

## **PESANTREN IN THE CHANGING INDONESIAN CONTEXT: HISTORY AND CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS**

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### **Abstract**

This article discusses the history of *pesantren* as an educational institution in the changing Indonesian context, and provides a snapshot on their current development and enrolment trends. It aims to provide an updated comprehension on Indonesian *pesantren*, which is an important aspect in understanding the contemporary development of Islam in Indonesia. The data presented here is based on a systematic review of existing literature and policy documents, interviews with key policy makers, and observation in some *pesantren*. I argue that Indonesian *pesantren* have continued to grow over different historical periods due to their adaptability in the changing contexts. Such adaptability is seen in their adoption of modern schooling system, their incorporation of non-religious subjects into their curricula, as well as their dynamic integration into the national education system.

**Keywords:** *Pesantren*, history, modernisation, education system.

## A. Introduction

*Pesantren* are Islamic boarding schools that have been found in Indonesia from pre-colonial times to the present. In the past, their core business was the provision of Islamic learning for Muslim pupils who had aspirations to later become the propagators of Islam in their home communities. In their current form and under the auspices of present and past Indonesian governments, *pesantren* have become an important part of the Indonesian national educational system serving a wide populace.

*Kiai* is a title given to Islamic scholars who for the most part provide the leadership of *pesantren* in Indonesia. Scholarship on Indonesian Islam has noted the important position of *kiai* in their communities, beyond their position as leaders of *pesantren*. The relationship between *kiai* and community is based on mutual expectation. Community members usually expect *kiai* to provide them with spiritual, moral, and religious guidance, as well as expecting them to perform a protective leadership role. In return, community members respect *kiai*, and out of this respect *kiai* gain the authority to disseminate Islamic teachings within the community. Beyond this local role, *kiai* also deal with outside agents on behalf of their community, as well as mobilising the community to support causes that the *kiai* advocate (Horikoshi, 1976, p. 300). In short, in addition to their position as *pesantren* leaders, *kiai* are expected to play multiple roles in important areas, which include Islamic rituals, Islamic propagation, politics and economics. The concerns and personal interests of individual *kiai* largely determine which of these multiple roles an individual will undertake.

Until a decade ago, most studies on Indonesian *pesantren* and *kiai* are historical and anthropological. Scholars like Steenbrink (1986), van Bruinessen (1990, 1994), Dhofier (1999), Azra (1994, 2006), Mas'ud (2004) and in some ways Abdullah (1986), just to mention the most widely read and cited, had cemented foundational bricks of this field for the next generations of scholars. Later generation brought the studies into a more topical emphasis like, among others, *pesantren's* role in education and shaping Muslim future generation (e.q. Hefner, 2009; Lukens-Bull, 2005; Tan, 2012), its involvement in electoral politics (e.q. Karim, 2008, 2009), and its dynamic as a religious authority (e.q. Halim, 2018; Pohl, 2006). Those works have provided in-depth explanation on the chosen topic. However, readers especially early scholars of Indonesian Islam have to read scattered sources to develop their understanding on this typical Indonesian Islamic learning institution. This article aimed at providing a short but wide-covering information on Indonesian *pesantren*, from historical information to contemporary development. It is expected to help readers with a "shortcut" reading before reading more historical, anthropological, and topical works on Indonesian *pesantren*.

Information and data used in this article were extracted from existing scholarly works, official information from authoritative organizations such as the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Nahdlatul Ulama in oral, written, accessed documents, and posted website news. The desk study was combined with fieldwork to fifteen *pesantren* in 2013 and follow up visits until recently. Available information on internet websites including the websites of the *pesantren*

mentioned in this article has helped me to make cross-references on certain information.

This article is organised into four sections. After this introduction, I will outline the history and shared characteristics of *pesantren*. The next section explores the changing learning model and curricula that has been the result of external influences from both the Dutch colonial education and Islamic reform movement that originated in the Arab world between the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The dynamic adaptation of *pesantren* learning model and curriculum formation in post-Independence Indonesia -which was a result of its gradual integration into national educational system- is discussed in the third section. The last section will examine the *pesantren's* current development and enrolment trends and situates the important role of *pesantren* in understanding the contemporary development of Islam in Indonesia.

## **B. History and Shared Characteristics of Pesantren**

*Pesantren* are Islamic educational institutions that share many common characteristics. Their physical and organisational structures commonly share several elements: mosque, dormitory, students (popularly called *santri*), and *kiai* (Islamic scholar who leads *pesantren*). The central place is occupied by a mosque where the students and *kiai* pray five times a day, and do other activities that involve a large number of people, such as public lectures, collective prayers, and public preaching. The house of the *kiai* is commonly located beside the mosque and the dormitory where the students reside (Dhofier 1999: 34). Today's *pesantren* also

commonly have class rooms and other school buildings. The other characteristic is the teaching of Islamic texts, organised mainly after prayer times.

In a more formal language, *pesantren* are commonly called *pondok pesantren*. *Pondok* literally means a 'hut', while *pesantren* means 'a place of the *santri*'. In a broader sense the term *santri* also refers to 'religiously oriented Muslims' as opposed to '*abangan*' or nominal Muslims (Geertz, 1960b, pp. 121–130). The term '*santri*' can also be limited to denote '*pesantren's* student'. In the past, the term *pondok pesantren* or simply *pesantren* was used only in Java, but today the term *pondok pesantren* is also commonly used in other regions of Indonesia as this term has been adopted by the central government to refer to Islamic boarding schools (Azra, 2006, pp. 61–77). Nevertheless, some regions still use local terms to refer to similar institution such as *surau* in West Sumatera and *dayah* in Aceh. *Surau* literally means 'a place of worship' which is smaller than mosque, and is the same as *langgar* and *mushalla* in Java. In the Minangkabau region of West Sumatra, it denotes the site of traditional Islamic learning led by *tuanku shaykh* (Azra, 2003, 2006, pp. 63–68). In Aceh, the local name of similar institution is *meunasah*, *ranggang*, and *dayah*. *Meunasah* is a place in which children learn the recitation of al Qur'an and basic teachings of Islam, then they go to *ranggang* to continue with intermediate Islamic subjects, finally they end up in *dayah* as the most advanced level of Islamic schools. These schools are led by *teungku* (similar to *kiai* in Java) (Azra, 2006; Srimulyani, 2013).

