

THE INTEGRATION OF THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM INTO PESANTREN EDUCATION SYSTEM

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Abstract; the pesantren has been one of the important educational institutions in Indonesia. As an education institution, the curriculum of pesantrens seems to reflect the style and will of the kyai who leads the pesantren, reflect his interpretations of both Islamic traditions, and the changes happening in his society. A *pesantren* is an indigenous education institution in Indonesia concerned with conducting Islamic education. *Kitab kuning* teaching is the typical curriculum of pesantren that is applied in the pesantren education system. Some *pesantrens* still strictly use *kitab kuning* as their whole curriculum, whereas some others include other curricula into their overall curriculum. Due to globalization and modernity, pesantren - as one of the education system in Indonesia- tries to integrate their curriculum into the national curriculum.

Keywords: national curriculum, pesantren, Islamic tradition, education system, *kitab kuning*

Introduction

It is commonly believed and accepted until now, that religion and science are two concepts that cannot be integrated. It creates a wide dichotomy between religion and science. Simply understood, religion produces “religious sciences” on the one hand, while science produces “secular sciences” on the other. Hence, religion and science are regarded as independent

– they each have their own sphere in terms of what matters they approach, research methods, and truth criteria

In terms of education system in Indonesia, this dichotomy appears in two institutions. The Ministry of National Education is responsible for teaching the “secular sciences” such as physics, mathematics, biology, and so forth that produce skilful graduates without including any religious teachings, whereas the Ministry of Religious Affairs is responsible for teaching the “religious sciences” that produce “religious” graduates.¹

Pesantren, as one of education system in Indonesia, has characteristic which is different with other system of education. One of the characteristic of the pesantren education system is kitab kuning teaching as the typical curriculum of pesantren.

Some pesantren still strictly use *kitab kuning* (classical Islamic Arabic books) as their whole curriculum, whereas some others include other curricula into their overall curriculum. The need for formal acknowledgment by the government in order pesantrens’ graduates may continue to tertiary education is one of the reasons for the acceptance of curricula other than just kitab kuning. As a consequence, pesantren tries to integrate the national curriculum in their system of education. On the one hand, this integration creates some positive impacts for education system in pesantren, while on the other hand creates also some negative effects.

This essay will discuss the discourse of pesantren in integrating national curriculum into their education system. The first part talks about general background of this essay. In the second part will explore the Islamic education system and overview of pesantren. The next is talking about implications of

¹Azyumardi Azra, *Pendidikan Islam: Tradisi dan Modernisasi Menuju Milenium Baru* (Jakarta: Logos. 2004), p. 112.

the integration the national curriculum into pesantren education system. It will be followed by talking about pesantren; past, now and future. Finally conclusion is drawn in the last part based on previous discussion.

B. Islamic Education System and Pesantren

The Islamic education system in Indonesia consists of *madrasah* and *pesantren*. *Madrasah* is a classical Islamic school educational system that initially adopted certain aspects of Dutch schooling system. It introduced in the early 20th century.² The curriculum in madrasah is provided by the government with 30 percent religious subjects and 70 percent general subjects³. Madrasah consists of three levels: Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (Elementary School), Madrasah Tsanawiyah (Junior High School) and Madrasah Aliyah (Senior High School).

Pesantren is usually associated with the traditionalist community in Indonesia, because traditional method of teaching and learning process is implemented by pesantren. Pesantren is a term indicating an Islamic educational institution in Indonesia where santri accept Islamic teaching and live as well.⁴

There has been a controversy among researchers concerning the origin of the *pesantren*. One view assumes that the *pesantren* originated from the Hindu tradition that had existed in Indonesia before Islam was disseminated. This point

²Azyumardi Azra, *Jaringan Ulama Timur Tengah dan Kepulauan Nusantara Abad XVII dan XVIII* (Bandung: Mizan, 1998), h. 57.

³Martin van Bruinessen, *Traditionalist' and 'Islamist' Pesantren in Contemporary Indonesia*, Retrieved October 13 2012, from http://www.let.uu.nl/~martin.vanbruinessen/personal/publications/pesantren_in_Indonesia.htm.

