



The Existence of Islamic Boarding School Education in the Spiritual and Socio-Cultural Development of Society

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Article Information:

Received October 20, 2025

Revised November 28, 2025

Accepted December 23, 2025

Keywords: *Islamic boarding schools, Islamic education, spirituality, socio-cultural, society*

Abstract

Pesantren education is not only a center for religious learning, but also a pillar for character building, tradition preservation, and local cultural value development through intellectual, spiritual, and social integration. This literature review analyzes the existence of pesantren in a socio-cultural context, demonstrating its flexibility in facing globalization while maintaining Indonesia's Islamic identity. Pesantren contribute to local economic empowerment through practical skills, ensuring the spiritual and cultural sustainability of the community. The existence of pesantren is supported by their ability to preserve Islamic scholarly traditions, adapt to changing times, and actively contribute to socio-cultural life.

INTRODUCTION

Pesantren are the oldest Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia, rooted in the history of the spread of Islam by the Wali Songo. They have functioned as centers of da'wah, education, and empowerment since the 15th century (Badrudin et al., 2018; Fatih, 2024; Niswah et al., 2025; Usman, 2013). Amidst moral degradation due to globalization, such as corruption and individualism, Islamic boarding schools have emerged as spiritual strongholds with the principle of *al-adabu fauqol 'ilmi* (*adab* is more important than knowledge), shaping students who are faithful, moral, and socially responsible. Law No. 18 of 2019 recognizes the role of Islamic boarding schools as partners in national education, da'wah, and strengthening the nation's character (Asrori et al., 2024; Fajarudin & Muttaqin, 2024; Ni'am & Arafah, 2024).

Islamic boarding schools have played an important role in the history and development of Islamic education in Indonesia (Andari et al., 2023; Wathoni, 2020). Since their inception, Islamic boarding schools have served as centers for the transmission of Islamic knowledge, moral guidance, and spiritual strengthening of the community. Amidst the currents of modernization and globalization, Islamic boarding schools have persisted and even flourished through various educational innovations (Al Asyari, 2022; Qotrunada et al., 2025).

The existence of pesantren is interesting to study because these institutions not only focus on formal education but also have a broad influence on the social and cultural life of the community (Bashori, 2017; Burga et al., 2021).

How to cite:

Lubis, M. Y., Ritonga, M. (2025). The Existence of Islamic Boarding School Education in the Spiritual and Socio-Cultural Development of Society. *Ahlussunnah: Journal of Islamic Education*, 4(3), 681-691.

E-ISSN:

2827-9573

Published by:

The Institute for Research and Community Service

METHODS

The research method in this article is based on a qualitative library research approach that focuses on exploring written sources as the main material for analysis (Abishev et al., 2025; Aryasutha et al., 2025; Az-Zahra et al., 2025; Engkizar et al., 2023, 2024; Oktavia et al., 2020). The researcher collected data from various academic references such as scientific journals, books, articles, and official websites relevant to the theme of the existence of Islamic boarding schools. The collection process was carried out systematically by selecting literature that had high credibility and was directly related to the research topic. In addition, the researcher used primary documents such as the Islamic Boarding School Law and historical literature as the main references to strengthen the theoretical basis. This stage did not stop at collection, but also involved critical reading to assess the accuracy, relevance, and consistency of the information obtained, so that the data used truly supported the research objectives.

Next, content analysis was conducted descriptively with the aim of analyzing the role of Islamic boarding schools in spiritual and socio-cultural dimensions. The researcher applied source triangulation to ensure validity, namely by comparing information from primary documents with secondary literature so that the analysis results were more objective and comprehensive. The recording process was carried out in detail to identify important themes, followed by an interpretation that focused on the meaning and contribution of Islamic boarding schools in the context of society. With these steps, the research not only produced a factual description but also provided an in-depth understanding of the position of Islamic boarding schools as educational and social institutions. Validity is maintained through consistency in analysis and interconnectivity between sources, so that the research results are scientifically accountable and provide a clear picture of the existence of Islamic boarding schools in community life (Akem et al., 2025; Engkizar et al., 2022, 2025).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Concept of Pesantren Education