Within a *pesantren* there is a central figure and authority who bear different titles according to locality. In

Java, such figures are called *kiai*, in Sundanese *ajengan*, in Nusa Tenggara Barat *tuan guru*, in South Sulawesi *guruta/anreguruta*. Other regions with strong Muslim populations have their own titles to refer to such figures. The authority of these figures is sometimes shared with other family members such as wife and sons who may also share an interest in managing the *pesantren* as an institution or in dealing with community affairs. As a central figure, the *kiai* is a role model and 'figurative parent' for the students. They consult him on problems related to *pesantren* and their daily life. In some *pesantren* in Java, a *kiai* is sometimes called *romo*, a Javanese word for father (Srimulyani, 2012, p. 43) or *aba*, an Arabic word for father. In general, the relation of *kiai* and his students is not equal as he is believed to have superior intellectual and spiritual authority. This relation places *kiai* as the sole source of power and authority within the *pesantren* and no *santri* should question any decision made by him. *Pesantren* is therefore like a small kingdom led by the *kiai*. A *kiai*, as a source of knowledge and spiritual authority, is often visited by his students and the laity alike for consultation or to acquire his blessing (*barokah*) (see Dhofier, 1999, pp. 39–40). The other way to obtain such blessings is by inviting or asking a *kiai* to lead a collective prayer in a *slametan* for particular purposes such as celebrating a baby's birth, a wedding ceremony, and commemorating the death of family members (*haul*) (Bustami, 2009, pp. 53–60).

In addition to his specific role within his own *pesantren*, to some extent a *kiai* is also a central figure for surrounding community. Many *kiai* become leaders of mysticism order (*tarekat*) which organises systematic spiritual teaching with

neighbouring communities and even attracts followers from faraway places (Mulyati, 2002; van Bruinessen, 1995).

The most widely shared legends about the origin of *pesantren* among ordinary Javanese Muslims are from the period of *walisongo* (nine saints) whom are believed to be the first propagators of Islam in Java and the teaching methods that they used to spread Islam in the Javanese community. These stories are still widely reproduced and disseminated at various events through religious sermons by Javanese Islamic preachers. Scholars, however, have debated the origins of the *pesantren* as an institution. Clifford Geertz (1960a, p. 231) has argued that *pesantren* are based on a model derived from Javanese Hindu-Buddhist monasteries from the second to the sixteenth century CE. When Islam came to the archipelago, the Islamic preachers maintained this educational model, but replaced its content with Islamic content, or in Geertz's words 'a new wine in a very old bottle' (Geertz, 1960a, p. 231). An alternative history has been suggested by Van Bruinessen (1994, p. 9), where he argues that today's *pesantren* developed in the nineteenth century as a further expansion of Islamic study groups located in mosques or the houses of *kiai*.

An Indonesian historian, Taufik Abdullah (1986, pp. 86–101) argued that the history of *pesantren* should be traced back to the period when 'religious men' withdrew from the life of *kraton* (the local name for the palace of Javanese kingdoms) because of internal political rivalries and disappointments with the *kraton* establishment and its dealing with European colonizers. This point is evident in the case of Diponegoro who was a prince of the Mataram Kraton in Yogyakarta. When he became disillusioned with the way the Kraton was

dealing with the Dutch, he took his followers and established his own community in a village, whose political stance was more strongly anti-colonial and religious stance more overtly Islamic and that could be considered to be a 'religious or *santri* community'. The *kiai* with their *santri* community inhabited so called '*desa perdikan* (autonomous villages)'. These were special villages that were established for religious purposes and given considerable autonomy and privileges, most notably tax exemption. With the deepening of Islam among the community, *desa perdikan* were then also characterised by the growth of Muslim cemeteries, mosques and *pesantren*. It is important to note that this historical pattern is specific only to Java (T. Abdullah, 1986; Azra, 2006, p. 72).

From the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century onward, *pesantren* was a symbol of Islamic resistance and identity among the *santri* community. This can be seen from the reluctance of the *santri* community to send their children to the Dutch schools, which were beginning to be established from the end of the nineteenth century onwards. In the early part of the nineteenth century, there were 1,853 *pesantren* with 16,556 students. This number increased dramatically to 14,929 *pesantren* with 222,663 students by the end of the century, even though the Dutch schools had been introduced in many places. It seems that *pesantren* at that time were the choice for Muslims to maintain their independence and cultural pride in the face of increasingly intrusive Dutch colonial power (Azra, 2006, pp. 72–73).

Throughout the colonial era, the existence and development of *pesantren* was largely beyond the control of the colonial government. Instead, *pesantren* developed their



own networks with Islamic learning centres in Egypt and present-day Saudi Arabia. The influence of the Arab world is evident in their curricula contents and models of education. Azra (1994), van Bruinessen (1994, 1995), and Mas'ud (2004) noted that most Indonesian pesantren were globally oriented in their intellectual reference and orientation. This can be found in their strong orthodoxy in using classical Arabic texts which might be brought or sent from Mecca or Medina from around 1600. The Arabic texts called *kitab kuning* are still used in *pesantren* until now. Van Bruinessen (1994) estimated that the use of *kitab kuning* in the East Indies had occurred before the existence of properly institutionalised *pesantren*. However, he could not estimate how wide its use was before the existence of *pesantren* educational tradition. The further development in Indonesian context was still consistent with the use of Arabic as a symbol of universal language of Islamic intellectual tradition, individual's intellectual integrity, and the language of Al Qur'an. The works of Indonesian ulama living in Mecca, such as Akhmad Khatib, Nawawi Banten and Kiai Makhfud Termas, and of those living in Indonesia such as Kiai Ihsan Jampes from Kediri also used Arabic. This type of *pesantren* was, and is, categorised as traditionalist *pesantren*.

