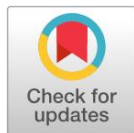


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Narrating Curriculum Transformation in Islamic Boarding School: Integrating Tradition and Digital Practices in Islamic Boarding School Education

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ABSTRACT

Background: Digital technology is an important part of Islamic boarding schools that need to pay attention to Islamic educational institutions in the archipelago. The rapid development of digital technology urges Islamic educational institutions, including salaf Islamic boarding schools, to transform curriculum design to remain relevant while preserving traditional identity. Integrating classical Islamic values with technological innovation presents both challenges and opportunities in pesantren education.

Purpose: This study aims to analyze the curriculum design of Al-Asy'ariyyah Islamic Boarding School, Kalibeber Wonosobo, in adapting to technological developments in the digital era.

Method: A mixed-methods approach was employed using questionnaires, interviews, observations, and documentation. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were processed through data reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing.

Results: The findings indicate that the curriculum maintains traditional sorogan and bandongan learning methods while integrating digital technology utilization. Approximately 50% of respondents produced fiqh content, 23% moral content, 17% hadith content, and 10% interpretative content. The dominant media included images (63%), videos (26%), and animations (11%), while digital tools facilitated learning interaction and online academic communication.

Conclusion: The pesantren curriculum demonstrates adaptive, flexible, and collaborative characteristics through integrating traditional Islamic education with digital technology while sustaining Islamic and local cultural values.

KEYWORDS

Curriculum Design, Digital Era, Educational Technology, Salaf Pesantren

INTRODUCTION

Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) constitute one of the oldest and most resilient Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia, historically rooted in community-based learning and moral formation. The enactment of Law Number 18 of 2019 concerning Pesantren formally recognizes their educational, da'wah, and community empowerment roles while affirming their contribution to national development

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and character education grounded in Islamic values of *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (Undang-Undang (UU) Nomor 18 Tahun 2019 Tentang Pesantren, 2019). With more than 39,000 pesantren and approximately 4.85 million students nationwide, these institutions represent a significant component of Indonesia's educational landscape (KOMINFO, 2023). Unlike formal schooling systems, pesantren education is traditionally centered on the authority of the *kiai*, communal learning culture, and the transmission of classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*), forming a distinctive pedagogical subculture that has sustained its relevance across generations (Ahmad, 2019; Mohammad & Bassith, 2021).

At the same time, rapid digital transformation associated with the Fourth Industrial Revolution has reshaped educational expectations worldwide, emphasizing technological literacy, interdisciplinary competence, and lifelong learning (Klaus, 2017; Paulina, 2018). Religious educational institutions are increasingly required to adapt to digital environments while maintaining theological authenticity and institutional identity. For salaf pesantren—traditionally characterized by strong preservation of classical learning traditions—this transition generates a structural tension between continuity and change. The challenge is not merely technological adoption but how educational systems integrate digital developments without undermining epistemological authority, moral formation, and culturally embedded learning practices (Muhtifah, 2016; Subri, 2018).

Existing scholarship has examined pesantren modernization primarily through institutional transformation, foreign language competence, or integration with formal and higher education systems (Firdaus, 2021; Firdaus & Husni, 2021; Triono et al., 2022). Studies on digital-era curriculum development largely focus on formal schooling contexts and teacher professional readiness rather than traditional Islamic institutions (Thelma et al., 2024). Consequently, prior research tends to conceptualize modernization as a linear process of technological integration. Limited attention has been given to how salaf pesantren actively negotiate the coexistence of inherited religious traditions and digital modernity within curriculum design practices. This reveals a critical research gap: the absence of analytical understanding of curriculum as a negotiation arena where traditional authority, cultural continuity, and digital transformation interact simultaneously.

This study addresses that gap by analyzing the curriculum design implemented at the Salaf Islamic Boarding School Al-Asy'ariyyah Kalibeber Wonosobo in responding to the digital era. The novelty of this research lies in conceptualizing curriculum development not as technological adaptation alone but as a negotiated process between traditional religious epistemology and emerging digital narratives. By examining how traditional and digital logics are reinterpreted and institutionalized within a salaf pesantren context, this study contributes to broader discussions on Islamic educational transformation, offering a theoretical perspective on how faith-based educational institutions sustain authenticity while engaging with global educational change.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-methods approach using a sequential explanatory design (Armiyati et al., 2025; Buana & Zulwidyaningtyas, 2025), in which quantitative data collection and analysis were conducted in the first phase and subsequently strengthened through qualitative exploration. This design was selected to obtain both measurable patterns of digital technology utilization and an in-depth understanding of curriculum practices within the Islamic boarding school context. The quantitative phase aimed to identify patterns of digital-era product utilization in learning activities and religious content development. This phase used a questionnaire administered to students, teachers, and caregivers at Al-Asy'ariyyah Islamic Boarding School, Kalibeber Wonosobo. The collected responses were converted into numerical data and analyzed descriptively. The scoring

results were calculated using the formula: $\text{Value} = (\text{Average of the sample score} / \text{Maximum score}) \times 100\%$. The obtained percentages were then interpreted descriptively to represent levels of technology utilization and learning engagement (Ekawati & Sumaryanta, 2011; Elida et al., 2025; Yadav & Yadav, 2025).

