in shaping *santri*'s literacy of *Kitab Kuning*. Furthermore, the data verification was conducted to reveal the theory's truth in implementing the *Sorogan* method in learning classical books or *Kitab Kuning* in traditional *pesantren* and was to hypothetically test the effectiveness of implementing the *Sorogan* method on the literacy of traditional *pesantren*'s *santri*. Furthermore, the data were discussed in *content analysis*. This content analysis revealed that *santri* was involved with various activities, *Kiai* and *pesantren*, and *santri* with various elements allow for wider causes and effects such as family and society. Thus, this research strongly supports *Sorogan*-based learning, especially in studying the *Kitab Kuning* more intensively. In addition, this research is relevant to the current situation with the various dynamics that occur in religious life. Besides, the minimal increase in *santri* with various studies of the *Kitab Kuning* needs to be re-invigorated so that the causes of the decline in literacy are easily known comprehensively. Therefore, the discussion was then carried out by elaborating the data between the theoretical and practical results related to the *Sorogan* method and *santri* literacy.

## B. Discussion

### 1. Literature Review

#### a. *Sorogan* as a Method for Learning *Kitab Kuning*

The local wisdom value in *Pesantren* is one of the main aspects of developing *santri*'s characteristics to be more independent and responsible, particularly in the learning process guided by *Kiai* or preachers (Tolchah, M., & Mu'ammara, 2019). *Pesantren* is a local education, but for international, it is even a national character and moral fortress that must be planted as life values, forming an international scale network. *Pesantren* is also a typical education of the Indonesian nation; these *pesantren* are widely available in various remote areas, which have minimal progress but become a separate value for the Indonesian nation. Their presence is a moral bulwark of the nation's generation. In addition, as the only education that applies generational morality with national character, *pesantren* contribute to instilling the mutual love values among human beings and respecting any differences. In the *pesantren* environment, the learning process is conducted at a mosque or dormitory terrace, where the *Kiai* or preacher teaches the *santri* to recite and explain the *Kitab Kuning*. In the past, *Kitab Kuning* was generally written or printed on yellow paper, so it was called *Kitab Kuning* or Yellow Book (Wiryoatmoko, 2017).

The activity in the learning process in *pesantren* is led by *Kiai*, or preacher, who uses *Sorogan* and *Bandongan* methods. Meanwhile, the learning method is defined as the tool used to convey the material to the students (Fadli, M. R., Sudrajat, A., Aman, & Amboro, 2021). In this context, the *Sorogan* method is discussed. Wekke (2015) explained that *the Sorogan method is individual learning in which the santri try to learn by themselves and then continue interacting with their Kiai or preacher to understand the studied material better*. Meanwhile, Rinaningsih, Kadarohman, & Firman (2019) described the *Sorogan* method as the most challenging in the traditional system of Islamic education because this system requires patience, perseverance, obedience, and discipline of *santri*. Specifically, Dhofier (1987) agreed that the *Sorogan* method forces *santri* to learn individually. He explained that *santri* faces *Kiai* to read and explain what has been learned during learning individually. The explanation contains the meaning in *Kitab Kuning* word by word and sentence by sentence.

It is also important to note that the *Sorogan* method allows the *santri* to do individual learning before facing *Kiai* to test their literacy in *Kitab Kuning*. When the *santri* faces the *Kiai* to read and explain word by word and sentence by sentence, *Kiai* can give feedback or comments directly about the *santri's* literacy in *Kitab Kuning*. In addition, the *santri* are allowed to select which book (*Kitab*) based on their desire; however, they are still under the guidance of *Kiai* or the preacher (Dhofier, 1987). In other words, while a *santri* is doing *nyorog* or facing the *Kiai* or preacher, *Kiai* or preacher will teach some parts of the studied book. During the learning process, a *santri* repeatedly imitates what *Kiai* or the preacher says (Sauri, S., Rahmat, A. S., Nursyamsiah, N., & Nursaidah 2016).