Another type is *pesantren* modern. Beginning in the early 1900s, and connected to the flow of reform movement from the Middle East, there were some *pesantren* that called themselves *pesantren modern* or modern *pesantren*. The pioneer and still the most reputable of this type of *pesantren* is Pondok Modern Gontor in Ponorogo, East Java. It was founded in 1926 and combined the pedagogical philosophies of Al Azhar in Egypt, Aligarh and Santiniketan in India, and

Taman Siswa in Yogyakarta. For the Gontor's founders, these educational institutions represented Islamic, modern, progressive, and anti-colonial pedagogical philosophies and spirit. They saw the existing old-style *pesantren* as being unstructured and undisciplined, and the government schools of the time as being part of the colonial agenda which oriented the schools towards producing colonial government's employees (Castle, 1966, pp. 30–32). The hallmark of this type of *pesantren* was their emphasis on the use of Arabic and English in daily conversation and learning activities. In theology and school of thought, they claimed not to be affiliated with particular schools of classical Islamic jurisprudence (*madzhab*). They saw a fanatical affiliation to certain schools of thought as contrary to the reform mission and as an obstacle to the development of Islamic scholarship. By taking this position, they accommodated children from both modernist and traditionalist streams of the population. Politically speaking, Gontor has always claimed to be neither affiliated to NU nor to Muhammadiyah by coining the tagline "*untuk semua golongan* or for all groups". Many of its graduates subsequently replicated this model in many other places such as Pesantren Pabelan in Magelang and Pesantren Darun Najah in South Jakarta. Currently there are more than 200 pesantren operated by Gontor's alumni and replicating the Gontor educational model. Pesantren Gontor also has a strong reputation, with many of its graduates becoming important political figures at national level (see Castle, 1966; Hady, 2012; Shabir & Susilo, 2018; Yunus, 2008, pp. 276–277). The examples of Gontor alumni on Indonesian national stage are Hasyim Muzadi, chairman of NU (1999-2010), Din

Syamsuddin, chairman of Muhammadiyah (2005-2015), and Hidayat Nur Wahid, former chairman of Prosperity Justice Party (PKS) and Speaker of People Assembly (MPR, 2004-2009).

On the other hand, there are also some *pesantren* which have allegedly cultivated radical or Islamist ideas among their students. Radical or Islamist ideas here is Islamic ideology which is built on scripturalist understanding on the source of Islamic teachings to be applied in both private and public life. Muslims with such ideological view are categorised into *wahabi-salafi* group referring to the name of the founder of that movement Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab, and salafi word refers to their claim to be following the first generation of Muslims. One of the most well-known of these is Pesantren Al Mukmin in Ngruki near Solo, Central Java, under the leadership of Abubakar Ba'asyir. From the books that it uses, Pesantren Al Mukmin can be identified as being affiliated with the *wahabi-salafi* stream of Islam (Hasan, 2008; Tan, 2012 Chapter 3). The growth of new *wahabi-salafi pesantren* in Indonesia has been significant in the last decade (see Wahid, 2014). In addition, some *pesantren* are known for their specialities. Pesantren Suryalaya in Tasikmalaya with its famous leader Abah Anom is known for its focus on drug rehabilitation (see Mulyati, 2002).

*Pesantren* are not only limited to male students. Indeed, beginning in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, some *pesantren* started to accept female students. According to Srimulyani (2012, p. 38), Nyai Nur Khodijah and Kiai Bisri Syamsuri initiated an Islamic study group for girls in their Pesantren Denanyar in Jombang in 1919. Initially, only their close relatives and

neighbours attended, but later this female study group attracted participants from distant places that led to the official establishment of a female dormitory in 1930 within the existing male-only *pesantren* complex. The opening of *pesantren* to female students then spread to other *pesantren* in Jombang. In 1929, Kiai Maksum Ali, who had previously helped Kiai Hasyim Asy'ari in Pesantren Tebuireng, opened a new *pesantren* for female students in a nearby village to Tebuireng called Pesantren Putri Salafiyah Syafi'iyah (Yasin & Karyadi, 2011, pp. 12–13; Zaini, 1998, pp. 54–66). In West Sumatera, Rahmah Al Yunusiah founded Madrasah Diniyah Putri in Padang Panjang in 1923 (Yunus, 2008, p. 69). All these female *pesantren* continue to exist today. Currently, most *pesantren* accommodate both male and female students along with the widespread involvement of women in the provision of *pesantren* education.

Viewed historically, the growing trend of women's participation in education initially started at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when the Dutch colonial government implemented Ethical Policy, which opened up opportunities to the indigenous people, both male and female, to enrol in Dutch colonial schools. In practice this opportunity was provided for the aristocratic layer of society, especially in Java. Early women proponents of women education such as Kartini of Jepara and Dewi Sartika of Bandung appeared in this period. Later, those educated and literate women agitated for wider access to education that would encompass a broader layer of the female population. This trend also influenced Islamic organisations like Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama. Kiai Ahmad Dahlan, the founder of Muhammadiyah, together with

his wife initiated an Islamic school for girls, which was later named Madrasah Muallimat Muhammadiyah in Yogyakarta. At the same time, the organisation also established an organisational wing, Aisyiah, to provide greater opportunities for women's involvement within Muhammadiyah. Around the same time, there were several traditionalist *pesantren* which began to receive female students. This coincided with the establishment of NU's women organisational wing, Muslimat NU (Srimulyani, 2012, pp. 37–39). Female *pesantren* have become important in the production of women leaders for Islamic women's organisations, female politicians in Islamic parties, and female Muslim scholars and public intellectuals in Indonesia.

While the historical background of the foundation of most *pesantren* often centred on the central initiative of an individual *kiai* and support from surrounding community, from 1990s we can find other models of *pesantren* foundation. Firstly, some media-star preachers have founded *pesantren* and use them as the base of their activities. For example, Kiai Haji Abdullah Gymnastiar or popularly called AA Gym founded Pesantren Darut Tauhid in Bandung, West Java and has used it as a centre for various activities, ranging from workshops, regular sermons, to being a basis for business activities. Unlike other *pesantrens* where students are resident, Pesantren Darut Tauhid does not have any permanent residential students. Groups of people will stay at the Pesantren only for a short time (such as a weekend, three days or a week) for workshops with planned programs. This *pesantren* does not have a school as is the norm for other *pesantren* (Solahudin, 2008; Watson, 2005; my personal observation, October 2008). As

such, Pesantren Darut Tauhid presents a new model for what Indonesians calls *pesantren*. Another celebrity preacher who has founded a pesantren is Ustadz Yusuf Mansur. He founded Pesantren Tahfidz Daarul Qur'an (Pesantren for Memorising Al Qur'an) in Tangerang, Banten. Unlike AA Gym's *Pesantren* which does not accommodate permanent residential students, Pesantren Tahfidz Daarul Qur'an has residential students who follow a special program of memorising Al Qur'an.