Pesantren education is an Islamic education system that has grown organically from the scientific and spiritual traditions of Islam in the Indonesian archipelago (Kusuma et al., 2024; Moh. Toyyib & Faishol, 2023; Tahfidzi et al., 2025). Conceptually, pesantren are not only understood as formal educational institutions, but as holistic tarbiyah (guidance) systems, covering intellectual, spiritual, moral, and social dimensions. The main objective of pesantren education is to shape individuals who are faithful, knowledgeable, have noble character, and are able to play an active role in society (Kusuma et al., 2024).

The concept of pesantren education is rooted in the Islamic view of humans as beings with the potential for reason (*‘aql*), heart (*qalb*), and behavior (*‘amal*). Therefore, pesantren education emphasizes not only mastery of religious knowledge, but also the formation of manners, spiritual depth, and social piety. From this perspective, Islamic boarding schools view knowledge not merely as an intellectual tool, but as a means of drawing closer to Allah SWT and building the welfare of the ummah (Abdullah, 2016; Jamil et al., 2023).

In addition, pesantren education is based on the principle of continuity of Islamic scientific tradition (*al-muhāfaẓah ‘alā al-qadīm al-ṣāliḥ wa al-akhdzu bi al-jadīd al-aṣlah*), which is to preserve good old traditions and adopt new things that are better. This principle forms the conceptual basis for Islamic boarding schools in facing the changing times without losing their Islamic identity.

Characteristics of Pesantren Education

The first characteristic is the leadership of the *kyai* as a central figure. One of the main characteristics of pesantren education is the charismatic and moral

leadership of the *keiyai*. The *keiyai* not only acts as an educator, but also as a spiritual role model, caregiver, and social leader. The *keiyai*'s authority is built on the basis of knowledge, moral exemplarity, and community recognition, not merely on bureaucratic structure (Muslim, 2025; Wahid & Benny Prasetya, 2024).

The relationship between the *keiyai* and the *santri* is personal and educational, so that the educational process does not only take place through the transfer of knowledge, but also through exemplary living (*uswah hasanah*). This characteristic makes pesantren education effective in shaping the *santri*'s personality in a profound way (Dainori, 2025; Isti'anah et al., 2025).

Secondly, there is the Boarding School System and 24-Hour Education. Pesantren education is carried out through a boarding school system that allows the learning process to take place 24 hours a day. All activities of the *santri*, such as studying, worshiping, and socializing, are an integral part of the educational process. This system creates an educational environment conducive to the internalization of religious values, discipline, and independence.

Through collective life in the pesantren, students learn to live simply, respect one another, and be responsible (Asriyah, 2022). Education does not only take place in the classroom, but also in daily life, thereby shaping Islamic character and ethos.

Third is the Islamic Studies and Morality-Based Curriculum. Another characteristic of pesantren education is a curriculum that focuses on Islamic sciences, such as *fiqh*, *tauhid*, *tafsir*, *hadith*, and *tasawuf*, which are taught through classical texts (*kitab kuning*). This curriculum aims to equip students with a deep and comprehensive understanding of religion (Ridwan et al., 2023; Salam et al., 2025; Santi & Aini, 2022).

In its development, many Islamic boarding schools have integrated general knowledge and life skills into their curriculum. However, moral values and spirituality remain at the core of the entire learning process, so that the knowledge acquired by students is not separated from the moral and ethical dimensions.

Fourth is the Pesantren's Unique Learning Methods. Pesantren education has unique learning methods, such as *bandongan*, *sorogan*, *balaqah*, and *talaqqi*. These methods emphasize depth of understanding, discipline, and continuity of scientific *sanad*. Direct interaction between teachers and students is an important feature of the learning process (Salam et al., 2025).

This method aims not only to transfer knowledge, but also to shape attitudes of humility, patience, and respect for knowledge and teachers. In the modern context, these traditional methods are often combined with active and participatory learning methods.