In other cases, *Kiai* or preachers read *Kitab Kuning* in the Arabic language, and then *santri* will translate it into *santri's* books in the *santri's* mother tongue, for instance, Javanese or Sundanese. Thus, *santri* will repeat and translate accurately as explained they *Kiai* or the preacher (Sauri et al., 2016). By this method, Fakhurrazi & Sebgag (2020) stated that it allows a preacher to supervise, assess, and guide them intensely. Further, it is easier to know the *santri's* ability to understand *Kitab Kuning*. In contrast, some argue that the *Sorogan* method tends to be monotonous, indoctrinated, teacher-centered, text-oriented, and top-down. However, this method has the authenticity of the material/substance of Islamic values from one generation to another (Ma'Arif, 2018). In a different context, Fadli et al. (2021) reported that *the Sorogan method improved santri's understanding of history and literacy rather than conventional learning*. In short,

this method is effective for novice *santri* who want to be a preacher. Besides that, preachers or *Kiai* can genuinely supervise and guide the *santri* in mastering the Arabic language or other books. M. Dawam Rahardjo (1985) stated

”.....The **santri face the preacher** or *Kiai* in turn and bring the *Kitab Kuning* they will study; the preacher or *Kiai* reads the Arabic lesson sentence by sentence, then translate and explains it. *Santri* listens and analyzes by giving notes or marks in their books to validate that the teacher or *Kiai* has given the knowledge.

Moreover, the age of this method is estimated to be older than the age of the *pesantren* itself. Based on Arifin’s perspective, the *Sorogan* method has proven effective at the earliest stage of creating skilled *santri* reading classical books. Therefore, implementing the *Sorogan* method enables *Kiai* or preacher as an educator to understand each *santri*’s individuality and intellectual dynamics from an early age.

#### **b. Santri’s Literacy in Kitab Kuning**

Ironically, children who cannot read and write need motivation and improvement of learners to live fully in the world; here, education is important, involving welfare and profit, and learners are urged to live together. Alfin Toffler stated that human development experienced a characteristic wave; the most felt wave today is the 1970s. Its development promoted a powerful flow of information, and human underdevelopment is like being in a period of illiteracy. Humans also experience blindness in every action in obtaining information.

Commonly, literacy might be understood as an ability to read and write. In fact, literacy has a broader meaning, which actually involves a set of skills and social practices (Zutas, 2017). Further, Gamble and Easingwood asserted that literacy is a dynamic that transcends the basic expertise of reading and writing skills. Meanwhile, White & Cooper (2015) remarked that literacy could not be separated by text, language, situation, meaning, practice, social institution, academic performance, and unofficial learning. It aligns with *pesantren* as a formal education institution that provides qualified literacy to *santri* through book teaching or religious practices (Carvalho, 2011).

In the Indonesian context, it is common to know that *Kitab Kuning* is one of the parts of tradition in *pesantren*. *Kitab Kuning* is also an identity of *pesantren* that distinguishes it from the other educational institutions. In other words, *pesantren* cannot be called a *pesantren* if they do not include *Kitab Kuning* as the main learning (Chaeru Nugraha, T., & Amalia, 2017). Further, the position of *Kitab Kuning* is essential

to be used as textbooks, reference, and curriculum in the *pesantren* education system (Chaeru Nugraha, T., & Amalia 2017).

Equally important, the increases in *santri* literacy will positively affect the development of academics in *pesantren*. Firstly, the increases in *santri's* literacy can improve their quality in terms of information literacy. Secondly, literacy enables *santri* to tell the truth on a broader scale. Thirdly, radicalism indoctrination can be prevented because the *santri* have religious knowledge and broader insight. Furthermore, several elements must be developed to strengthen literacy culture in *pesantren*, such as the library's development, books collections, and reading and writing habits among *santri* (Maskur, 2019). In addition, *pesantren* of Lubbul Labib have implemented *santri's* literacy. They realize that literacy culture is essential to develop *santri's* critical and creative thinking ability and respond to various internal or external phenomena. Undoubtedly, they use *Kitab Kuning* and other Islamic *Kitab Kuning* as the main references (Baharun, H., & Rizqiyah, 2020).