⁴Mujammil Qomar, *Pesantren dari Transformasi Metodologi Menuju Demokratisasi Institusi* (Jakarta: Erlangga, 2007), p. 45.

of view is supported by some arguments, such as similarities found with *pesantren* and the previous Hindu education. Also, the word '*pesantren*' is derived from the Sanskrit language where Hinduism was sourced.⁵

Another view argues that this Islamic institution came from the Islamic traditions itself. The nature of the dissemination of Islam in Indonesia by the advocates and the similarities found between *pesantrens* and the Islamic education tradition in the Middle East are the reasons for asserting that the *pesantren* came from Islam.⁶ One other view is that the *pesantren* originated from the Hindu traditions, and was then Islamised by Muslim *du'at* (preachers) following the victory of Islamic kingdoms over the Hindu kingdoms.⁷ Regardless of such a controversy, the *pesantren* has certainly developed through time from its simplest form, that is *surau* or *langgar* (a special place for prayers located in a village) to a new and relatively modern institution that shares some features with schools.

As an educational institution, *pesantren* has several elements. According to Susanto the basic elements of *pesantren* are: *pondok*, mosque, *kitab kuning*, *santri* and *kyai*.⁸

⁵Zamahsyari Dhofier, *Tradisi Pesantren: Studi tentang Pandangan Hidup Kyai*. Jakarta: Lembaga Penelitian, Pendidikan dan Penerangan Ekonomi dan Sosial (LP3ES), 1985), h. 89.

⁶Azyumardi Azra, *Jaringan Ulama Timur Tengah dan Kepulauan Nusantara Abad XVII dan XVIII* (Bandung: Mizan, 1998), p. 67.

⁷Norcholish Madjid, *Merumuskan Kembali Tujuan Pesantren* (Jakarta: Paramadina, 1997), p. 77.

⁸Muthohar, *Ideologi Pendidikan Pesantren: Pesantren Ditengah Arus Ideology-Ideologi Pendidikan* (Semarang: Pustaka Rizki Putra, 2007), p. 112.

1. *Pondok* (Dormitory)

A *pondok* is a basic characteristic of a *pesantren*, which means a dormitory where the *santris* stay. The *pondok* usually is located beside or surrounding the *pesantren*.

2. Mosque

The basic function of mosque is a place to pray and worship Allah. In *pesantren*, besides its function as a place to pray, the mosque also been used as another learning place. It means there are two places in terms of learning process in *pesantren*; classrooms and mosque.

3. *Kitab Kuning* (classical Islamic book)

Kitab kuning is another basic element of a *pesantren*. The term *kitab kuning* indicates traditional or classical Islamic books which have been taught in the *pesantren*. *Kitab kuning* is a basic universal reference in a sense that the *pesantren* community always seeks the solution for each socio-religious problem in a *kitab kuning*. It is even considered as an undoubted truth by the community.

Mochtar said that *kitab kuning* advocates argued that considering *kitab kuning* as a universal reference does not mean ignoring al-Qur'an and al-Sunnah, but it is even following them. *Kitab kuning*, which comprises various Islamic disciplines such as *fiqh*, *tauhid*, and *tashanwuf*, was based on the two sources, too. It is regarded as a set of comprehensive interpretation of al-Qur'an and al-Sunnah.⁹

⁹Mochtar, Tradisi Kitab Kuning: Sebuah Observasi Umum. In M. Wahid (Ed.), *Pesantren Masa Depan: Wacana Pemberdayaan dan Transformasi Pesantren* (Bandung: Pustaka Hidayah, 1999), p. 56.

4. *Santri* (students)

Another basic element of *pesantren* is the *santri* or the student. A *santri* is a person who studies in *pesantren*. A *santri* is usually identified as a person who studies deeply religion teaching in order to be a pious person in community.


5. *Kyai* (Islamic clerics)

The *kyai* is the most essential element of a *pesantren*, because he, assisted by some *ustadz*s (teachers), leads and teaches Islam to the *santris* (students). In many cases, *kyai* is usually the founder of the *pesantren* or at least he continues his parent leadership in *pesantren*.

One of the common features in *pesantren* is that the *kyai* plays a very important role. Generally, he possesses total control over the *pesantren* in each decision-making process, especially at the macro level. In some cases, indeed, the *kyai* is assisted by staff in determining the program policies, but still the final decision is in the hands of the *kyai*. It is expected that this authority held by the *kyai* results in less-involvement of other key stakeholders, such as teachers, students and parents.