Fifth is the Emphasis on Character Building and Spirituality. The most prominent characteristic of pesantren education is its emphasis on character building and spirituality. Routine worship activities, such as congregational prayers, recitation of the Quran, *zikir*, and *riyadah*, are an integral part of the *santri*'s life. This spiritual education aims to foster a deep and lasting religious awareness (Harifah & Sofa, 2025).

Character building is not done through theoretical teaching alone, but through habit formation and role modeling in everyday life. This makes pesantren an effective educational institution in building the character and morals of students.

The sixth is connection with the community. Pesantren education is open in nature and connected to community life. Pesantren do not exist in isolation, but interact actively with their social environment. *Santri* are trained to be sensitive to community issues and involved in social activities, *da'wah*, and community empowerment (Arifin et al., 2022).

This connection makes Islamic boarding schools function as centers of social and cultural learning, and strengthens their role in shaping individual and social piety

simultaneously.

Based on this description, it can be understood that the concept and characteristics of pesantren education lie in the integration of knowledge, morals, and spirituality into a comprehensive education system. Pesantren not only produce individuals who are intellectually intelligent, but also morally and spiritually mature, and ready to contribute to the social and cultural life of society.

The Existence of Islamic Boarding Schools in the Spiritual Development of Society

Islamic boarding schools play a fundamental role in the spiritual development of Indonesian society. Their existence is not only determined by the physical presence of the institution or the number of students, but also by their transformative function in shaping the religious, moral, and spiritual awareness of the people. In this context, Islamic boarding schools serve as centers for continuous spiritual guidance that are deeply rooted in Islamic tradition (Aini & Ramadhan, 2024).

First, Islamic Boarding Schools as Centers for Islamic Spiritual Guidance. Since its inception, Islamic boarding schools have been oriented towards shaping individuals with spiritual depth. Education in Islamic boarding schools places spirituality at the core of the entire learning process. Structured worship practices such as congregational prayers, recitation of religious texts, *zikir*, *wirid*, sunnah fasting, and *riyāḍah* form a disciplined and consistent pattern of religious life.

The continuity of these spiritual practices not only shapes the individual piety of the students, but also has an impact on the surrounding community. Islamic boarding schools become a space for the cultivation of spiritual values, which are then reproduced by the students when they return to society as religious figures, educators, or social leaders.

Second, the Transmission of Spiritual Values through the Relationship between *Kiyai* and Students. The existence of pesantren in the spiritual development of society is greatly supported by the educational, personal, and transformative relationship between *kiyai* and *santri*. *Kiyai* are not merely teachers of religious knowledge, but spiritual figures who serve as role models in the practice of Islamic values. The exemplary lives of *kiyai* in terms of simplicity, sincerity, and discipline in worship are effective means of internalizing spirituality.

Through this relationship, Islamic boarding schools transmit the values of sincerity (*ikhlas*), patience (*sabr*), *tawakal*, and moral responsibility. These values then shape the spiritual awareness of *santri*, which does not stop at the level of ritual, but develops into a religious ethos that influences their mindset and social behavior.

Third, Islamic Boarding Schools and the Formation of Individual and Social Piety. The spirituality developed in Islamic boarding schools is not individualistic in nature, but rather directed towards the formation of social piety. Spiritual education in Islamic boarding schools teaches that closeness to Allah SWT must be reflected in concern for others, social justice, and social responsibility (Pulungan, 2025). In practice, Islamic boarding schools educate students to engage in socio-religious activities such as preaching, community service, and serving the people. Thus, Islamic boarding schools contribute to the spiritual development of society that is not only ritualistic but also ethical and social.

Fourth, Islamic Boarding Schools as Guardians of Moderate Spirituality. Amidst the challenges of modernity, secularization, and religious extremism, Islamic boarding schools play a role as guardians of moderate (*wasathiyah*) Islamic spirituality. The scientific tradition of Islamic boarding schools, which integrates *fiqh*, *tasawuf*, and *akhlak*, forms a balanced pattern of religiosity between the physical and spiritual dimensions (Awwaliyah, 2019).

