

Educational Problems in Islamic Boarding Schools: A Philosophical Study of Tradition and Modernity

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Abstract: *This research aims to examine the problems of education in Islamic boarding schools from a philosophical perspective by highlighting the dialectic between tradition and modernity. Pesantren as the oldest Islamic educational institution in Indonesia faces a double challenge: maintaining traditional values rooted in spirituality and manners, while adapting to the currents of modernity that demand methodological innovation, rationality, and efficiency. This research uses a library research approach by examining academic literature, scientific journals, and contemporary researchers on Islamic boarding school transformation. The results of the study show that the problems of Islamic boarding school education include epistemological, methodological, and axiological aspects. Epistemologically, Islamic boarding schools are still trying to unite religious science and general science in an integrative scientific paradigm. Methodologically, Islamic boarding schools face challenges in adapting modern technology and learning systems without ignoring the characteristics of the typical teacher-student relationship.*

Abstrak : *Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji problematika pendidikan di pesantren dari perspektif filosofis dengan menyoroti dialektika antara tradisi dan modernitas. Pesantren sebagai lembaga pendidikan Islam tertua di Indonesia menghadapi tantangan ganda: mempertahankan nilai-nilai tradisi yang berakar pada spiritualitas dan adab, sekaligus beradaptasi terhadap arus modernitas yang menuntut inovasi metodologis, rasionalitas, dan efisiensi. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan studi pustaka (library research) dengan menelaah literatur akademik, jurnal ilmiah, dan para peneliti kontemporer tentang transformasi pesantren. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa problematika pendidikan pesantren meliputi aspek epistemologis, metodologis, dan aksiologis. Secara epistemologis, pesantren masih berupaya menyatukan ilmu agama dan ilmu umum dalam paradigma keilmuan yang integratif. Secara metodologis, pesantren menghadapi tantangan dalam mengadaptasi teknologi dan sistem pembelajaran modern tanpa mengabaikan karakteristik relasi guru-santri yang khas.*

Keywords: *Islamic Boarding School , Tradition , Modernity , Islamic Education, Philosophical Studies*

INTRODUCTION

Cottage Islamic boarding school as institution Islamic education has very deep roots in in tradition Nusantara science and has play a role strategic in formation character , knowledge , and religion public Indonesian Muslims (Silfiana , 2020). However thus , in journey history , Islamic boarding school not escape from dynamics change social science knowledge and technology continues developing . Literature review show that Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia today This faced with a very big

challenge complex , namely How maintain teak self religious and cultural while respond demands rapid modernity (Mas'udi , 2024; Silfiana , 2020).

Modernity demand institution education For behave adaptive to developments of the times, for example through integration curriculum general , use digital technology , and formation competence 21st century , without ignore element mark traditional that has become characteristics typical Islamic boarding schools (Zuhri & Syamsi , 2023). On the other hand other , Islamic boarding schools traditional often experience dilemma between preservation method classic like sorogan and bandongan yellow book with need For do changing the learning format to make it relevant in context moment This (Silfiana , 2020). Tension between maintain traditions and adopt modernity This become problematic main education Islamic boarding schools that require study deep in a way philosophical . More further , the transformation that occurs like integration curriculum national and digitalization learning show that change No Can just technical , but also conceptual and value-based need questionable , whether modernization the precisely erode spiritual quality or strengthen capacity Islamic boarding school in answer global challenges ? (Novebri et al ., 2025). With Thus , it is important For do analysis philosophical to essence education Islamic boarding school to be found capable synthesis bridge tradition and modernity in context contemporary Islamic education .

Study of education in Islamic boarding schools has Lots focus on aspects structural and managerial , such as transformation curriculum or modernization management institutions . For example , research by Modernization Management Islamic boarding school Welcoming the Era of Society 5.0 (Aldeia et al ., 2023) highlighted How Islamic boarding school adapt management and technology information in the era of Society 5.0. Meanwhile Therefore , a study by Preserving Tradition Amid Disruption: A Systematic Literature Review of Pesantren Development in Indonesia (Akhmad , 2024) reviews in a way bibliographic various studies that raise modernity and Islamic boarding schools , however still tend nature descriptive without examine in a way deep runway philosophical from education Islamic boarding school That Alone .