Following the quantitative analysis, the qualitative phase was conducted to explain and interpret the statistical findings more comprehensively. Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observation sheets, and documentation analysis (Cheron et al., 2022). The qualitative inquiry focused on understanding the curriculum implementation process, content selection trends, leadership roles of kyai and administrators, and institutional responses to digital transformation in pesantren education.

Data integration was carried out at the interpretation stage, where qualitative findings were used to explain, contextualize, and provide meaning to quantitative patterns. The interview and observation results clarified why certain digital practices emerged, how traditional learning methods were maintained, and how institutional values influenced curriculum adaptation. Thus, the qualitative data functioned as explanatory support that enriched and validated the quantitative results rather than operating as a separate analytical strand.

Through this sequential explanatory mixed-method design, the study achieved methodological complementarity by combining statistical description with contextual interpretation (Bareh, 2025; Kupczynski, 2025), enabling a more comprehensive understanding of curriculum transformation in the digital era within the pesantren educational environment.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this section is to interpret the empirical findings and explain their implications within broader theoretical and scholarly discussions on Islamic education and digital transformation. Rather than merely presenting institutional practices, this discussion demonstrates how curriculum design at Al-Asy'ariyyah Islamic Boarding School reflects an ongoing negotiation between traditional religious pedagogy and digital-era educational demands.

Continuity of Traditional Pedagogy within Digital Transformation

Findings indicate that Al-Asy'ariyyah Islamic Boarding School maintains a foundational salaf curriculum centered on the study of classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*), including fiqh, tafsir, hadith, and moral education, which are internalized through daily religious practices and social interaction. The persistence of etiquette (*adab*) toward kyai, teachers, and senior students illustrates that character formation remains the central pedagogical orientation of pesantren education.

The curriculum design continues to employ traditional instructional methods such as *sorogan* and *bandongan*, not only in textual learning but also in Qur'anic memorization programs. These findings confirm Zamakhsyari's (Zamakhsyari, 2011) argument that pesantren pedagogy relies on relational and dialogical learning structures grounded in teacher authority and individualized guidance. From a sociocultural learning perspective, these practices reflect knowledge transmission through situated interaction, where learning occurs within culturally embedded communities rather than through standardized instructional systems.

However, the findings also demonstrate that traditional pedagogical structures are not static. In line with digital pedagogy theory, educational institutions increasingly reinterpret established teaching practices through technological mediation (Agwn & Adie, 2025; Jurow et al., 2019). At Al-Asy'ariyyah, digital tools do not replace traditional learning but extend its accessibility, suggesting a hybrid pedagogical model rather than modernization through substitution.

Digital Literacy as Complementary Religious Competence

In addition to classical religious studies, the pesantren introduces special competencies such as graphic design, videography, and web design training. Interview and observation data reveal that students, teachers, and caregivers actively integrate digital technologies into learning and institutional communication. The distribution of digital technology usage among 110 respondents is presented in Figure 1.

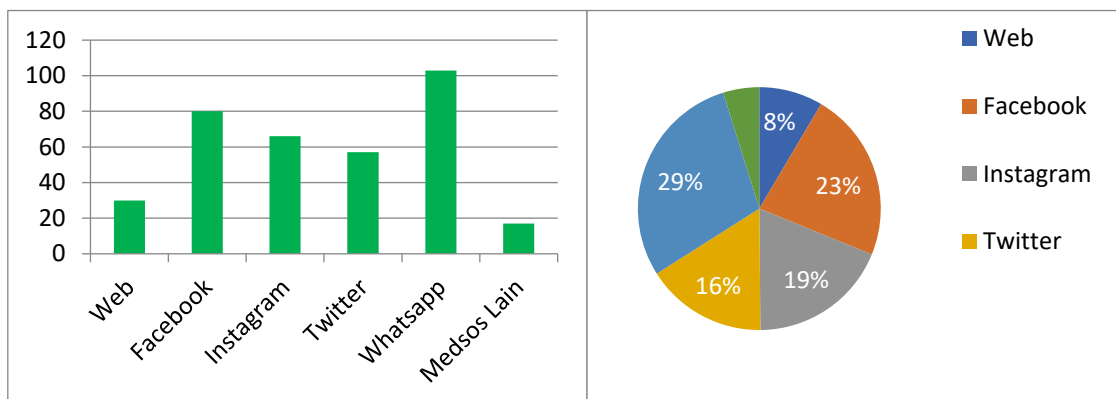


Figure 1. Diagram and Percentage of Digital Era Technology Products That Can Be Operated by Santri

The data show that WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram constitute the most frequently used platforms. Rather than functioning solely as communication tools, these platforms serve as informal learning environments where religious knowledge is exchanged and disseminated. This finding aligns with digital religion scholarship (Doğan, 2026), which argues that religious practice increasingly unfolds within networked digital spaces, transforming how authority and knowledge circulate.