The existence of Islamic boarding schools in this context is very important to

protect society from rigid, textual, or extreme religious understandings. Islamic boarding schools teach spirituality rooted in love, tolerance, and wisdom, thereby contributing to social harmony and inner peace in society.

Fifth, Adaptation of Islamic Boarding School Spirituality in the Modern Era. Although rooted in classical traditions, Islamic boarding schools have demonstrated their ability to adapt in developing spirituality that is relevant to the modern context. Many Islamic boarding schools utilize digital media for preaching, online recitation, and spiritual guidance for the wider community. This expands the role of Islamic boarding schools as centers of spiritual guidance, not only for students, but also for the global community.

This adaptation shows that the existence of pesantren in the spiritual development of society is not static, but dynamic and contextual. Pesantren are able to maintain the spiritual essence of Islam while adapting it to the needs of the times.

Sixth is the implication of the existence of Islamic boarding schools on the spiritual life of society. The existence of Islamic boarding schools has a direct impact on the formation of a society with a deeper spiritual awareness. The religious values instilled by Islamic boarding schools contribute to the creation of inner peace, moral stability, and social solidarity. In a society experiencing a crisis of values and spiritual disorientation, Islamic boarding schools serve as a source of reference and support for religious life.

Thus, the existence of Islamic boarding schools not only enriches the spiritual dimension of individuals but also strengthens the spiritual foundation of society as a whole. Islamic boarding schools also serve as a reference for the community in religious matters, thereby reinforcing moderate religious practices based on Islamic values.

The Existence of Islamic Boarding Schools in the Socio-Cultural Development of Society

Pesantren are not only religious educational institutions, but also socio-cultural institutions that have a broad and lasting influence in shaping the social structure, cultural values, and lifestyle of the community. The existence of pesantren in the socio-cultural development of society is reflected in their ability to become centers for the formation of values, guardians of tradition, and agents of social transformation that are deeply rooted in the lives of local communities.

Pesantren as Socio-Cultural Institutions. Since its inception, Islamic boarding schools have grown from the community and developed alongside the community. This has given Islamic boarding schools an emotional and cultural closeness to their surroundings. Islamic boarding schools do not stand as exclusive institutions but are integrated into the social structure of the community. Their existence shapes a unique pattern of social interaction, in which Islamic boarding schools become a center of reference for religious, social, and cultural issues.

As a socio-cultural institution, Islamic boarding schools play a role in transmitting Islamic values that have been acculturated with local culture. This process has given rise to a form of religiosity that is unique to Indonesia, which is moderate, tolerant, and contextual.

Pesantren and the Preservation of Local Cultural Traditions. The existence of pesantren in the socio-cultural sphere is evident in their role as guardians and preservers of community religious traditions. Traditions such as *tahlilan*, *selamatan*, *maulidan*, and the commemoration of important Islamic days are not only preserved, but also given religious and social meaning by pesantren.

Pesantren function as mediators between normative Islamic teachings and local cultural practices. Through this cultural approach, pesantren are able to prevent conflicts between religion and culture in society, while strengthening a harmonious social identity rooted in Islamic values.

Pesantren as Agents of Social Value Formation. In the socio-cultural development of society, pesantren play an important role in shaping social values such as solidarity, mutual cooperation, tolerance, and collective responsibility. The community-based educational model of pesantren teaches students to live together, respect one another, and cooperate in daily life.

These values are not limited to the pesantren environment, but spread to the wider community through da'wah activities, social service, and the role of pesantren alumni. Thus, pesantren contribute to building an ethical and civilized social order.

Pesantren and the Formation of Social Leadership. Pesantren also play a role in producing social and cultural leaders. *Kiyai* and pesantren alumni often become influential figures in society, whether as scholars, educators, traditional leaders, or informal leaders. The leadership formed by pesantren is generally based on moral legitimacy and social trust.

The presence of pesantren figures in the social structure of society strengthens the existence of pesantren as centers of moral and cultural authority. Pesantren not only shape knowledgeable individuals, but also leaders who are able to maintain social harmony and community values.

