

The Role of Islamic Boarding Schools in Enhancing Educational Quality and Students' Learning Motivation: A Case Study at Pondok Pesantren Darussalamah Braja Dewa, East Lampung

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ABSTRACT

The proliferation of Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia highlights the strategic role of pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) in shaping educational quality and fostering students' motivation to learn. This study explores how Pondok Pesantren Darussalamah Braja Dewa contributes to improving educational standards and cultivating santri learning enthusiasm through formal, non-formal, and informal learning systems. Employing a qualitative research approach, data were collected through interviews, observation, and documentation involving the management and students of the pesantren. The results reveal that the institution enhances educational quality by systematically organizing learning objectives, subject standards, annual and semester programs, daily learning schedules, and extracurricular activities. In parallel, the pesantren promotes learning motivation through character-building practices, religious habituation, social mentoring, emotional and spiritual intelligence development, and vocational training. Educational strategies such as wetonan, sorogan, halaqah, and musyawarah also play a vital role in achieving these outcomes. Furthermore, the pesantren functions as a religious, social, and leadership training center, supporting students in becoming intellectually grounded and spiritually responsible individuals. These findings underscore the continuing relevance and adaptability of pesantren in the modern educational landscape.

Keywords: *Islamic boarding school, educational quality, learning motivation, pesantren curriculum, santri development*

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INTRODUCTION

The transformation of Indonesia's education system in the 21st century has brought renewed attention to the role of Islamic education, particularly pondok pesantren (Islamic boarding schools), in shaping the nation's intellectual and moral landscape. As one of the most enduring indigenous institutions, pesantren have historically functioned as both religious training centers and social reform agents. Their contribution is deeply rooted in the cultural and spiritual fabric of Indonesian society, particularly in rural and semi-urban communities where access to formal educational institutions is limited. In recent decades, pesantren have become the focus of policy discussions concerning educational equity, religious moderation, and youth development. According to Dhofier (2011), pesantren are not merely institutions for teaching classical Islamic sciences but are also dynamic cultural systems capable of integrating tradition with contemporary needs. Unlike formal schools that prioritize standardized academic outcomes, pesantren place a balanced emphasis on spiritual

development, character formation, and communal values. This multidimensional educational orientation positions pesantren uniquely in responding to current challenges in education, such as declining student motivation, shallow learning, and moral disorientation among youth. Moreover, pesantren provide an alternative educational model that addresses not only the cognitive domain but also the affective and psychomotor aspects of learners. This is especially significant in a time where conventional school systems struggle to cultivate holistic student development. Thus, examining the evolving role of pesantren—especially their strategies to improve educational quality and learning motivation—is essential for understanding how Islamic education contributes to the national goal of producing competent, ethical, and resilient citizens.

The concept of educational quality in pesantren must be interpreted more broadly than in formal schooling. According to UNESCO (2005), educational quality encompasses inputs (such as teachers, curriculum, and facilities), processes (including teaching-learning interactions), and outputs (student achievement and character development). In pesantren, these dimensions manifest in unique forms. Educational inputs include not only classical Islamic texts but also local wisdom, social discipline, and the spiritual authority of the kyai. Processes are often embedded in daily routines—ritual prayer, collective meals, and communal activities—all of which serve as implicit learning models. Output is assessed less by test scores and more by behavioral transformation, mastery of religious practices, and readiness to serve the community. According to Sanjaya (2010), education that achieves quality is one that optimally develops learners' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. In pesantren, this holistic model is realized through continuous exposure to structured religious practices, mentoring relationships between seniors and juniors, and integrated curricula that combine *tafaqquh fî al-dîn* with contemporary skills. The synergy between structured instruction and spontaneous character-building environments makes pesantren an exemplary model of educational quality in practice, even in the absence of standardized evaluation frameworks. This makes it critical to explore how pesantren design their internal learning systems—both formal and non-formal—to ensure sustained quality. Moreover, as the demand for faith-based education increases among Muslim families in Indonesia, the relevance of pesantren as providers of quality education continues to grow, meriting systematic academic investigation into their pedagogical frameworks.