There is a second category of *pesantren* that have been founded by wealthy families as in the case with Pondok Pesantren Modern Islam Assalam near Solo, Central Java. The family of Haji Abdullah Marzuki and Siti Aminah are successful local entrepreneurs and who own a printing company and book store, Tiga Serangkai. As they are not qualified religious teachers, the family hires Islamic teachers to operate the *pesantren* and the family remains as the patron of the institution. The Pesantren Assalam was known to charge very high fees, more than Rp. 16 million for the enrolment in 2013 and approximately Rp. 2 million for monthly fees ([www.assalam.or.id](http://www.assalam.or.id)).

There is a third category of new *pesantren* development that centres on *pesantren* founded as initiatives from networks of preachers and mosques care-takers in Makassar city. This is the case with Pesantren Modern IMMIM in Makassar, South Sulawesi. IMMIM is an acronym for Ikatan Masjid Musholla Indonesia Muttahidah (Association of Indonesian Mosques and Prayer Halls), a Makassar-based local network of mosque care-takers and preachers. One of the aims of this organisation is to strengthen unity and diminish differences- which mostly concerns aspects of ritual (*furu'*)- among Muslims. As

such, the foundation of the Pesantren IMMIM was an effort to produce high quality Islamic preachers with a strong capacity to work across the divided communities- such as who affiliated to Muhammadiyah, Nahdlatul Ulama, and other groups (Damopoli, 2011).

A fourth category can be seen with the establishment of Pesantren Hidayatullah in Balikpapan. This *Pesantren* represents a different organisational background: it is a learning centre for preachers recruited by the Hidayatullah as mass-organisation. The Pesantren Hidayatullah was founded in 1976, and transformed into an Islamic mass organisation (Ind. ormas) in 2000 to manage networks of da'wah cadres graduating from the Pesantren. Currently, the organisation manages da'wah activities throughout the archipelago especially in remote areas and has branches in 200 municipalities. In order to fulfill demand for preachers, the Hidayatullah educates and trains hundreds of cadres in its Pesantren at no cost. After graduating, these cadres will be sent to various remote places on propagation missions (Burhanuddin & Basri, 2003; Subhan, 2006; my personal observation, September 2013).

Prior to Hidayatullah, there had been some *pesantrens* which had been turned into mass organisations such as Al Khairat in Palu, Central Sulawesi and As'adiyah in Wajo, South Sulawesi. Similarly, this transformation was further developed by their scattered alumni who in turn founded new pesantren and Islamic schools in their home towns. However, their development seems to be limited to *pesantrens* in surrounding regions. For example, Pesantren Darul Da'wah wal Irsyad (the Centre for Propagation and Spiritual Guidance,

DDI) in Mangkoso, South Sulawesi transformed into a mass organisation whose followers are concentrated mainly in the same province and in places where the local Bugis people have migrated such as Papua and East Kalimantan. The Pesantren was founded in December 1938 under the leadership of Abdurrahman Ambo Dalle. When some of its graduates returned to their home towns or migrated to new places, they also founded *pesantren* or Islamic schools. Abdurrahman Ambo Dalle allowed them to use the name of DDI. Along with the spread of these Islamic educational institutions, they initiated the transformation of the network into a mass organisation during the early independence period of the country. Their purpose was to strengthen their *da'wah* outreach, especially through the establishment of Islamic schools. Currently under this organisation there are more than 200 Islamic schools scattered in eight provinces, but mostly in South Sulawesi and West Sulawesi (my fieldwork, September 2013).

In a similar way, Pesantren Nahdlatul Wathan Diniyah Islamiah founded in 1937 in Pancor, East Lombok has also been transformed into an influential mass organisation named Nahdlatul Wathan (NW) in West Nusa Tenggara province. Its history goes back to Tuan Guru Zainuddin who returned to his home town in East Lombok after studying in Mecca for 12 years. The Pesantren has produced Islamic scholars and community leaders who have transmitted the Islamic teachings of Tuan Guru Zainuddin to broader regional community through the establishment of Islamic schools and *da'wah* activities. Up until 2000, there were 377 Islamic schools, ranging from kindergarten to senior high school, that have been affiliated to this organisation ([nw.or.id](http://nw.or.id)).



The last type of *pesantren* I present is a *pesantren* which was founded by a business motivator Jamil Azzaini who is obsessed with the idea of creating young entrepreneurs with strong *da'wah* commitment. The *Pesantren* named Abdurrahman bin Auf does not provide a normal learning track through schooling as is the case with other *pesantren*. It provides instead a year-intensive life skill training in fields such as livestock, agribusiness, computer repair and so forth that are imbued with Islamic psychological motivation. The students come from poor households who are unable to continue their studies to higher levels and are unable to find jobs. With the skills studied in the *Pesantren*, they are expected to be able to create their own businesses after their year-long study there (jamilazzaini.com).

Based on these examples I argue that *pesantren* are still considered important Islamic educational institutions, that produce an Islamic learned generation who are expected to sustain Islam among the wider Indonesian community. For celebrity preachers, founding and leading a *pesantren* can add legitimacy to their religious authority. For wealthy people, devoting their wealth to the establishment of a *pesantren* can be a way to spend their wealth in an Islamic mission. For a promoter of *da'wah*, *pesantren* might be considered to be the most effective educational model to produce *da'wah* cadres. For a motivator of entrepreneurship, the provision of intensive life skill training complemented by an Islamic motivation within *pesantren* might be seen as a comprehensive means to transform individuals into highly motivated entrepreneurs.