However Thus , there are emptiness study related how is the transition process education Islamic boarding schools , from the traditional model towards modernity philosophical-epistemological managed . The study examines essence mark scientific , epistemic and axiological from system Islamic boarding school in context tradition and modernity Still limited . For example , the article A Traditional and Modern Education System of Pondok Pesantren in Perspective Philosophy of Education (Silfiana , 2020) hinders that system education Islamic boarding school has adopt paradigm modern education , but the analysis only stop at the description pattern , not synthesis philosophical .

Based on this gap , research This presenting novelty in the form of approach comparative-philosophical which places education Islamic boarding school as a locus of dialectics between tradition

and modernity . Research This describe change structure or curriculum , and strive dig in a way deep essence epistemic system education Islamic boarding school , tension mark between tradition science classic and demands modernity , as well as effort synthesis conceptual that can become foothold for development education Islamic boarding schools that are relevant in contemporary times .

With Thus , research This offer framework conceptual new in discourse philosophy Islamic education which is specific highlight Islamic boarding school as institutions education scientific , moral and spiritual in the modern era .

METHOD

Study This use method studies library research with approach qualitative and philosophical approach This chosen Because study No oriented not on field data , but on analysis conceptual and reflective to ideas related philosophy with education Islamic boarding school . Research This make an effort understand in a way deep essence , values , and problems education Islamic boarding school in dialectics between tradition and modernity . Literature review allows researchers browse thoughts relevant classic and contemporary use find synthesis between two poles (Silfiana , 2020)

Data analyzed use analysis content analysis with approach hermeneutic and reflective-philosophical analysis done through three stage : (1) description to idea main from various literature , (2) interpretation For understand meaning philosophical in context tradition and modernity , and (3) synthesis For find relationships and offers paradigm new for education Islamic boarding school . Through approach this research produce deep and argumentative understanding about problematic education Islamic boarding school without lost runway values Islam that becomes teak himself . (Muqit, 2018)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Essence of Islamic Boarding School Education from a Philosophical Perspective

Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) emerged and developed as institutions for the transmission of religious knowledge, deeply rooted in the traditions of the Indonesian ulama (Islamic scholars). Since their inception, pesantren have functioned not merely as places for memorizing Islamic texts, but as loci for the formation of Islamic manners, morals, and scholarly identity. An educational practice that emphasizes the formation of ethical human beings (ta'dīb), religious deepening (tafaqquh fi al-dīn), and communal living within a learning community. This view is reflected in historical and philosophical studies of pesantren, which place spiritual and community values at the center of pesantren education (Silfiana, 2020).

From a philosophical perspective in Islamic education, Syed M. Naquib al-Attas's perspective asserts that Islamic education must prioritize the formation of a perfect human being through ta'dīb (adab

education), not merely the transfer of technical or utilitarian competencies. This approach is relevant to understanding the essence of Islamic boarding schools, which emphasize the epistemological orientation of what knowledge is, where it comes from, and for what purpose it is taught. Al-Attas's framework helps explain why Islamic boarding schools place classical texts and the student-kiai relationship at the center of learning (Al-Attas, 1999).

Learning methods and practices in Islamic boarding schools (e.g., sorogan, bandongan, halaqah) reflect a distinct epistemology from the modern school system. These methods emphasize direct teacher-student interaction, the recitation of classical texts, and moral formation through the example of the kiai (Islamic teacher), a holistic and character-centric educational model. Recent literature studies have shown that while this approach is strong in terms of moral formation and continuity of tradition, it faces challenges when confronted with the demands of contemporary education, which emphasize standardized curricula, 21st-century competencies, and the use of digital technology. This epistemic difference marks the central philosophical dilemma: the relationship between value orientation (axiology) and the rational-instrumental demands of modernity (Silfiana, 2020).

In the Indonesian context, several empirical studies and literature reviews demonstrate variations in Islamic boarding schools' responses to modernity. Some maintain strict traditional traditions, while others adopt curriculum integration and technology to enhance the relevance and competence of their students. This transformation represents both the adoption of techniques and a shift in discourse about educational goals, from a focus on spiritual and ethical virtues to an increased focus on social, academic, and professional skills (Novebri et al., 2025).