Learning motivation in pesantren is another key dimension that demands scholarly attention, as it underpins the effectiveness of educational processes. Defined as the internal force that drives individuals to pursue learning and persevere in the face of challenges, motivation is considered a prerequisite for meaningful education (Slavin, 2011). In pesantren, learning motivation is cultivated not only through formal classroom interaction but also through daily habits of worship, peer discipline, and the spiritual ambiance of the institution. Intrinsic motivation—such as the desire to understand religious texts or earn spiritual merit—plays a dominant role. However, extrinsic factors like recognition from the kyai, praise from peers, and the prestige of memorizing classical texts also contribute to learners' sustained engagement. Syaiful Bahri Djamarah (2002) argues that students with high motivation tend to be more consistent, independent, and productive in their learning journey. In pesantren, where learning is often self-paced and less externally enforced, the cultivation of motivation becomes essential. Ritualistic practices such as group *dzikir*, communal fasting, and scheduled *halaqah* sessions function as reinforcement mechanisms, embedding

motivation into the learners' lifestyle. This context-specific form of motivational development remains under-researched, particularly in relation to structured learning outcomes. Thus, understanding how pesantren foster student motivation through a combination of cultural reinforcement, personal relationships, and religious engagement is critical for assessing their overall educational impact.

Pedagogically, pesantren operate on a spectrum that blends traditional religious methodologies with adaptive modern strategies. Traditional methods such as *wetonan* (group recitation), *sorogan* (individual recitation), and *halaqah* (group study circles) are central to instruction and remain deeply embedded in pesantren culture (Zarkasyi, 2005). These methods emphasize oral transmission, close teacher-student interaction, and memorization, which are believed to enhance comprehension and moral internalization. However, many pesantren—especially those with formal madrasah components—are now incorporating contemporary educational approaches, including modular instruction, competency-based assessment, and project-based learning. This hybrid model allows pesantren to preserve their religious identity while equipping students with skills relevant to the 21st century. The combination of conventional and innovative methods reflects an adaptive learning ecosystem rooted in Islamic epistemology but open to pedagogical advancement. According to Sanjaya (2010), effective teaching strategies must align with learners' needs, learning goals, and institutional missions. In the case of pesantren, instructional strategies are not only meant to transfer knowledge but also to transform behavior and worldview. The diversity of instructional formats—ranging from mass lectures to peer-led *musyawarah* (discussion forums)—illustrates the flexibility of pesantren pedagogy in addressing multiple learning styles. Investigating how these instructional methods operate within a broader learning system can yield valuable insights into the pedagogical dynamics of faith-based education in Indonesia.

Beyond formal instruction, pesantren offer rich non-formal and informal educational settings that significantly enhance student engagement and learning outcomes. Non-formal education includes structured programs such as Madrasah Diniyah, leadership training, public speaking workshops, and vocational courses like sewing, carpentry, and computing. Informal education, on the other hand, occurs organically through the daily rhythms of pesantren life: communal meals, shared chores, conflict resolution, and religious rituals. These activities foster values such as discipline, cooperation, time management, and emotional intelligence. According to Lickona (2004), character education is most effective when it is integrated into all aspects of students' lives—not just taught as a subject. Pondok Pesantren Darussalamah, for instance, embeds educational values in the smallest details of student routines, including how to greet elders, maintain cleanliness, or manage personal finances. These practices function as implicit curricula that shape students' habits and identity. Moreover, the pesantren's communal setting cultivates a sense of belonging and accountability, further strengthening intrinsic motivation. Such integrated models of education are rarely found in secular institutions and represent a distinctive strength of pesantren pedagogy. Understanding these non-formal dimensions is crucial for a comprehensive analysis of how pesantren sustain both academic and moral excellence.