The last point I highlight in this section concerns leadership transfer. The leadership transfer in most

traditionalist *pesantren* that are often affiliated to Nahdlatul Ulama is hereditary. When the leader dies, one of his sons or sons-in-law (only men can become leaders in most cases) will take over the leadership automatically or as the result of a family convention. In such cases, subsequent development of the *pesantren* depends on the capacity of the new leader. In some cases, *pesantren* deteriorate or even close down because their new leaders do not have the reputation or charisma to attract students. By way of contrast, *pesantren* which are subsequently transformed into a mass organisation are likely to manage their leadership transfer through organisational meeting such as was the case with Pesantren Darul Da'wah wal Irsyad (the Centre for Propagation and Spiritual Guidance, DDI) and Pesantren As'adiyah in South Sulawesi, and Pesantren Hidayatullah in Balikpapan. There are other *pesantrens* that have established a board of patrons called Badan Wakaf whose job it is to appoint (or dismiss) the *pesantren's* leader, as was in the case with Pesantren Gontor in Ponorogo, East Java and its networks. In practice, however, the appointed leaders still share a 'bloodline' with the *pesantren's* founders or previous leaders.

### **C. Learning Models and Curricula**

The learning model in *pesantren* has gradually been reformed as a result of influences from both Islamic learning tradition in the Arab world and a Western schooling model brought by the Dutch to the country. In pre-independent Indonesia, the learning model in *pesantren* was very modest. A *kiai* read the *kitab kuning* (classic books) surrounded by his students, and sometimes complemented this with a question

and answer season. There was no systematic grading system. When student numbers were large and their intellectual levels were diverse, the *kiai* organised the learning process but delegated the teaching task for some groups to his senior students. This model was changed by Muslim scholars who had returned from their studies in Egypt in early 20th century. At this time the Islamic reform movement was taking place in Arab countries in response to colonialism and the identified backwardness among Muslims, especially in the fields of science and technology (Steenbrink, 1986, p. 26). According to Muhammad Abduh, one of the most important figures of the Islamic reform movement, this backwardness was a result of the separation of school into those Islamic schools which taught only Islamic subjects and the modern schools which taught non-religious subjects. This separation created two distinct cohorts with different visions regarding the future of Muslim ummah (Hourani, 1983, p. 137). At the same time, during the late 19th century, the Dutch also began to introduce schooling for selective segments of indigenous population. Some years later, some of the graduates of these Dutch schools taught in *pesantren* where they passed on their experiences in the Dutch school system. Those two developments—Islamic reformism and colonial, Western education—gradually influenced the *pesantren* world. The first influence evidenced in the adoption of graded classes of *madrasah* system, and the second was the incorporation of non-religious subjects (Steenbrink, 1986, p. 25). This new model was initially adopted by some Muslim reformists after studying in Middle East, especially at Al Azhar University in Cairo. Later, however, the traditionalists also began to follow

this trend (Azra, Afrianty, & Hefner, 2007, pp. 175–177; Dhofier, 1999 Chapter Four; Steenbrink, 1986, pp. 69–72; van Bruinessen, 1994, pp. 20–24).

*Madrasah* is an Arabic word for school, while *sekolah* is an Indonesian word derived from Portuguese to refer to school. In the Indonesian context, *madrasah* are specifically Islamic schools supervised by the Ministry of Religion. Meanwhile, *sekolah* denotes non-religious schools supervised by the Ministry of Education. The hierarchical structure of *madrasah* ranges from *Raudlotul Athfal* (RA) for kindergarten, *Madrasah Ibtida'iyah* (MI) for primary level, *Madrasah Tsanawiyah* (MTs) for secondary level, and *Madrasah Aliyah* (MA) for higher levels. The hierarchy of *sekolah* ranges from *Taman Kanak-kanak* (TK) for kindergarten, *Sekolah Dasar* (SD) for primary level, *Sekolah Menengah Pertama* (SMP) for junior secondary level, and *Sekolah Menengah Atas* (SMA) for senior secondary level. With these two structures, it can be said that Indonesian national education system covers both *madrasah* and *sekolah* system.

In terms of educational arrangement, today's *pesantren* can be divided into three main categories. The first category is *pesantren kholaf* that provide formal schooling through *madrasah* and *sekolah*. The second category is *pesantren salaf* (not *salafi*) which do not provide a government-approved schooling system (Hefner, 2009, pp. 66–69; Lukens-Bull, 2005; Zuhdi, 2006). Such *pesantren* still exist in some places and are regarded as able to produce graduates with greater expertise in *kitab kuning* as they do not need to study general sciences (Isbah, 2012). The final category is *pesantren modern* which is often distinguished by their emphasis on the teaching

of Arabic and English and the obligation of students to use these languages in their everyday conversations. The first *pesantren* using this brand was Pesantren Modern Gontor in Ponorogo, East Java. Later, Gontor's alumni went on to found new *pesantren* in many other places, and have copied its educational model and use the brand 'modern' as well.

Today, the majority of *pesantren* provide formal schooling through *madrasah* and *sekolah* that incorporate non-Islamic subjects in their curricula like any other school, and can be categorised as *pesantren kholaf*. The difference is that *pesantren* schools provide a greater proportion of Islamic subjects in their curricula than is the case with schools outside *pesantren* system. Given the limits of school hours, most *pesantren* arrange their curricula so that Islamic subjects and the teaching of *kitab kuning* are given outside the school hours, commonly in afternoon or evening through a *madrasah diniyah*, *halaqoh* (discussion group) and *pengajian*. In *madrasah diniyah*, the management and teaching methods are similar to secular school, but the material is limited to Islamic teachings which commonly stresses Arabic, theology, Islamic law (*fiqh and ushl fiqh*), Islamic ethics (*akhlak*), *tasawuf* (mysticism), Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsir*), and Traditions of the Prophet (*hadits*) (van Bruinessen, 1995, pp. 32–37). Such decisions were an adaptation of *pesantren* world to the public demand for state registered formal schooling, while simultaneously being an effort to maintain their learning traditions.

In terms of Islamic subjects taught in *pesantren*, there is a difference between what so called modernist/reformist *pesantren* and traditionalist/classicalist *pesantren* teach

(Lukens-Bull, 2005, p. 14). The modernists or reformists are generally associated with the Muhammadiyah, Persatuan Islam, Al Irsyad or other newly established *wahabi-salafi* groups. The traditionalists or classicalists are mostly associated with Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and other locally based smaller groups such as Mathlaul Anwar which is popular in some regions of West Java, Nahdlatul Waton which is popular in West Nusa Tenggara, and Al Khairat which is popular in Central Sulawesi and some regions of eastern Indonesia.