### c. Traditional *Pesantren* in Indonesia Context

*Pesantren* is a tradition of educational institutions that have been embedded among Muslims. The term *pesantren* is similar to Islamic educational institutions in Southeast Asia, particularly Indonesia. For instance, in Aceh, it is known as *dayah*; in Minangkabau, it is called *Surau*; in Java, it is called *pesantren*; in Malaysia, it is called *Pondok*; in Southern Thailand, it is called *pho no* (Ridhwan, Nurdin, A., & Samad 2018).

*Pesantren* was born as a religious response in the local community, which aims to create individuals who understand Islamic religious knowledge as a way of life (*tafaqquh di al-din*) by emphasizing ethics and morals (*akhlaq karimah*) in society (Hanafi et al., 2021). Furthermore, Patriadi, Bakar, & Hamat (2015) defined *pesantren* as consistently preserving what has been good in tradition (*alhumafazah ala l qodi sholih*) in terms of the learning system, infrastructure, and management.

Suud, Toriqul Chaer, & Setiawan (2020) also emphasized that the *pesantren* teach various of Islamic knowledge, such as *Fiqh, Ushul Fiqh, Tauhid, Tasawuf, Mantiq, Bayan, Nahu, Saraf, Tafsir, Qaidah fiqh, Balagah, Faraid, Arudth, Ilmu Falak, Ilmu Hadist, Hadist* and *Kurma*. Besides that, traditional *pesantren* also teach and practice the classical Islamic books without being interfered with by profane sciences or knowledge (Sakai, M., & Isbah, 2014). The importance of traditional *pesantren* as educational institutions have the main function not merely as an agent of social changes,



economics, and culture but also as the spread of Islamic tradition. For instance, they include the transmission and transfer of Islamic knowledge throughout history by scholars (i.e., *Kiai* or '*Ulama*'), keeping Islamic tradition from classical books written over centuries, and regeneration of '*Ulama* and future leaders for society (Bustamam-Ahmad, 2015).

In traditional *pesantren* education, *Kitab Kuning* or classical Islamic books must be studied, understood, and memorized by all *santri*. H. Fadli & Ramadhan (2016) mentioned that traditional *pesantren* have certain characteristics than modern *pesantren*. First, traditional *pesantren* preserve the value of education with the traditional teaching method. Second, the role of *Kiai* and *santri* is not only in the scope of *pesantren* but also in socializing and contributing to surrounding societies. In line with that, Nurhayati & Nurhidayah (2019) agreed that the way of life in *pesantren* is still thick with cultural traditions with hierarchical communication between *santri* and *Kiai* or preachers and their students.

#### d. The History of Kitab Kuning

*Kitab Kuning* is an Arabic book written on yellow paper. *Kitab Kuning* terms are used in Indonesia, especially in Java, as one of the traditional *pesantren* identities and to distinguish other books written on white paper (Mughits, 2008). At the end of the 20s century, according to Martin (1999), the number of *Kitab Kuning* spread among *pesantren* of Java and Madura reached 900 titles, with the percentages 20% of *Fiqh*, 17% of *ushuluddin*, 12% of Arabic language (*al-Nahw, Sharf, Balaghah*), 8% of *hadith*, 7% of *tasawwuf*, 6% of *akhlaq*, 5% of prayer guidance and *dzikir*, and 6% of the creation of praise to the Prophet Muhammad (*qisās al-anbiyāʾ, mawlid, ma-nāqib*).