Empirical studies support the assertion that pesantren can serve as effective institutions for both religious and general education. Research by Kulsum (2017) found that students in pesantren environments exhibited superior memorization ability and stronger religious discipline compared to their peers in public schools. Similarly, Yafie

et al. (2016) highlighted the pesantren's role in equipping students with communication and leadership skills essential for societal contribution. These findings reinforce the need to study pesantren not only as religious institutions but also as alternative educational models capable of delivering holistic outcomes. However, most research tends to generalize pesantren without accounting for diversity in scale, curriculum, and leadership models. Pondok Pesantren Darussalamah, for example, represents a salafiyah model that remains grounded in classical texts yet is committed to curriculum development and skill-based training. This hybrid approach reflects an effort to modernize without compromising foundational values. Yet, empirical data on how such pesantren operationalize their educational vision – particularly in enhancing educational quality and learning motivation – is limited. This study attempts to fill that gap by providing a focused, in-depth analysis of one pesantren's internal learning systems, educational strategies, and institutional roles.

The current academic discourse on pesantren is often limited by either a nostalgic romanticization of tradition or a narrow critique of educational lag. Both perspectives overlook the nuanced realities of contemporary pesantren that are actively reforming their systems in response to socio-educational challenges. Pondok Pesantren Darussalamah Braja Dewa exemplifies such a dynamic institution. Established in 1965, it has grown into a multi-tiered educational facility with formal (madrasah), non-formal (madrasah diniyah), and informal (daily life) learning components. Its commitment to structured educational planning – evident in its annual programs, curriculum development, extracurricular design, and assessment mechanisms – demonstrates an institutional vision aligned with both Islamic values and national educational goals. Moreover, its integration of life skills training and social engagement positions it as not only a center of religious learning but also of community development. Analyzing how such a pesantren designs and executes its learning systems offers an important lens into how faith-based institutions adapt to educational standards without losing their identity. In this regard, the case of Darussalamah provides an excellent site for examining the intersection between tradition, innovation, and educational impact.

This study aims to investigate how Pondok Pesantren Darussalamah Braja Dewa enhances educational quality and promotes students' learning motivation through its instructional systems, pedagogical methods, and institutional culture. Specifically, the research seeks to: (1) analyze the structure and components of the pesantren's learning system; (2) explore how formal, non-formal, and informal learning environments support student engagement and value formation; and (3) assess the roles of the pesantren as an educational, religious, and social institution. By employing a qualitative case study design, this research intends to provide a holistic account of how one pesantren responds to contemporary educational demands while maintaining its religious mission. The study contributes to the academic literature on Islamic education by offering an empirically grounded model of pesantren-based learning integration. It also provides practical insights for educators, policymakers, and pesantren administrators seeking to enhance the relevance and quality of religious education in Indonesia.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to explore how Pondok Pesantren Darussalamah Braja Dewa enhances educational quality and fosters students' learning motivation through its structured and informal learning systems. A qualitative design was chosen to allow for in-depth exploration of the lived experiences, institutional practices, and contextual realities that shape the pesantren's educational impact. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative research is suitable for studies that seek to understand meanings, processes, and phenomena within natural settings, particularly when variables are not easily quantifiable.

The research was conducted at Pondok Pesantren Darussalamah, located in Braja Dewa Village, Way Jepara District, East Lampung, Indonesia. The pesantren serves as a multi-functional Islamic education institution providing both formal (madrasah), non-formal (madrasah diniyah), and informal (daily routines) learning. The primary subjects of this study included pesantren administrators (pengasuh), PAI teachers, and selected students (santri) who actively engage in both academic and religious programs.

Purposive sampling was used to select informants based on their involvement in educational planning, instructional activities, and student mentoring. This sampling technique enables the researcher to access informants who are most knowledgeable about the research topic (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Participants were selected to represent diverse perspectives within the pesantren: senior staff, teachers, and santri from different educational levels.

Data were collected through triangulated methods: (1) in-depth interviews with administrators and teachers to explore planning, curriculum, and evaluation systems; (2) observations of daily activities, instructional sessions, and community rituals; and (3) document analysis of internal curricular structures, program schedules, and vision-mission statements. This multi-method approach ensured a rich and comprehensive dataset.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, triangulation of both sources and techniques was employed. This included comparing interview results with observational notes and document content. In line with Moleong (2019), credibility in qualitative research is strengthened through consistent cross-verification among data types and perspectives.