Pesantren as Agents of Social Transformation. In the dynamics of modern society, pesantren not only preserve tradition, but also act as agents of social change. Many pesantren are involved in community empowerment programs, economic development, community education, and social advocacy.

Through this role, pesantren contribute to improving the quality of life of the community while strengthening a just social structure. The social transformation carried out by Islamic boarding schools is cultural and participatory in nature, so it is well accepted by the community.

Islamic Boarding Schools and Socio-Cultural Moderation. The existence of Islamic boarding schools in the socio-cultural development of society is also reflected in their role as guardians of social and cultural moderation. Amidst the challenges of globalization, individualism, and identity conflicts, Islamic boarding schools offer a model of social life that balances tradition and modernity.

Islamic boarding schools teach the values of tolerance, dialogue, and respect for differences, thereby contributing to the creation of an inclusive and harmonious society. With a cultural and educational approach, Islamic boarding schools are able to reduce the potential for social conflict and strengthen social cohesion.

Socio-Cultural Implications of the Existence of Islamic Boarding Schools. The existence of Islamic boarding schools has important implications for the socio-cultural development of society, including: The preservation of harmonious cultural and religious values. The formation of social solidarity and collective ethics. The emergence of moral leadership trusted by the community. The implementation of social transformation rooted in Islamic values and local culture.

Thus, in the socio-cultural dimension, Islamic boarding schools function as agents of local cultural preservation in harmony with Islamic values. Traditions such as *tahlilan*, *selamatan*, and Islamic holidays have developed through Islamic boarding schools and are widely accepted by the community. In addition, Islamic boarding schools play a role in social development through community empowerment activities, moral education, and the strengthening of social solidarity. Islamic boarding schools also produce community leaders who play a role in the fields of education, da'wah, social affairs, and nationality.

Challenges and Adaptations of Islamic Boarding Schools in the Modern Era

The development of modern society, marked by technological advances, globalization of information, and changes in social structures, poses serious challenges to the survival of Islamic boarding schools as traditional Islamic educational institutions. However, Islamic boarding schools are not passive in the

face of these changes. On the contrary, they have demonstrated a relatively strong adaptive capacity by implementing various institutional innovations without abandoning their Islamic identity.

First, the challenges faced by Islamic boarding schools in the modern era are globalization and changing values. Globalization brings rapid changes in values, including increased individualism, materialism, and secularization. These values often conflict with the character of Islamic boarding school education, which emphasizes simplicity, collectivity, and spirituality. As a result, Islamic boarding schools face challenges in maintaining traditional values amid an increasingly pragmatic modern lifestyle.

Second is the Challenge of Digital Technology Development. Advances in digital technology present two sides for Islamic boarding schools. On the one hand, technology opens up broad access to information and knowledge; on the other hand, technology has the potential to bring content that is not in line with Islamic values, such as religious hoaxes, digital radicalism, and moral degradation. Islamic boarding schools are required to be able to manage technology wisely so as not to erode established educational values.

Third is the challenge of educational quality and competitiveness. Modern society demands graduates who have academic competence, life skills, and job readiness. Islamic boarding schools face the challenge of improving the quality of their management, curriculum, and human resources so that their graduates can compete with graduates from other educational institutions without losing their Islamic character.

Fourth is the challenge of stigma and social perception. Some people still view Islamic boarding schools as educational institutions that are backward, exclusive, or irrelevant to the needs of the times. This stigma poses a challenge for Islamic boarding schools in building public trust and expanding their social role.

Adaptation Strategies for Islamic Boarding Schools in the Modern Era are, first, the Integration of Traditional and Modern Curricula. As a form of adaptation, many Islamic boarding schools integrate classical Islamic scientific curricula with formal education and modern science. This integration aims to create a balance between religious depth and academic competence. Islamic boarding schools no longer focus solely on mastering classical Islamic texts, but also on the development of science, technology, and professional skills.