Since the public's interest in studying in *pesantren* is increasing, *Kitab Kuning* has become familiar, especially because all aspects of *Kitab Kuning* are conveyed through the religion assembly (i.e., *Majlis taklim*), which is led by *Kiai* or preachers either at school or mosque flexibly. In the last decades, certain graduated Muslims translated *Kitab Kuning* into Indonesian so that the public can read and understand *Kitab Kuning* without entering *pesantren*. Since then, the teaching of classical *Kitab Kuning* continues and culturally has become a special feature in *pesantren*. The teaching of *Kitab Kuning* has also increased and brought their characteristics and certain value systems (Abuddin Nata, 2012).

Moreover, even though the majority of *pesantren* have been included in general knowledge materials within their educational system and teaching, the teaching of *Kitab*

*Kuning* is still preserved. It aims to maintain the primary purpose of the *pesantren* itself, which is to educate *santri* to be preachers or *'ulama* in the future (Soebahar, 2013). Through the tradition of *Kitab Kuning*, *Kiai* has succeeded in coloring the diversity of religious life in social life. In this respect, the teaching of *ahl sunnah wa al-jama'ah* among Muslims has a huge influence. It is proven using *Asy'ariyah's* understanding in the field of theology, the use of *As-Shafi'i* ideology in the field of *Fiqh*, and the use of *tasawuf al-Ghazali* and Imam al-Junaid in the field of Islamic *tasawuf*. The field of *Sufism* occurred because of the influence of the tradition of reading the *Kitab Kuning* by *Kiai* in *pesantren* (Abuddin Nata, 2012).

## 2. Results

### a. Santri vs. Ordinary Student

*Santri* is an Islamic religious student in *Pondok pesantren* who lives with the *Kiai*, while ordinary students study in public schools. In addition, *santri* is students in the *pesantren* environment; they always study with the *Kiai*, imitate what the *Kiai* does, carry out routine worship and Qur'an activities, and conduct religious discussions by taking various references to the Yellow Book. Meanwhile, ordinary students only study in the school environment to receive an education. These students go from home to school; after finishing studying, students will return to their respective homes.

This study showed that *santri* and graduated *santri* in traditional *pesantren* were less able to read the text of *Kitab Kuning*. Twenty stakeholders of traditional *pesantren* (Syekh al-Ma'had) with a good reputation admitted that there had been a diminishing in the *santri's* ability to read *Kitab Kuning*. If so, it seems like the capability of a graduated *santri* was the same as a graduated ordinary student who did not study *Kitab Kuning* at school. These situations worried traditional *pesantren* stakeholders about the future of graduated *santri*. Another thing is that some *pesantren* no longer use the *Sorogan* method as their method yet use other methods, such as *Bandongan*. In other words, if *santri* cannot read *Kitab Kuning*, it will not be easy to learn, develop, and re-teach what has been learned in *pesantren*, especially content knowledge in the classical books (*i.e.*, *Kitab Kuning*).

### b. Capable of Understanding Value and Explanation of Kitab Kuning

One of the preachers in *pesantren* of Gedongan recalled:

“KH. A. Yasin and others Kiai in certain times, especially from maghrib prayer to Isya prayer, teach Kitab Kuning to santri with Sorogan method consistently. As a result, santri and graduates of pesantren of Gedongan can truly be accounted for. The vast majority of santri could read Kitab Kuning in accordance with the rules of *nahwu-shorof (i’rob)* and understand the meaning and the explanation of Kitab Kuning. Apart from this, when they return hometown, they also teach the Yellow Books in their respective regions.”

From the explanation above, the most important thing is that *Kiai* must provide time for *santri* to read *Kitab Kuning* deeply. The activities included *santri* reading *Kitab Kuning* individually and *Kiai* listening to their reading to be easier to evaluate and develop *santri*'s literacy measurably. In this respect, the way *santri* read the *Kitab Kuning* can be in accordance with the *nahwu shorof* or *i’rob* so that they can be accounted for and guaranteed scientific literacy.