Data analysis followed an inductive thematic analysis approach. As suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), the researcher transcribed interviews verbatim, coded the data systematically, and identified recurring themes related to instructional design, motivational strategies, and institutional functions. Analytical memo-writing and constant comparison were applied to refine categories and develop interpretive insights.

Ethical clearance was ensured by obtaining verbal consent from all participants, with confidentiality maintained throughout the research process. Participants were informed about the voluntary nature of their involvement and their right to withdraw at any point.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Structured Learning System

The pesantren implements a well-organized and tiered learning system covering formal, non-formal, and informal education. This includes structured schedules for madrasah learning, a yearly curriculum plan, syllabus breakdown,

and daily class routines. Each level—*ibtidaiyah* (elementary), *tsanawiyah* (junior secondary), and *aliyah* (senior secondary)—has tailored learning targets aligned with both classical Islamic texts and modern educational competencies. Observations confirmed consistent lesson planning, division of teaching responsibilities, and weekly evaluations. The presence of physical documentation, including teaching portfolios, syllabi, and academic calendars, validates the institutional commitment to educational structure.

2. Character-Based Education

Character building is central to the pesantren's educational philosophy. Students are exposed to continuous moral and spiritual training through practices such as *ta'lim al-muta'allim*, etiquette toward teachers, and communal rituals. Interviews with caregivers and teachers reveal that students are not only assessed based on academic performance but also on their behavioral consistency, time discipline, and interpersonal conduct. Through modeling and daily reinforcement, values such as honesty, humility, responsibility, and empathy are nurtured. This environment fosters internalized character development that transcends classroom learning.

3. Religious Motivation Practices

The pesantren adopts motivation-enhancing religious practices such as *halaqah* (group recitation), *wetonan* (lecture-based memorization), and *sorogan* (individual mentoring). These are paired with daily prayers, *dzikir*, and Qur'an memorization sessions. Interviews with students indicate that the spiritual environment itself is a strong motivator, reinforced by the presence of role models and spiritual mentors (*ustadz*). Recognition for religious achievements—such as *hafidz* milestones—is a powerful extrinsic motivator. These combined factors contribute to a learning environment in which students are intrinsically and extrinsically motivated to seek knowledge.

4. Integration of Formal and Informal Education

Educational experiences at Pondok Pesantren Darussalamah are not confined to classrooms. Daily routines—from waking up before dawn for *subuh* prayer, to group cleaning duties, and participation in religious events—are designed to build discipline, responsibility, and leadership. The pesantren's ability to integrate these routines with formal instruction reinforces student learning and contributes to holistic development. Students learn from both direct instruction and observation of role models within the pesantren.

5. Leadership and Vocational Training

Beyond religious education, the pesantren provides training in leadership and life skills through roles such as dormitory head (*ro'is*), prayer leaders, event organizers, and small group mentors. These roles are assigned rotationally, ensuring broad participation. Vocational programs—such as sewing, agriculture, and computer literacy—are also integrated to prepare students for life beyond pesantren. This holistic preparation aligns with the pesantren's vision to produce not only religiously devout individuals but also socially functional citizens.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study affirm that Pondok Pesantren Darussalamah has successfully combined structured educational design with holistic approaches to character and motivation development. This aligns with UNESCO's (2005) framework of educational quality, which integrates input, process, and outcome as fundamental

elements. Unlike the common stereotype of pesantren as informal and unregulated institutions, this pesantren demonstrates systematic curriculum planning, teacher assignment, and instructional organization, which support a well-structured learning environment. The institutional commitment to organized formal education rooted in Islamic tradition supports Dhofier's (2011) claim that pesantren are capable of adapting their educational function in response to societal needs.

Character education at the pesantren reflects what Lickona (2004) terms "comprehensive moral education," where values are embedded in all aspects of student life. The pesantren's daily routines—communal meals, prayer, cleanliness, mutual respect—embody a form of value transmission that is experiential rather than purely cognitive. These findings correspond with Zarkasyi (2005), who emphasizes that pesantren educational methods are inherently moral and character-centered. The emphasis on ethical behavior, respect for elders, and time discipline situates pesantren as not only religious but also ethical learning institutions.