A part from the differences between the modernist and the traditionalist lies in the way they understand Islamic doctrines and their attitudes to certain religious practices, especially relative local customs. Generally speaking, the traditionalists are more accommodative to local customs. As for *pesantren* education, the traditionalists treat the historical development of Islamic sciences that have been codified in *kitab kuning* as their primary reference. *Kitab Kuning* are a range of books that were mostly written between 10<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century. For traditionalist Muslims, they are accepted as the final intellectual work that cannot be supplanted by new works, but may be explained only in a more detail in such subsequent works. *Kitab* literally means book, and *kuning* literally means yellow. Those books are called *kitab kuning* because they are printed on yellow paper (van Bruinessen, 1995, pp. 17–30). In contrast, the modernists tend to ignore books in the *kitab kuning* tradition and instead focus mainly on the study of al Qur'an (under the subject of *ilm tafsir* and *ulumul Qur'an*) and *hadist* (Traditions of the Prophet).

In line with the wider adoption of a government approved *madrrasah* schooling model since early 1970s,

many *pesantren* started to incorporate non-Islamic subjects in their curricula. It should be noted, however, that Islamic schools managed by Muhammadiyah were among the first to introduce subjects like mathematics, geography, Dutch language and so forth, while Pesantren Tebuireng in Jombang was among the first traditionalist *pesantren* to do the same thing in late colonial era (Dhofier, 2011, p. 186). According to Lukens-Bull (2000, p. 26, 2001), combining Islamic and non-Islamic subjects in their curricula was the way *pesantren* leaders encountered modernisation and globalisation. In this way, they were projecting their students on a path to become members of a society “that is fully modern, fully globalised, fully Indonesian, and fully Islamic” at the same time (Lukens-Bull, 2000, p. 26).

#### **D. Modernisation and Integration into the Indonesian Educational System**

In post-independence Indonesia, *pesantren* have gradually gained state recognition through their integration into the national educational system. In the early years of independence, the government recognised the existence of Islamic schools -*pesantren* and *madrasah*—and placed them under the supervision of the Ministry of Religious Affairs rather than the Ministry of Educational Affairs. This policy created a duality in the management of educational affairs. The passing of the National Education Law in 1952 regulated the schools under the supervision of the Ministry of Education only. It left the Islamic schools out of the national education system. The New Order regime which took over the country in 1966 attempted to integrate both secular and religious schools

under one ministry, the Ministry of Education. This attempt was made through the implementation of ‘single umbrella education’ (*pendidikan satu atap*) policy that was based on a Presidential Instruction in 1972. However, many Muslim educators could not accept this policy as they considered it to be an over-simplification over the problem on the ground, and they were suspicious that the actual purpose of the regime was to eliminate the existence of Islamic schools. Instead, they proposed the idea of standardising curriculum of Islamic schools. This was eventually adopted in the so called ‘Three-Ministry Joint Decree’ (SKB 3 Menteri). The main point in this policy was that Islamic schools had to adopt a curriculum where 30 percent of learning hours was devoted to religious subjects and 70 percent to non-religious subjects (Zuhdi, 2006, pp. 417–421)).

Since 1975, and partly due to the implementation the Three-Ministry Joint Decree, the general tendency in most *pesantrens* has been to follow the model of the state’s educational system and its curricula. *Pesantren* manage their schooling through government-recognised *madrasah* system which requires 70 percent of its learning hours for non-Islamic subjects and the rest 30 percent for Islamic subjects (Hefner, 2009, p. 65). In addition, they provide instruction in a more diverse range of Islamic subjects in lessons out of school hours. Most *pesantren* today organize their Islamic subject teaching in *madrasah diniyah* which they hold in the afternoon or evening. This educational model can be found in many prestigious *pesantren* like Pesantren Tebuireng and Pesantren Darul Ulum in Jombang, East Java. These two *pesantren* also have established universities in their complexes with various



departments that range from English, Education, Psychology, to Law. One reason for this is to equip their graduates with modern skills and degrees so that they are able to compete in the modern labour market. Consequently, graduates from these institutions can readily be found working in government offices, universities, the business sector, and, of course, religious offices (Hefner, 2009, p. 66). In short, it seems that such *pesantren* do not consider themselves to be different from general schools, except in their commitment to provide a greater range of Islamic subjects and the *pesantren* living experiences. However, the broad policy remains of keeping *madrasah* under the supervision of the Ministry of Religion, while *sekolah* (non-religious schools) are under the Ministry of Education.

After the fall of Soeharto's regime in 1998, *pesantren* moved to become more closely integrated into the national educational system. The most recent National Education Law of 2003 recognises fully that *pesantren* and *madrasah* are part of the country's educational system. Government Bill No.55 of 2007 (PP 55/2007) on Islamic Education strengthens the law by stating that students from Islamic schools are entitled to transfer to any other school and that the graduates of these Islamic schools are entitled to a state recognised certificate which can be used for both job applications and higher school/university entry requirements. Another important policy of the post-New Order Indonesian government related to *pesantren* was the elevation of the Sub-Directorate of Pondok Pesantren and Madrasah Diniyah in the Ministry of Religion to be a directorate in 2001. This policy has provided the Directorate with more chances to secure greater state

funding and to gain greater authority (Interview with Ace Saifudin, Director of the Pondok Pesantren and Madrasah Diniyah, Ministry of Religious Affairs, Jakarta, 18 May 2013).

As a consequence of these changing policies and the internal dynamic within *pesantren* world in responding societal changes, the educational model of Indonesian *pesantren* today can be divided into four categories. The first is *pesantren salaf* (traditional) which provides only Islamic teachings in the form of classical works (i.e. the *kitab kuning* (classic books on Islamic sciences mentioned above)). *Pesantren* of this type commonly organize their teaching activities in *madrasah diniyah* and *pengajian bandongan* (public lecture). The second are *pesantren* that build formal Islamic schools in the form of *madrasah ibtida'iyah* (primary school), *madrasah tsanawiyah* (junior high school), and *madrasah aliyah* (senior high school/college) that are supervised by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Their curriculum is determined by the Ministry in the form of modern text books which are changed periodically. A number of large *pesantren* have also established tertiary education institutions (*perguruan tinggi*) within their complexes. The third type of *pesantren* is similar to the previous type, but their schools are affiliated to the Ministry of National Education and are regarded as *sekolah* or secular schools, not *madrasah*. The fourth kind are *pesantren* that provide both *madrasah* and secular schools (Bustami 2009: 39). Except the first type, all are categorised as *pesantren kholaf* (as opposed to *pesantren salaf*). Many *pesantren* today organize formal education in *madrasah* or secular school classes in the morning and teach *kitab kuning* in the afternoon and evening. This is their way to adapt to modernisation and to meet the expectations of students and

parents seeking formal certification (Azra et al., 2007; Hefner, 2009; Steenbrink, 1986; Zuhdi, 2006).