Importantly, technology adoption appears influenced by institutional culture, particularly the communication habits of teachers and administrators. This indicates that digital literacy development in pesantren is socially mediated rather than individually driven, reinforcing sociocultural theory that learning practices emerge from communal norms and leadership models.

Digital Content Production and Emerging Santri Identity

The functional use of digital platforms for learning purposes is illustrated in Figure 2.

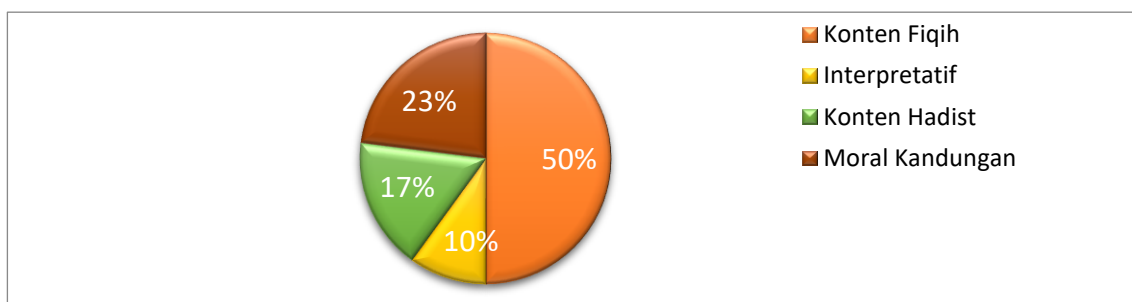


Figure 2. Diagram of the Use of Digital Era Products for Learning Functions

The data indicate that students predominantly produce content related to fiqh, moral teachings, and hadith, while interpretative religious content remains limited. This pattern suggests epistemological awareness among students, reflecting caution toward interpretative authority in Islamic scholarship. Rather than indicating limitation, this demonstrates continuity of traditional knowledge hierarchy within digital environments.

From a narrative identity perspective, digital content creation allows santri to construct religious self-representation in public spaces. Digital platforms become arenas where religious identity is negotiated, performed, and validated socially (Evolvi, 2022; NOVAK & MATTES, 2025). Thus, digital engagement does not merely enhance technical skills but contributes to the formation of a “digital santri identity,” integrating religious commitment with contemporary communicative practices.

Media Preference and Pedagogical Adaptation

Patterns of media utilization are presented in Figure 3.

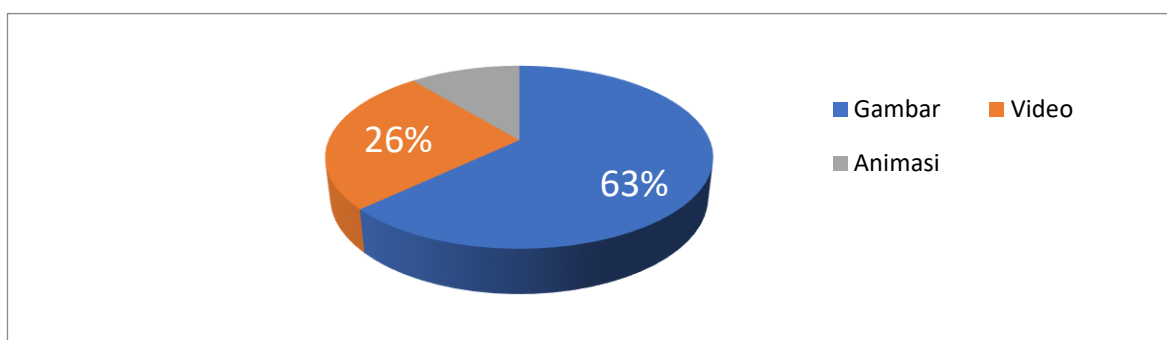


Figure 3. Graph of Media Usage in Utilizing Digital Era Products

Image-based content dominates student production due to accessibility and technical simplicity, followed by short video formats distributed via social media platforms. Limited engagement with YouTube content production is associated with psychological and cultural considerations, including hesitation toward public exposure.