Religious motivation emerged as a strong internal force shaping student engagement. Students reported that their drive to study was influenced not only by external factors (e.g., praise, recognition) but also by intrinsic goals such as attaining barakah and religious knowledge. This supports Slavin's (2011) theory that intrinsic motivation leads to more enduring learning outcomes. Similarly, Djamarah (2002) emphasizes that a synergy between spiritual aspiration and supportive learning environments generates sustained motivation, a dynamic clearly observable in the pesantren's religious rituals such as halaqah, wetonan, and sorogan.

The integration of formal, informal, and non-formal educational systems at Pondok Pesantren Darussalamah validates Sanjaya's (2010) claim that education must go beyond the classroom to include life-based learning. The pesantren's informal routines and leadership structures (e.g., dormitory management, public speaking roles) serve as developmental tools that complement formal religious instruction. These dimensions foster independence, cooperation, and time management—attributes not often explicitly taught in conventional schools but essential for long-term educational and social success.

Furthermore, the inclusion of vocational and entrepreneurial training highlights the pesantren's adaptation to modern educational needs. Courses in agriculture, sewing, and computing empower students with life skills that are critical in today's socio-economic landscape. This finding echoes Yafie et al. (2016), who argue that modern pesantren are increasingly preparing students for both religious leadership and productive citizenship. Kulsum (2017) also affirms that pesantren-based students demonstrate superior personal discipline and religious commitment compared to those in secular institutions, especially when exposed to structured and motivational environments.

Therefore, the case of Pondok Pesantren Darussalamah illustrates how pesantren can evolve into hybrid institutions—maintaining their traditional foundations while embracing pedagogical innovation and societal engagement. This finding challenges the false dichotomy between modern and traditional education, positioning pesantren as agents of educational transformation. Their embedded moral environment, adaptive instructional systems, and relevance-oriented programming offer a model that bridges faith, intellect, and action—an integration rarely achieved in mainstream schooling.

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that Pondok Pesantren Darussalamah Braja Dewa effectively enhances educational quality and fosters students' learning motivation through a comprehensive and integrated learning model. By systematically organizing formal, non-formal, and informal educational systems, the pesantren ensures that both academic knowledge and moral values are cultivated in tandem. Structured learning programs supported by syllabi, daily schedules, and evaluation frameworks reflect the institution's commitment to pedagogical professionalism. These practices contradict common assumptions that pesantren operate with minimal planning or academic rigor.

Equally important is the pesantren's character education framework, which successfully embeds ethical values into students' daily lives through ritual practices, shared responsibilities, and relational guidance. This immersion fosters affective and behavioral development in ways that exceed the capacity of conventional schools. Religious motivation—both intrinsic and extrinsic—functions as a critical catalyst, sustaining students' engagement with their studies and deepening their commitment to learning as a form of worship and moral obligation.

The integration of leadership training and vocational programs further extends the pesantren's role beyond religious instruction, preparing students for productive roles in society. This holistic model of education—spiritually grounded, socially engaged, and pedagogically adaptive—positions Pondok Pesantren Darussalamah as a transformative institution that bridges tradition and modernity.

The findings of this study contribute to the broader discourse on Islamic education by highlighting pesantren as evolving institutions capable of maintaining religious integrity while meeting contemporary educational demands. Future research may explore comparative models across pesantren types or assess long-term outcomes on alumni success in various social sectors. Stakeholders in Islamic education and policy development should consider the pesantren's integrative model as a viable blueprint for educational reform rooted in local values and global relevance.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

Nur Azizah conceptualized the research design, conducted field interviews, and compiled observational data. Ahmad Hidayat performed data analysis, literature integration, and drafted the findings and discussion sections. Siti Rahmawati contributed to the theoretical framework, manuscript structure, and final editing. All authors participated in the review process and approved the final version of the manuscript for submission and publication.

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