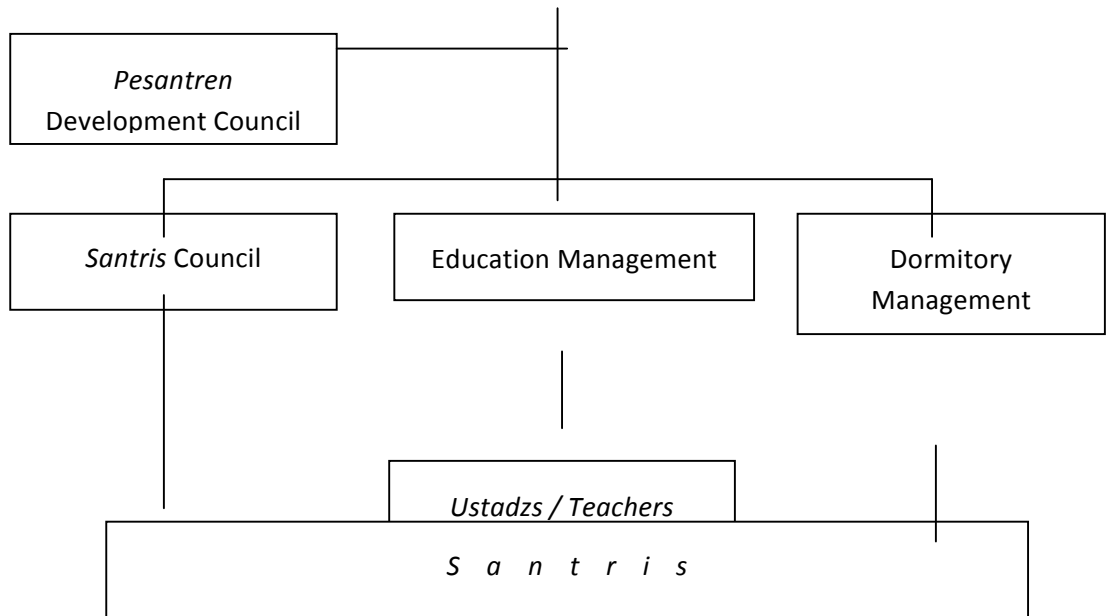
Pesantren is paralleled by some experts as a kingdom, in which the *kyai* is the king. This implies that the *kyai* has total power and authority to control any aspect of *pesantren*. *Pesantren* curricula, methods of teaching and assessment methods are designed by *kyai*

Pesantren Organisational Structure¹⁰



Kyai / Leader

¹⁰Mastuhu, *Dinamika Sistem Pendidikan Pesantren: Suatu Kajian Tentang Unsur dan Nilai Sistem Pendidikan Pesantren* (Jakarta: INIS, 1994), p. 80.



The above figure indicates that the highest authority in the *kyai's* hands as the leader in the pesantren. All people in the structure under the *kyai* are responsible to him for the activities they do. *Kyai* manages all activities in the *pesantren* in material, economic, physical aspects and the like. However, in the case where the *pesantren* is owned by a society represented by a board or foundation, the role of the *kyai* is restricted to some extent. He still has the power to control the *pesantren*, but he also should consult with the people of the foundation.

C. The Implication of the National Curriculum Integration into Pesantren

Curriculum is a set of experiences that students undertake with the guidance of the school, in order to achieve the goals of their school.¹¹ A curriculum is vital as it is the set of guidelines for the school to run its programs in order to reach its goals. Each school has its own curriculum, even though it may be recorded in the simplest form, probably not a formal well-written curriculum.

In responding to the changes, the *pesantren* has, then, been divided into two major types, namely: *salafi* (traditional) and *kbalafi* (modern).¹² While the former still retain *kitab kuning* as the only curriculum to teach, the latter includes the formal government curriculum into its system. These two major types of *pesantren* imply that there must be a curriculum change process within these *pesantrens*.