Educational Problems in Islamic Boarding Schools

The long history of Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) as Islamic educational institutions demonstrates their extraordinary adaptability in preserving scholarly traditions while responding to changing times. However, this adaptation process has not always been without obstacles. Educational modernization, technological developments, and the demands of 21st-century competencies have given rise to various complex problems within the Islamic boarding school education system. These challenges are not only practical, such as curriculum updates and learning methods, but also touch on more fundamental philosophical aspects, namely questions about the nature of knowledge, educational methods, and the purpose of the Islamic boarding school itself (Akhmad, 2024; Novebri et al., 2025).

Several studies have shown that the main dilemma facing Islamic boarding schools lies in maintaining the authenticity of tradition amidst the demands of modernity, which demands efficiency, rationality, and pedagogical innovation (Aldeia et al., 2023; Silfiana, 2020). On the one hand, Islamic boarding schools possess unique spiritual and cultural strengths, and on the other, their systems are often

considered unresponsive to shifts in the global educational paradigm. This tension presents multidimensional epistemological, methodological, and axiological issues that require deeper philosophical study to ensure that the development of Islamic boarding school education does not lose its Islamic value orientation while remaining relevant to the needs of the times (Mas'udi, 2024; Zuhri & Syamsi, 2023).

Epistemological Problems

Islamic boarding schools face epistemological challenges related to the position of religious and general knowledge, or between classical knowledge traditions and the demands of modernity. Many writings indicate that the knowledge system in Islamic boarding schools is still heavily influenced by traditional epistemologies, such as the *bayānī* orientation (interpretation of texts), and is somewhat limited to *burhānī* or *'irfānī* epistemologies that emphasize rationality, empiricism, and critical reflection (War'i, 2021). Research by Kuswandi & Asmoni (2023) found that the Islamic boarding school curriculum combines the moral aspects of classical texts and logic/*usthul fiqh*, but still faces challenges in developing a systematic scientific integration. This challenge is important because without epistemic reflection, Islamic boarding school education can become trapped in the reproduction of tradition without updating concepts relevant to the contemporary context, thus limiting the relevance of students' knowledge and abilities to face the challenges of the times.

Methodological Problems

Furthermore, there are problems related to pedagogical methods and approaches in Islamic boarding schools. Classical methods such as *sorogan*, *bandongan*, and *halaqah kitab kuning* remain the primary practices in many Islamic boarding schools (Syukur, 2019). However, these methods are often less adaptable to 21st-century learning, information technology, and the active-learning demands of the modern era. Furthermore, a study by Surahman (2019) shows that many Islamic boarding schools face challenges in human resources, technology, curriculum, and a learning orientation that favors traditional values over professional competence. As a result, learning methods in Islamic boarding schools sometimes experience a misalignment between traditional styles and the demands of modern educational innovation, which can create a gap between the output of Islamic boarding school education and the needs of the outside world.

Axiological Problems

Problems in terms of educational values and objectives (axiology): Islamic boarding schools are required to maintain the spiritual traditions, character, and morals of their students, yet simultaneously face pressure to produce graduates who are "work-ready," academically and professionally competent,

and adaptable to globalization. Research by Lisdaleni et al. (2022) shows that Islamic boarding schools often find themselves at a crossroads between the ideals of Islamic norms and the needs of the modern world, including market orientation, technology, and the globalization of values. This situation creates a dilemma: if modernity is overemphasized, religious values and morals can be marginalized, but if tradition is overly maintained, the relevance and competitiveness of Islamic boarding school graduates can be reduced. In this context, it is important for Islamic boarding schools to build a strong (axiological) value framework that speaks to the contemporary context.

Tradition and Modernity in Islamic Boarding School Education

The dialectic between tradition and modernity in Islamic boarding school education reflects a unique epistemological dynamic in the history of Islamic education in Indonesia. The Islamic boarding school tradition is built on a foundation of classical scholarship that emphasizes the transmission of religious texts (*tafaqquh fi al-din*), the ethical relationship between *kiai* (Islamic scholars) and *santri* (students), and moral and spiritual orientation in character formation. This system relies on the *sorogan* (religious gathering), *bandongan* (religious gathering), and *halaqah* (religious gathering), which emphasize the value of *adab* (ethnicity) and the depth of meaning in learning (Syukur, 2019). Conversely, modernity demands efficiency, rationality, and methodological renewal, including the integration of the general curriculum, professional management, and the use of digital technology in learning (Aldeia et al., 2023). This tension, beyond technical issues, also concerns the epistemological struggle between value orientation and educational instrument orientation (Silfiana, 2020).