The fact that the majority of today's *pesantren* resemble the *pesantren kholaf* model can be seen as a response to parents' pragmatic demands that education be an important contributing factor to students' economic success. Unfortunately, there is no official data available that compares the number of each type of *pesantren*. Many *pesantren* opened *madrasah* or general elementary schools with non-religious and vocational subjects in the 1970s and 1980s. Their residential students attend these *madrasah* during the morning and spend the afternoons and evenings studying religious subjects in the dormitory. It is also important to note that all *pesantren* are independent institutions, and none of them are funded by the Indonesian government. A 2005 data from the Ministry of Religion reveals that 47 percent of *pesantren* are operated by private foundations, and 39 percent by individuals. The reminder is run by Islamic mass organizations such as Muhammadiyah, Nahdlatul Ulama or other organizations (Jackson & Parker, 2008, p. 26).

There is strong pressure on all forms of Indonesian Islamic education, including *pesantren*, to integrate into the national education system. However, according to Jackson and Parker (2008), *pesantren* have constantly faced an uneasy adjustment to, and negotiation with, government policy and its values. For example, in order to produce graduates who are able to compete with their counterparts from secular schools both in the labour market and in pursuing higher education, Islamic schools, including *pesantren* schools, have to allocate large proportion of their teaching hours to

non-Islamic subjects. Added to this, they have to maintain an appropriate number of hours for Islamic subjects in their curriculum. The other issue is that the national education system encourages active and participatory teaching and learning methods in order to raise the level of students' critical thinking. In contrast, this traditional Islamic education method is generally teacher-centred with a high degree of respect for a teacher's knowledge and authority, and tends to centre on rote learning. This might give rise to a contradiction in pedagogical approaches. In summary, most of them have tried to be adaptable to the educational system endorsed by the state (Azra et al., 2007; Hefner, 2009; Zuhdi, 2006).

### **E. Current Development of *Pesantren* and their Enrolment Trends**

The current growth of Indonesian *pesantren* and their enrolment trend is complex. Statistically the number of *pesantren* has been increasing steadily over the past decades, but their proportion of the total national student body remains at only about 13 percent of Indonesian school age children (Azra et al., 2007, pp. 178–180). Some commentators have sought to justify the importance of *pesantren* not merely in terms of their student numbers relative to that of general schools but in terms of the strategic position that *pesantren* hold in driving the direction of Islam in a country where there are many contested sources of religious authority in Indonesia (cf. Sakai, 2012, 2014). My own observation additionally suggests that there is a new tendency among those who do not have *pesantren* education background but now wish to send their children to *pesantren*.

Number of *Pesantren* and Pupils (1977-2012)

Year	Number of <i>Pesantren</i>	Number of <i>Pesantren</i> Pupils
2016d	28,194	4,290,626
2011-2012a	27,230	3,759,198
2006-2007b	17,506	3,289,141
1997c	9,388	1,770,760
1977c	4,195	677,384

Source: (c. Azra et al., 2007; b. Direktorat Jenderal Kelembagaan Agama Islam, 2008; a. Direktorat Jenderal Pendidikan Islam, 2012a; d. Muhyiddin & Yulianto, 2017)

A report based on a survey in 2011-2012 from the Ministry of Religious Affairs showed that the number has reached 27,230 *pesantren* which accommodate 3,759,198 students (Direktorat Jenderal Pendidikan Islam, 2012a). This is a remarkable growth if we trace back to data published in previous years. For example, in 2006-2007, the *pesantren* number was 17,506 with 3,289,141 students (see Table 1 The table above). It is not known why the number of *pesantren* had increased and why student number have not shown a proportional increase. This might relate to a growth in the establishment of new *pesantren* in many places. These new *pesantren* need time to build a reputation and to attract students. There is no longer a gender gap between male and female students with 50.19 % of them male and 49.81 percent female. Unfortunately, there was no available data on the gender comparison and gap in *pesantren*'s enrolment figures across different years. The majority of students (79.93 %) live in *pesantren*'s dormitories, while only 20.07 % live with

their parents or in rented accommodation outside *pesantren* complex (Direktorat Jenderal Pendidikan Islam, 2012a).

Unfortunately, there was no available information of what the percentage of those figures against the total number of Indonesian school age children. Azra, Afrianty, and Hefner (2007, pp. 178–179) suggested that in 2001-2 *pesantren* educated about 13 % of the total school age children. However, there was no data across different years.

Throughout my visit to about fifteen *pesantren* in various regions during my research, however, I found evidence that supports the increasing enrolment in *pesantren*. For instance, Pesantren Sunan Pandanaran di Yogyakarta now accommodates 3000 students, while it accommodated only 600 students prior to 2005. Likewise, around 5000 students now reside in Pesantren Sunan Drajat in Lamongan, East Java that is doubling of the number of 10 years ago. All these *pesantren* are complemented with formal *madrasah* schooling model where the graduates receive certificates that enable them to pursue higher education. By way of contrast, a stagnant or declining enrolment trend can be found with *pesantren salaf* such as Pesantren Lirboyo in Kediri, East Java and Pesantren Sarang in Rembang, Central Java, which do not have formal *madrasah* schooling model. Without a systematic survey, we cannot make any generalisation from this trend. I found, for example, Pesantren Salaf Sidogiri in Pasuruan, East Java displays a trend towards slightly increasing student enrolment over the last 5 years and is becoming more popular among neighbouring communities (see Isbah, 2012, 2019). After the enactment of Government Bill number 55 on Religious Education in 2007, the graduates of such *pesantren*

*salaf* are actually able to continue to any type of school and university. Nonetheless, a large segment of Muslims may perceive that such *pesantren* as not modern and, therefore, less relevant to worldly demands.