Before the integration of national curriculum, *pesantren* teaches students exclusively religious curriculum and *kitab kuning* teaching is the typical curriculum of *pesantren*. Starting from 1970s, the national curriculum was integrated to the *pesantren* education system in the form of *madrasah* and the *pesantren* education system is becoming under the Ministry of Religious Affairs.¹³

The government of Indonesia through the Soeharto's regime (1966-1998) encouraged *madrasah* and *pesantren* to follow the national curriculum standards as a response to globalization. As a result many *pesantren* nowadays try to keep their identity as

¹¹Armstrong, *Developing and Documenting the Curriculum* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1993), p. 45.

¹²*Pedoman Pelaksanaan Pondok Pesantren Salafiyah Sebagai Pola Wajib Belajar Pendidikan Dasar*. (Jakarta: Kantor Menko Kesra dan Taskin, 2000).

¹³Muhammad Zuhdi, The 1975 Three Minister Decree and the Modernization of Indonesian Islamic School. *American Educational History Journal*. 32:1, 2005. p. 36-43

part of the Islamic education system while at the same time strive to follow the national education system to face many changes in the global world. In recent times, *pesantren* have been influenced by the globalization of education. There are many benefits as a consequence of globalization of *pesantren* and also there are many drawbacks. However, the drawbacks can be minimized well.

The integration of *pesantren* into the national education system as a response to globalization can be seen in three aspects; competition of *pesantren* graduates with public school graduates, equality between Arabic and English in *pesantren*, and growth of Muslim intellectuals of the *pesantren*'s background.

First is the competition of *pesantren* graduates with other graduates. In 1960s, some *pesantren* did not wish to adopt the national education standard. They think, if *pesantren* applied the national education standard in their system of education, the roles from government should be obeyed. As a result, *pesantren* lose their autonomy, because of the interference from the government. Furthermore, some *pesantren* tend to offer a solid religious curriculum to create *ulama* (Islamic clerics) rather than be globally competitive. In addition, other *pesantren* did not hope their graduates to become the government employees and only teach them more practical knowledge.

However globalization is a reality and cannot be avoided. In recent time, many *pesantren* have applied the national education system as a response to globalization, although they have to accept the government's interference. Because of this, *pesantren* graduates are not only able to speak in front of people as *da'i* (preachers), but also can compete with graduates from public school to continue their study at higher schools or to get jobs and good positions in the government or others organizations. In my point of view the government intervention in *pesantren* development is important in order to omit a wider gap between public schools and the Islamic schools.

Secondly, globalization brings English as an international language. Nowadays, English is not only a compulsory for students, but also a need to all people in order to interact with modernization. As a matter of fact, in 1960s some *pesantren* did not wish to teach English to their students. Some *kyais* believe that English is a language of colonialism and language of *kafir* (unbelievers). In that time, the main purpose of the teaching process in *pesantren* was learning Arabic and how to translate the Arabic textbooks into the local dialect. Furthermore, reading and memorizing the Quran are the other main purposes in the system of education in most *pesantren* in Indonesia. The indicator of successful students can be measured by their ability to recite the Quran, although they do not understand of Arabic.

However, many *pesantren* nowadays have been combining traditional Islamic values with modern subjects, for example English and computing. It can be predicted that English will be the future language of global education in *pesantren*. In addition, many *pesantren* students are also interested to learn English. Consequently, students are not only able to master Arabic, but also English. Wahid (2006) states that one of the features in the learning process in *pesantren* is mastering tools of communication, both Arabic and English. So, English is predicted to have the same position as Arabic in *pesantren*.

Nevertheless, the most important point should be considered is the model of learning English in *pesantren*. The English teachers in *pesantren* are adopting the traditional systems of teaching, which relies on textbooks and uses Indonesian language. The appearance of competency-based curriculum in 2004 imposes the English teachers in *pesantren* to improve their abilities and skills to deliver this subject.

The last point of the globalization impact on *pesantren* is the emergence of Muslims intellectual's, which have *pesantren* educational background, such as Gus Dur (the former President of Indonesia), and Hidayat Nurwahid (the chief of the House Representative). It means, after adopting the national

curriculum, the system of education in *pesantren* have given birth for many experts who are becoming the intellectuals and the Islamic clerics as well. *Pesantren* have shown their function to follow the changes in the modern world.