Literature reviews show that Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia have adopted various strategies to bridge these two poles. Some Islamic boarding schools still strictly maintain traditional Salaf traditions by rejecting the interference of modern curricula, while others have begun to integrate national systems and technology to expand their social relevance (Zuhri & Syamsi, 2023). This phenomenon demonstrates that the modernization of Islamic boarding schools is incorporative, not destructive; elements of modernity are accepted as long as they do not erase the spiritual substance and scientific ethics that are at the heart of Islamic boarding schools. Novebri et al., (2025) emphasized that digitalization and curriculum innovation can actually strengthen the capacity of Islamic boarding schools as centers of Islamic education, if the modernization process is carried out based on the principle of balancing values and social context. Thus, the relationship between tradition and modernity in Islamic boarding schools cannot be understood as an opposing dichotomy, but rather as an adaptive dialectic that continues to undergo philosophical and practical negotiations.

However, the integration of tradition and modernity also raises deeper philosophical issues. Epistemologically, Islamic boarding schools face challenges in managing the duality between religious

and general knowledge, between text and context, between orthodoxy and scientific creativity (War'i, 2021). Meanwhile, from an axiological perspective, concerns arise that educational modernization could erode the spiritual and moral dimensions of students. Silfiana (2020) emphasizes that Islamic boarding school education is truly based on the unity of knowledge and adab (ethics), as Syed M. Naquib al-Attas asserted that the goal of Islamic education is not merely the transfer of knowledge but also the formation of a civilized personality (ta'dib). Therefore, educational innovation in Islamic boarding schools must be rooted in Islamic values to avoid being trapped in a merely functional modernity detached from spiritual morality.

Within this philosophical framework, tradition and modernity should not be positioned as mutually exclusive entities, but as two poles that can be synthesized. Islamic boarding schools can become integrative educational laboratories that combine spiritual depth with modern intellectual prowess. This view aligns with Mas'udi (2024), who believes that Islamic boarding schools need to develop an adaptive educational system without losing their traditional roots, thus producing both knowledgeable and civilized individuals. Thus, the dialectic between tradition and modernity in Islamic boarding schools is not a crisis, but rather an epistemological opportunity to enrich the treasury of Islamic education relevant to the challenges of the times.

Beyond curriculum and methodology, the integration of tradition and modernity within Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) also involves socio-cultural dimensions and relational networks. Studies in communities on the north coast of Java show that traditional Islamic boarding schools function not only as educational institutions but also as spaces for the socialization of local values and cultural identity. In modern conditions, these Islamic boarding schools have begun to open up to global networks and digital media, while still upholding cultural diversity practices (such as tahlilan, slametan, and manaqiban) as part of their social ecosystem. These research findings emphasize that modern changes do not always erase traditions, but often force them to undergo reconceptualization to make them relevant to the millennial generation (Hadi, 2021).

Furthermore, studies of hybrid Islamic boarding schools in the digital era show that innovations in social media and online platforms allow for increased access and flexibility in Islamic boarding school learning. However, their successful implementation depends heavily on the readiness of the Islamic boarding school community to interpret technology as a vehicle for values, not merely a tool for productivity. This suggests that modernity, if implemented without a strong foundation of values, could potentially disengage Islamic boarding schools from their role as institutions for the formation of morality and spirituality (Mustofa et al., 2023).

Finally, successful integrative practices in many Islamic boarding schools include strengthening internal institutional capacity, training kiai/ustaz (Islamic teachers) in digital literacy, managerial skills,

and active pedagogy, and establishing external partnerships with academia and industry. A systematic literature review shows that Islamic boarding schools that consciously and reflectively integrate modern practices with tradition (rather than simply imitating external models) tend to maintain their traditional identity while enhancing the relevance and competitiveness of their graduates (Akhmad, 2024). Thus, the tradition-modernity dialectic in Islamic boarding schools can be seen as a constructive and continuous process, as well as a reconstruction of values and a reconfiguration of institutions that maintain traditional roots while simultaneously introducing contemporary skills.

Synthesis Attempts and Philosophical Implications

The attempt to synthesize tradition and modernity in Islamic boarding school education is a philosophical step to find a balance between preserving spiritual values and mastering modern rationality. In this context, Islamic boarding schools, both as religious educational institutions and as social and cultural laboratories, strive to build harmony between *adab* (ethics) and science. Silfiana (2020) emphasizes that Islamic boarding school education places *adab* (ethics) at the core of scientific epistemology, while modernity brings a spirit of rationality and efficiency that demands a reconstruction of educational patterns without losing their spiritual substance. Therefore, the synthesis between the two cannot be interpreted simply in structural or administrative terms but must be rooted in a philosophical awareness that knowledge and values are inseparable in the Islamic education system.