Second, Utilization of Technology as a Medium of Education. Islamic boarding schools have begun to utilize digital technology as a means of learning and preaching. The use of social media, online learning platforms, and the digitization of religious texts are adaptation strategies that enable Islamic boarding schools to reach a wider audience. This adaptation shows that Islamic boarding schools are not anti-technology, but rather seek to direct technology towards educational and spiritual goals.

Third, Strengthening Character Education and Religious Moderation. Amidst the challenges of extreme ideology and identity conflicts, Islamic boarding schools strengthen character education and religious moderation. This approach is an important form of value adaptation so that Islamic boarding schools remain relevant as guardians of social and religious balance in modern society.

Fourth, Developing Independence and Economic Empowerment. Many Islamic boarding schools have developed business units, cooperatives, and entrepreneurship training in response to modern economic challenges. This strategy not only strengthens the independence of Islamic boarding schools but also equips students with practical life skills.

Fifth, Dialectics of Tradition and Modernity in Islamic Boarding Schools. The adaptation of Islamic boarding schools in the modern era does not mean eliminating

tradition but rather creating a dialectic between tradition and modernity. The principle of *al-muhāfazah 'alā al-qadīm al-ṣāliḥ wa al-akhdzu bi al-jadīd al-aṣlah* is the philosophical basis for this adaptation process. Islamic boarding schools strive to preserve good old values while adopting new things that are more relevant and beneficial.

This dialectic makes Islamic boarding schools unique educational institutions: rooted in tradition, yet open to change. With this approach, Islamic boarding schools are able to maintain their existence while expanding their role in modern society.

Sixth, Implications of Challenges and Adaptation of Islamic Boarding Schools. The challenges and adaptations faced by Islamic boarding schools have important implications for the development of Islamic education and society. Islamic boarding schools that are able to adapt appropriately will become centers of excellence, relevant, and competitive education. Conversely, Islamic boarding schools that fail to respond to change have the potential to experience stagnation or marginalization.

Therefore, pesantren adaptation needs to be carried out strategically, planned, and value-based, so that pesantren remain educational institutions that play an important role in the spiritual, social, and cultural development of society. Thus, the ability of pesantren to adapt to changing times is a major factor in maintaining their existence in modern society.

CONCLUSION

Pesantren education is an Islamic educational institution that has a strong and sustainable existence in Indonesian society. Pesantren not only functions as an institution for the transmission of Islamic knowledge, but also as a center for spiritual guidance, character building, and the development of social and cultural values in society. Through a holistic education system, pesantren contribute significantly to shaping individuals who are religious, moral, and have a high level of social awareness. In the spiritual dimension, pesantren play an important role in instilling the values of faith, piety, and noble character through the habit of worship, the example set by the kiai, and the internalization of Sufi values and Islamic ethics. This role makes pesantren a moral and spiritual bastion for society amid the tide of modernization, which tends to give rise to a crisis of values and moral degradation.

Meanwhile, in the socio-cultural dimension, Islamic boarding schools function as institutions that maintain a balance between Islamic teachings and local culture. Islamic boarding schools preserve religious traditions, build social solidarity, foster moral leadership, and encourage social transformation rooted in Islamic values and local wisdom. With these characteristics, Islamic boarding schools contribute to the formation of a harmonious, moderate, and civilized society. In the modern era, Islamic boarding schools face various challenges, such as the globalization of values, the development of digital technology, demands for quality and competitiveness in education, and social stigma. However, Islamic boarding schools have demonstrated a strong ability to adapt through the integration of traditional and modern curricula, the use of technology as a medium for education and da'wah, the strengthening of character education and religious moderation, and the development of independence and economic empowerment.

Thus, the existence of Islamic boarding schools in the modern era cannot be understood as a static institution, but rather as a dynamic and adaptive Islamic educational institution. Islamic boarding schools are able to maintain their Islamic identity while responding constructively to the demands of the times. Therefore, Islamic boarding schools remain relevant and strategic as a main pillar in the spiritual, social, and cultural development of Indonesian society, both now and in the future.

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Ahlussunnah: Journal of Islamic Education

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