People who disagree with the integration of education system in *pesantren* argue that *pesantren* is a place to educate students to be pious Muslims with good morals, to teach santri to read kitab kuning, to create cadres of '*ulama* and *da'i* who have sincerity, patience, and strength in applying Islamic teachings, and to be the 'light' in their community.¹⁴

There were a number of different reasons to adopt the new system of education in *pesantren*. According to Lukens-Bull it is one way to negotiate modernity and there was an encouragement from Soeharto regime. While Bruinessen argues that the integration of national curriculum by *pesantren* is the demands of a changing labour market where every person tries to compete in order to get a better job and position.¹⁵

Even though adoption new system is difficult, in reality *pesantren* has to accept this system. This creates some positive impacts in the one hand and also negative effects in the other hand.

D. *Pesantren: Past, Now and Future*

The influences of globalization extend to every aspects of life. Globalization is not only exclusively limited to economy, but also culture, information, science, technology and education.

¹⁴Norcholish Madjid, *Merumuskan Kembali Tujuan Pesantren*. p .97.

¹⁵Martin van Bruinessen, *Pesantren and Kitab Kuning: Maintenance and Continuation of a Tradition of Religious Learning*, in: Wolfgang Marschall (ed.), *Texts from the islands. Oral and written traditions of Indonesia and the Malay world [Ethnologica Bernica, 4]*. Berne: University of Berne, 1994. p. 121-145.

Pesantren, which a part of the education system, is the Islamic boarding schools with a curriculum emphasizing religious teachings. Due to facing globalization, some *pesantren* have integrated their system of education into the national education system. As a result, *pesantren* graduates can compete in the public life, English has the same position with Arabic, and the emergence of the Islamic cleric intellectuals.

A possible dilemma of the accommodation of the national curriculum is *pesantren* aims reduced and become pragmatic. In the past, *kyai* and teachers in *pesantren* teach based on sincerity. They did not get any payment. Nowadays, *pesantren* has to run their education system based on a modern organization as a consequence of accepting the national curriculum.

The critique to *pesantren* is leadership model in *pesantren*. Even though *pesantren* has integrated education system into the national system, most *pesantren* leaders still apply charismatic leadership. A charismatic leader will show great confidence in their followers. They are very persuasive and make very effective use of body language as well as verbal language.¹⁶ In terms of *pesantren* context, every teacher and student have to obey what *kyai* said because the feeling of fear of *i'tiradh* (being disobedient to the *kyai*) which, according to the *pesantren*'s belief and tradition, might result in unblessed knowledge. As a result, what *kyai* said should be accepted by all students as something true. This model of leadership should be constructed creatively, but not be diminished. Students should be given an opportunity to express their idea as a concept of the modern education system.

Although there are many critiques, *pesantren* can compete in a changing world and maintain Islamic values. Lukens-Bull states,

¹⁶Lussier, R. N. and Achua, C. F. *Leadership: Theory, Application, Skill Development* (2nd ed. Eagan, MN: Thomson-West, 2004), p. 78.

*“If schools make people modern, then pesantren leaders are seeking to make people modern in a distinctly Islamic way. The combination of religious training, character development, and secular education is designed to create people who can live and compete in a changing world and maintain traditional values”.*¹⁷

It means that pesantren is not merely the place to create *ulama* (Muslims scholars), but pesantren is also the place to teach its students the social life, thereby, their graduates can be open-minded in facing the global problems such as the issue of terrorism and multiculturalism and at the same time they can keep up the Islamic values.

Conclusion

A *pesantren* is an indigenous education institution in Indonesia concerned with conducting Islamic education. *Kitab kuning* teaching is the typical curriculum of pesantren that is applied in the pesantren education system. Some *pesantrens* still strictly use *kitab kuning* as their whole curriculum, whereas some others include other curricula into their overall curriculum. Due to globalization and modernity, pesantren - as one of the education system in Indonesia- tries to integrate their curriculum into the national curriculum. This integration has a positive impact in one hand; however, it also has some negative impact in the other hand.

¹⁷ Lukens-Bull, R A, *Teaching Morality: Javanese Islamic Education in a Globalizing Era*, Retrieved December 23 2011 from <http://www.uib.no/jais/v003ht/03-026-047Lukens1.htm>

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