Data on the ability of *santri* to write and read the *Kitab Kuning* were seen from the graduates of *pesantren santri* who are successful in community life, for example, 50% becoming leaders, 30% becoming entrepreneurs, and 20% becoming farmers. The ability of *santri* with this method also contributes to producing a reliable cadre of scholars, in which *santri* can overcome various problems and dynamics of community life. *Santri*, who passes the *Kitab Kuning*, will also get community support for various problems faced and learn from them, while *santri*, who does not master the *Kitab Kuning*, only gets support as a dhikr reader.

### c. Sorogan Method as an Essential and the Basic Method

The *Sorogan* method is important because this method was considered effective in making *santri* easier and understanding *Kitab Kuning*. Meanwhile, the fundamental issue in learning *Kitab Kuning* is using the *Bandongan* method, where *santri* were difficult to be supervised by *Kiai* or preachers personally. In this respect, *Kiai* or preachers could not develop *santri*'s skills in terms of individualism.

KH. Husen Muhammad is a *Kiai* in a traditional pesantren known as the '*Kiai Gender*'. He likened the literacy ability of today's traditional *pesantren santri* to the term 'unclear'. He asserted:

“For instance, *santri* in Arjawinangun (sub-district city in Cirebon Regency) has studied and finished their junior high school, however (The *Kiai* was silent for a moment), they cannot even be good at reading and understanding the meaning of texts in *Kitab Kuning* so that they cannot explain it contextually. Their fault is one. They

have never learned Kitab Kuning with the Sorogan method even though it is very important and basic.”

From the excerpt above, he believed that the *Sorogan* method influenced *santri*'s understanding of *Kitab Kuning*. This perspective does not discredit other methods; however, previous studies showed that the *Sorogan* method is the main method to increase *santri*'s literacy.

**d. Reluctance to Use Sorogan Method is the Same as Reluctance to Understand Kitab Kuning.**

One of the sons of the principal from Khatulistiwa Kempek Pesantren (i.e., KH. Syarif Usman), Yahya, was often concerned about the condition of *santri* and graduated *santri*. He explained:

“As we discussed with senior Kiai, time by time, the *santri*'s understanding of Kitab Kuning was lower. They could not even read the Kitab Kuning appropriately, so how can they understand and explain it contextually? We were very concerned about it. In public, *santri* in Kempek Pesantren are known as smart *santri*, who can read Alfiyah (a book with high-level Arabic grammar); however, if we asked them to read Taqrib (the most basic Arabic books), they could not. Apparently, they came to the pesantren and reluctant to read Kitab Kuning using Sorogan method, and they prefer to choose a school.”

Based on the excerpt above, he described that the *santri* was reluctant to choose the *Sorogan* method as their learning. They had no seriousness in knowing and understanding the content of *Kitab Kuning*. They just relied on the explanation of *Kiai* or preachers without wanting to repeat or evaluate themselves. Therefore, they could not read the *Kitab Kuning*, even the basic books. Since then, these issues have become a concern, especially for the *Kiai* or preachers. They worried that after graduating from *pesantren*, the *santri* were not willing to read *Kitab Kuning* and could not be beneficial to the societies. Indeed, the school is important to measure the *santri*'s success; however, if thinking deeply, all knowledge came from the *Kitab Kuning*. For instance, the existence of mathematics, science, morals, history, *Fiqh*, language, and others were from the *Kitab Kuning*. In other words, it is impossible if they are reluctant to learn the sources of the basis of knowledge at school.

**e. Sorogan Method is an Identity of Pesantren**

Theoretically, the common methods used in *pesantren* are *Bandongan* and *Sorogan*. In addition, these methods are considered as an identity of *pesantren*. For instance, these methods were not found in other educational institutions, such as

schools, course institutes, and many more. Dr. Ahsin Sakho Muhammad, the principal of Rodhotut Tholibin Babakan Ciwaringin Pesantren, asserted that the *Sorogan* method was the identity of *pesantren* itself. He started his education in *pesantren* of Daruttauhid under his grandfather's supervision. He recalled:

**"I used to recite the Kitab Kuning starting from a small book, but after studying in this pesantren in Lirboyo, these experiences were very helpful. Mbah (i.e., grandfather) taught us, as Mbah taught the other santri the Kitab Kuning in his way. This method is now known as the Sorogan method. Then, after graduating from pesantren, I got much knowledge, especially Arabic vocabulary, the official language in Kitab Kuning. Meanwhile, for current santri, when they were asked to read Kitab Kuning, they even cannot read and understand the contents because they could not understand the nahwu shorof (i.e., knowledge of Arabic grammar) from the texts. These conditions are because they have never experienced reciting Kitab Kuning with the Sorogan method."**

*Kitab Kuning* has been used for centuries since the *pesantren* was established. *Kiai* reads *Kitab Kuning*, and the *santri* listens (listening while memorizing). After the *Kiai* has had enough, the *santri* imitate exactly what the *Kiai* has read. *Kiai* also gives feedback directly on either the weakness or mistakes in terms of reading, vocabulary, translating, and implementing the rules of Arabic grammar. Hence, implementing the *Sorogan* method in the future will create the *santri* who are *tafaqquh fial-Din* or deepen what is learned. In addition, it can also improve the literacy quality of the *santri* in the *Kitab Kuning*.

### 3. Discussion

#### a. Summary

Currently, the *santri's* literacy towards the *Kitab Kuning* in traditional *pesantren* decreased. The decline in the ability of *santri* to read the *Kitab Kuning* needs an effective method of learning. The weakness of the *santri* towards the *Kitab Kuning* also requires a book study approach that supports them to master the Yellow Book, such as providing basic knowledge, especially with the *nahwu* and *shorof* books, which are important learning. In addition, improving reading skills requires habituation that must be done every day to reach a good level of ability.

However, some traditional *pesantren*, classified as large and old based on the establishment time, have abandoned the *Sorogan* method as their study. These *pesantren's* graduated *santri* or *mukhaarij* no longer have a special classification

compared to modern *pesantren*. The survey results showed that 40% of the 120 respondents, which were 48 people who graduated from traditional *pesantren*, could not read the *Kitab Kuning*, 20% of which (24 people) were weak in understanding *Kitab Kuning*, and 40% were unable to explain the intent and purpose of *Kitab Kuning* fully. The factors causing *santri*'s low literacy came from internal and external factors. In this respect, implementing the *Sorogan* method is an external factor that greatly affects the low literacy of *santri* towards *Kitab Kuning*.

**b. Reflection**

Learning *Kitab Kuning* with the *Sorogan* method is a requirement for *santri* to continue their next studies. It is suggested that learning *Kitab Kuning* in traditional *pesantren* is carried out using all the *Bandongan*, rote, and *Sorogan* methods as the main methods. The *Sorogan* method is an individual method of learning the *Kitab Kuning*, which is very effective in forming *santri* who can read according to grammatical rules and understand the content or text of the *Kitab Kuning* and is supported by the power of memorizing *mufrodat* (vocabulary). This method has proven effective because it allows a *Kiai* to supervise, assess, and guide the *santri*'s ability in literacy of *Kitab Kuning*.

**c. Interpretation**

Traditional *pesantren* are still relied on as religious, educational institutions that can produce the future of *tafaqquh fi al-Din* scholars. As the future scholars or *Kiai*, the most important competition is *Kitab Kuning*'s literacy. This competition includes deep knowledge, broad insight, and adequate scientific methodology about Islam sourced from the *Kitab Kuning*. In addition, the effectiveness of learning *Kitab Kuning* is determined by the method used. In the early 1990s, the *Sorogan* method implementation in learning *Kitab Kuning* decreased. Yet, learning *Kitab Kuning* with the *Sorogan* method has successfully built the literacy competence of *santri*.