Rather than interpreting this as lack of confidence, the phenomenon may be understood through cultural modesty norms embedded in pesantren traditions. This finding suggests that digital participation is filtered through ethical and cultural frameworks, supporting the argument that technological adoption is culturally negotiated rather than universally uniform.

Digital Technology as Extension of Traditional Learning Space

Observations further reveal that digital applications such as video calls, Google Meet, and live broadcasts are utilized during *sorogan* and *bandongan* sessions, particularly when physical mobility is limited. Digital technology therefore expands the spatial boundaries of pesantren learning without altering its epistemological core.

This supports the argument of Ma'arif and Rofiq (Ma'arif & Rofiq, 2018) that pesantren curricula operate through flexible and adaptive structures. Curriculum decisions at Al-Asy'ariyyah remain strongly influenced by kyai leadership, demonstrating that authority structures persist even within digital adaptation processes. Moderation in leadership orientation enables technological openness while safeguarding institutional tradition.

Curriculum Negotiation: Tradition, Authority, and Modernity

The findings collectively indicate that curriculum design at Al-Asy'ariyyah is neither fully traditional nor fully modern but operates as a negotiated system. The integration of formal education alongside pesantren learning represents an institutional strategy to respond to globalization pressures while maintaining religious authenticity.

This confirms Fauzan's (Fauzan, 2017) argument that curriculum integration is a necessary response to rapid societal change. Rather than threatening tradition, digitalization functions as a mechanism for sustaining pesantren relevance. The curriculum demonstrates principles of relevance, flexibility, continuity, and effectiveness (Purwadi, 2019; Sumantri, 2019), enabling students to develop both spiritual character and technological competence (Budiyono, 2021).

Critically, the findings challenge the assumption that digitalization inevitably erodes traditional religious education. Instead, this study shows that digital engagement may produce a new hybrid educational identity—one in which santri maintain classical scholarly authority while participating in global digital culture. In this sense, digital transformation becomes a process of identity reconstruction rather than institutional disruption.

This study advances understanding by conceptualizing pesantren curriculum as a negotiation arena between tradition and digital modernity. The results extend existing literature by demonstrating that technological adaptation in Islamic education does not necessarily imply secularization or pedagogical replacement but may reinforce religious continuity through new media practices. Future studies may explore comparative analyses across different types of pesantren to examine variations in digital adaptation models, investigate long-term impacts of digital literacy on religious authority formation, and analyze how digital participation reshapes student identity beyond institutional contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that curriculum transformation in salaf Islamic boarding schools does not occur through the replacement of tradition by digital technology, but through a process of negotiated integration between traditional pedagogical practices and digital learning culture. The case of Al-Asy'ariyyah Islamic Boarding School shows that classical learning methods such as *sorogan* and *bandongan* remain pedagogically central while digital platforms function as complementary mediating tools that expand learning interaction and knowledge dissemination.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the discourse of Islamic educational transformation by proposing that digitalization in pesantren should be understood as a process of narrative adaptation rather than technological adoption. The findings extend sociocultural and digital pedagogy perspectives by illustrating how institutional identity, religious authority, and technological practices coexist through culturally negotiated curriculum design. This challenges deterministic views that position digital technology as a disruptive force and instead positions pesantren as active agents capable of redefining modernity within Islamic educational traditions.

Furthermore, the study offers an alternative model of curriculum flexibility in faith-based education, where leadership values, institutional culture, and community traditions play a decisive role in shaping digital integration. The adaptive curriculum observed in this study indicates that technological innovation can strengthen, rather than weaken, traditional Islamic educational values by enabling collaborative learning, wider religious communication, and new forms of student identity construction in the digital era.

Despite these contributions, this research is limited to a single pesantren context, which may not represent the diversity of Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia. Future research is recommended to conduct comparative and multi-site studies to explore variations of digital-traditional negotiation across different pesantren typologies and socio-cultural settings. Such studies would further develop theoretical understanding of digital transformation within Islamic education globally.

DECLARATION OF AI AND AI ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used AI-assisted language tools to support language refinement and improve clarity and readability of the text. The AI tools were utilized solely for linguistic editing and structuring purposes and did not contribute to data collection, data analysis, interpretation of results, or scientific decision-making. All intellectual content, analysis, and conclusions presented in this article are the full responsibility of the authors. The authors have carefully reviewed and approved the final manuscript to ensure its accuracy and academic integrity.

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AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Author 1: Contributed to the conceptualization of the study, research design, supervision of the research process, and critical revision of the manuscript.

Author 2: Contributed to data collection, field investigation, and methodological implementation.

Author 3: Contributed to data analysis, interpretation of research findings, and literature review.

Author 4: Contributed to manuscript drafting, language refinement, data organization, and final manuscript preparation.

All authors participated in discussing the results, reviewed the manuscript critically, and approved the final version of the manuscript for publication.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare that there are no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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