In general, the tuition fees of *pesantren* are relatively lower than those of government schools despite the greater government subsidy that the latter receive. Because studying in *pesantren* as residential student (*santri*) requires payment of not only tuition fees but also living expenses, parents have to send more money to their children in *pesantren*. In spite of this, 85 percent of the parents of *pesantren*'s students had income of less than Rp. 500,000 per month or Rp. 16,500 (USD 1.75) per day, putting them below the poverty line of USD 2 per day (Jackson and Parker 2008: 26). After the regime changed in 1998, there has been an increasing government budget allocation for Islamic schools including *pesantren*. What is the impact of the current government subsidies on the institutional development of *pesantren* and their relation with the wider community? Based on a quantitative research on three different types of *pesantren* *modern* cum modernist *pesantren*, semi-modern *pesantren*, *pesantren salaf*- and a secular public school, Sticher (2008) presents the following findings: First, parents who send their children to *pesantren salaf* are likely to have lower educational level compared to those sending their children to modern or semi-modern *pesantren*, and even more so to secular public school. Second, most parents of *pesantren salaf* are likely to have been to *pesantren* themselves. The number of parents who attended a *pesantren* decreases at each step for those who send their children respectively to semi-modern *pesantren*, *modern*

*pesantren*, or to secular public schools. Third, students/*santri* of *pesantren salaf* have more siblings (from 2 to 13) than those of semi-modern and *modern pesantren*, and even more than for secular public school students (Sticher 2008: 157-64).

Based on these quantitative findings, Sticher (2008, pp. 162–165) argues that choice of a school is linked closely to the educational background of parents, their own *pesantren* experience, their family size, and economic level. Educational attainment and family size are also indicators of social class. This data shows that parents of *pesantren salaf*'s students are mostly from lower class backgrounds relative to other kinds of *pesantren* and secular schools. There are two possible explanations for this. First, it is because *pesantren salaf* are cheaper than their alternatives. However, this reason is certainly not or no longer accurate because today secular public schools or *pesantren* with government recognised *madrasah* -as in the case of modern and semi-modern *pesantren*- may be cheaper than in the past as a result of government subsidies. Financial reasons are, however, likely to be just a part of the explanation. Another reason is that well-educated parents, especially those with secular educational backgrounds, prefer secular schools or *pesantren* with secular subjects.

In terms of quality which can be measured by failure rates in National Final Examination, *pesantren* or *madrasah* are relatively less successful than secular schools. The available data of 2003 indicates that the failure rate at junior secondary *madrasah* (Tsanawiyah) is 10.9 % compared to 3.9 % at general junior secondary school. For senior secondary *madrasah* (Aliyah), the failure rate is 15.4 % compared to



5.7 % at general senior secondary school. This is because they tend to serve disproportionately a rural and poor demographic (Azra et al., 2007, pp. 177–182). Azra, Afrianty, and Hefner (2007, pp. 177–182) showed a statistic produced by the Ministry of Religious Affairs in 2003 suggesting that over 50 % of *pesantren* students were children of farmers or laborers. A survey in 1999, across ten provinces, indicated that 85 % of *pesantren* are located in rural areas, 14 % in semi-urban districts, and just 0.8 % in cities (Azra et al., 2007, pp. 177–182). The most current data from 2012 suggests a similar success rate of 99.45 % for both *Madrasah Aliyah* and secular high school (SMA) (M. Abdullah, 2019; Amrilla & Zuhri, 2013). For secondary schooling, the success rate is 99.57 % for secular junior secondary school (SMP), but there is no available data on the success rate for *Madrasah Tsanawiyah* only. The available data does not disaggregate the data for SMP and *Madrasah Tsanawiyah* (Direktorat Jenderal Pendidikan Islam, 2012b; Kumoro, 2012).

The success rate in the National Final Examination as a reliable indicator of the educational quality should be questioned, as there is a substantial amount of mass media reporting, which questions the integrity of this examination, due to practices such as cheating, the leaking of question and answer sheets, and an over emphasis on coaching for the examination by teachers who fear the possible failure of their students in this examination.

## F. Conclusion

As an Islamic institution, *pesantren* has played several important and crucial roles in the changing historical situation

of Indonesia. It has survived different political contexts and continued to grow despite the changing socio-economic conditions of Indonesian people. In the colonial era, it tried to isolate itself from the influence of the European, non-Muslim, colonizers because they believed that the Islamic learning tradition would nurture a mastery in Islamic sciences and through this Muslims would be able to perform their religious obligations in line with the Islamic orthodoxy. *Pesantren* leaders saw a different goal in the colonizers' educational philosophy which was perceived as a worldly oriented system. Such a philosophy was regarded harmful to the 'pure vision' of *pesantren* learning tradition. As a result, *pesantren* education represented a solid block to the influence of the colonizers. *Pesantren* leaders maintained and developed an intellectual network with Islamic learning centres in the Arab speaking world through pilgrimage to Mecca and by studying in the Middle East.

Over the course of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the situation changed when traditional Islamic education in the Middle East was subject to a reform movement. This reformism was a result of self-critique on the backwardness of Islamic society throughout the world. One of the ways advocated to overcome this backwardness and to enhance the progress of Muslims was that Islam -and Islamic education in particular- should adopt aspects of Western notions of modernity. It resulted in the adoption of graded class model to replace *halaqah* model which had previously been the most popular. Another result was the incorporation of non-Islamic subjects as to equip students who were facing a competitive modern world. This reform greatly influenced *pesantren* in Indonesia, as

evidenced by their adoption of graded class model in the form of *madrrasah* system and the incorporation of non-Islamic subjects.

Later, the government of post-independence Indonesia put pressure on *pesantren*, so that they would be in line with national development priorities by integrating them into national education system. Up until the present, there has been a dynamic negotiation and appropriation in the process of interaction between the Indonesian state and *pesantren* as independent entities, particularly with regard to curriculum content and the portion of Islamic subjects in it. In spite of its weaknesses as an educational institution, *pesantren* have continued to grow and play significant roles in maintaining the Islamic educational tradition, out of which considerable numbers of Islamic scholars and community leaders have been produced. Therefore, understanding *pesantren* remains important way of understanding the development of Islam in Indonesia.

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