**d. Comparison**

The discussion on the urgency and function of the *Sorogan* method in Muhammad Afif's research (December 2019) is not the central theme. His research described that *pesantren* of Tarbiyatun Nasyiin Pacul Gowang Jombang, East Java, implemented the *Sorogan* method. It is concluded that using the *Sorogan* method made *santri* even more active in increasing their understanding of the *Kitab Kuning* in *pesantren*. It is also noted that the *Sorogan* method was only an offer or alternative and was not used as the main method.

Some graduated *santri* from the prominent *pesantren* in Cirebon, West Java, also abandoned the *Sorogan* method. Since the early 1990s, most *pesantren* have completely abandoned the *Sorogan* method as the main method in studying *Kitab Kuning*. *Shohibul ma'had*, *Kiai*, and preachers at the *pesantren* never imagined that the *Sorogan* method in learning *Kitab Kuning* would significantly impact their graduated *santri* (i.e., alumni) that the quality of their literacy decreased. Meanwhile, until this research was conducted, they had never thought to use the *Sorogan* method as an effort to overcome this issue.

#### e. Implication

Traditional *pesantren* in the archipelago (i.e., *Nusantara*) have a more distinctive character than other educational institutions. Keeping adapting in the globalization era will make the traditional *pesantren* survive. It also makes the traditional *pesantren* increase their quality. In addition, the alumni of these *pesantren* can grow up to be a society that preserves the values of simplicity, independence, and adaptability. Traditional *pesantren* have also succeeded in providing several values that always cause alumni to be needed because of their *maziyyah*. *Maziyyah* in every alumnus of a traditional *pesantren* is the literacy ability of the *Kitab Kuning*.

In this case, the leadership of *Kiai* and *Kitab Kuning* taught in traditional *pesantren* is the most influential factor in *santri's* literacy. The survey results revealed that implementing the *Sorogan* method is a significant supporting factor. *Sorogan* method is the first classical method implemented by *Kiai* in learning *Kitab Kuning*. This method has proven to be successful in producing the future *Kiai* or preachers who are *tafaqquh fi al-Din* with the mastering *Kitab Kuning*. Therefore, it is obvious that the *Sorogan* method has a crucial role in increasing *santri's* literacy toward *Kitab Kuning*. Moreover, using the *Sorogan* method is expected to return *Kiai's* charisma and traditional *pesantren's* reputation.

### C. Conclusion

The *Sorogan* method is vital in improving the ability of *santri* to understand the reading of the *Kitab Kuning*. Mastering Islam must have a stronger understanding of mastering the *Kitab Kuning* and the knowledge of *nahwu shorof*. Therefore, the ability of all *Kitab Kuning* knowledge requires the carrying capacity of studying tool books and *balagoh* books. Without mastering the *Kitab Kuning*, it is impossible to deepen the knowledge of Islam. In fact, mastery

of Islam with various literacy is crucial, but this mastery requires a *Sorogan* method that helps in reading and understanding.

In this study, the low literacy of *santri* in the *Kitab Kuning* was caused by internal and external factors. Internal factors included motivation and the purpose of joining *pesantren*. Meanwhile, external factors consisted of the experience of learning the *Kitab Kuning* before joining *pesantren*, the length of time in joining *pesantren*, and the process of learning the classical books in the *pesantren* with the *Bandongan* method. Equally important, the leadership of *Kiai* has an essential role in keeping the tradition in *pesantren*. *Kiai* believes that implementing the *Sorogan* method in this era is no longer in accordance with the demands of the times in terms of effectiveness and efficiency. In addition, *Kiai*, as *Shohib al-Ma'had*, still maintains the belief that "the most important *pesantren* is the blessing of the *Kiai*."

This study provides new insight into the learning method for *Kitab Kuning* in traditional *pesantren*. The selection and implementation of a method must have relevance to the teaching materials, learning objectives, time allocation, facilities and infrastructure, and *santri* development. In this regard, the *Sorogan* method is very effective in learning the *Kitab Kuning*, especially for novice *santri*. However, this study was limited to the participants by comparing several cases in learning *Kitab Kuning*. Thus, it is suggested for further study about this issue.

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