From an epistemological perspective, this synthesis process can be understood as an effort to integrate two systems of knowledge that have previously existed in parallel: religious knowledge and general knowledge. War'i (2021) emphasized the need for an epistemological paradigm in Islamic boarding schools that is open to scientific methodology without sacrificing the orientation of revelation. This integration creates a holistic model of Islamic education, combining rationality and spirituality within a single set of values. Novebri et al. (2025) reinforce this view by finding that modern Islamic boarding schools that successfully integrate the national curriculum, character education, and digitalized learning are able to produce students who are adaptive and adhere to religious values. Thus, the effort to synthesize tradition and modernity is a dialectical process that enriches the epistemological and axiological dimensions of Islamic boarding school education.

Axiologically, this synthesis yields profound philosophical implications. Education in Islamic boarding schools is expected to produce knowledgeable and civilized individuals (*insan kāmil*)—individuals capable of integrating spiritual, intellectual, and social intelligence. In Hadi's (2021) view, the Islamic boarding school tradition, rooted in Islamic cosmopolitan values, can serve as a foundation for building an inclusive civilization amidst global pluralism. Meanwhile, Mustofa et al. (2023) highlight the role of hybrid Islamic boarding schools as a model for Islamic educational renewal, capable of

utilizing digital technology as a means of preaching and strengthening values. Therefore, Islamic boarding schools can play a dual role, maintaining the continuity of tradition and becoming a driving force for social transformation in the modern era.

Within a reflective framework, Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) that are able to balance tradition and modernity can become models for relevant and sustainable Islamic education in the future. Akhmad (2024) emphasized that strengthening institutional capacity, digital literacy for teachers and students, and partnerships with the academic world are essential prerequisites for the success of this synthesis. Therefore, the philosophical implications of this process are both conceptual and practical, demanding an educational design that combines spiritual vision with global competency, so that Islamic boarding schools remain both moral strongholds and centers of intellectual innovation for the Muslim community.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that the problems of Islamic boarding school education are both technical and rooted in philosophical issues concerning the epistemology, methodology, and axiology of Islamic education. Islamic boarding schools stand between two major currents: tradition, which focuses on values, morals, and spirituality, and modernity, which demands rationality, efficiency, and innovation. The dialectic between the two forms a unique dynamic that determines the direction of transformation of Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia. In this context, Islamic boarding schools play a crucial role as institutions that maintain the continuity of Islamic scholarly traditions, yet are also challenged to continuously adapt to social and technological changes without losing their spiritual identity. Epistemologically, Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) face the need to affirm an integrative scientific paradigm, where religious and general knowledge are not positioned dichotomously, but are united within the framework of monotheism and *adab* (ethics). This integration process requires a reflective awareness that Islamic education aims not only to produce intelligent individuals, but also civilized individuals (*insan kāmīl*). Meanwhile, from a methodological perspective, the transformation of the Islamic boarding school learning system and curriculum needs to be directed toward fostering critical thinking skills, digital literacy, and social sensitivity without eliminating traditional values such as role models, teacher-student closeness, and learning ethics. Thus, the renewal of methods is an effort to broaden their relevance to the times. From axiological perspective, the synthesis of tradition and modernity in Islamic boarding school education has profound philosophical implications: Islamic education must balance spiritual vision and global competence. Islamic boarding schools that successfully balance these two will produce graduates who possess both intellectual competitiveness and moral and social sensitivity. This requires strengthening Islamic boarding school governance,

increasing teacher capacity, and establishing strategic partnerships with the academic world and the wider community. Thus, Islamic boarding schools can play a dual role: serving as bastions of values and centers of intellectual innovation relevant to the development of Islamic civilization in the modern era. Ultimately, this study emphasizes the importance of an Islamic educational paradigm based on an integrated philosophy of education, an approach that blends tradition and modernity within a single set of values and goals. Islamic boarding schools that internalize this paradigm will be able to survive amidst globalization and become models of sustainable, reflective Islamic education deeply rooted in the spirituality and culture of the Indonesian archipelago.

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