

Transformation of Salalahuk Tradition: A Media for Character Building and Strengthening the Value of Tauhid in Pesantren Education

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Abstract

This research focuses on exploring the Salalahuk tradition as a medium for spiritual education and character building in Senden Village Islamic boarding school, Kampak, Trenggalek. This tradition is integrated in non-formal learning, especially during the month of Ramadan, by involving the chanting of tawhid-valued poems, joint reflection, and group discussion. The purpose of this study is to reveal how local traditions can be an effective pedagogical tool in supporting Islamic religious learning. This research uses a qualitative method with a descriptive-analytical approach. Data were collected through direct observation, in-depth interviews with pesantren caregivers, santri, and community leaders, and analysis of related documents. The results showed that Salalahuk effectively conveys the values of tawhid through the medium of local culture, creating a deep spiritual experience for the participants. This tradition is also proven to strengthen the character of santri by instilling moral values such as honesty, responsibility, and solidarity. In addition, Salalahuk creates a holistic educational approach that integrates formal and non-formal elements, thus strengthening not only the cognitive but also affective and social aspects of learners. The implications of this research show that local traditions can be adapted as a relevant and contextualized religious education model. This research makes a significant contribution in enriching the literature of local culture-based Islamic education. However, the limitations of this study include limited location coverage and qualitative-based methods. Further research is needed to expand the analysis in various locations and use quantitative approaches to get a more comprehensive.

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INTRODUCTION

Local traditions in Indonesia play an important role in people's lives, especially in building cultural and spiritual identity (Arsal et al., 2023; Seff et al., 2021; Sulaeman et al., 2022). In many regions, these traditions often serve as a means to convey religious and moral values to the younger generation (Casma et al., 2023; Pajarianto et al., 2022; Zaid et al., 2022). One local tradition that still survives is Salalahuk, a religious practice in Senden Village, Kampak, Trenggalek, which is conducted during the month of Ramadan. The tradition involves the chanting of Islamic poetry accompanied by a distinctive rhythm and collective reflection. In a social context, Salalahuk is an effective medium to strengthen relationships between community members while transferring spiritual values to the next generation. However, in the midst of modernization and globalization, these traditions face challenges in the form of cultural shifts and a lack of interest from the younger generation to preserve them (Hariram et al., 2023; Ladson-Billings, 2021; Rudolph et al., 2021). This raises fundamental questions about the relevance and sustainability of local traditions in supporting Islamic religious education.

The literature shows that culture-based approaches in religious education have a significant impact on spiritual and moral learning (Rafikov et al., 2021; Ruslan & Irham, 2022; De Muynck & Kunz, 2023). The study by Suri & Chandra, (2021) shows that local traditions integrated into religious education can increase learners' engagement and deepen their understanding of religious values. In other studies showed that reflective and participatory approaches in religious education can encourage the internalization of moral values more effectively (Skrefsrud, 2022; Steć & Kulik, 2021). In the context of Salalahuk, this tradition has become an integral part of education in pesantren, but in-depth studies on its effectiveness are still very limited. Literacy related to local traditions as a medium for religious learning often only focuses on the cultural aspects, while the pedagogical dimensions receive less academic attention.

This research aims to explore Salalahuk as a contextual and effective medium of religious education in the formation of santri character. The problem formulations in this study include: (1) how is the Salalahuk tradition integrated into Islamic religious learning in pesantren? (2) to what extent does this tradition contribute to the character building of santri? (3) what are the educational implications of this tradition for strengthening the values of tawhid? This research seeks to answer these questions by exploring the pedagogical elements contained in the Salalahuk tradition and connecting them with the theory of culture-based education.

The assumption of this research is that the Salalahuk tradition acts as an effective medium to integrate spiritual and moral values into santri education. Using a qualitative approach and methods, this study aims to prove that local traditions can be relevant pedagogical tools in Islamic religious education. It is

argued that the success of Salalahuk as a learning medium lies not only in its spiritual elements, but also in its culture-based and reflective approach. Provisional answers from this study indicate that Salalahuk not only enriches the spiritual dimension, but also strengthens the character of santri through a holistic and contextualized learning experience. This research is expected to provide new insights into how local traditions can be adapted to support religious education in the modern era.

RESEARCH METHOD

The unit of analysis in this research is the Salalahuk tradition that takes place at Raden Paku Islamic Boarding School, Trenggalek. This location was chosen because this pesantren maintains the Salalahuk tradition as an integral part of religious learning and santri character, despite being in the midst of significant social changes. This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore in depth how the Salalahuk tradition is integrated into Islamic religious education (Alam, 2021; Monaro et al., 2022; Song et al., 2024). Case studies allow researchers to understand the unique aspects of the implementation of this tradition in the context of spiritual, local cultural, and social education (Abbas, 2020; Khan et al., 2022; Priya, 2021).

The main sources of information in this study involved three groups of resource persons: pesantren caregivers, santri, and community leaders around the pesantren. The pesantren caregivers are the main sources of information because they are responsible for managing, leading, and conveying values through the Salalahuk tradition. Santri, both seniors and juniors, became the source of information to understand their direct experience in following this tradition, including its impact on their character and spiritual values. Community leaders were selected to provide an external perspective on the importance of Salalahuk in building social relationships and preserving local culture. The selection of interviewees was purposive to ensure that the data collected was in line with the focus of the research.

Data was collected through in-depth interviews, direct observation and documentation. In-depth interviews were conducted with a semi-structured guide to explore the interviewees' understanding and experiences related to Salalahuk. Direct observation was conducted during the implementation of Salalahuk in the pesantren, including the activities of chanting the poems, joint reflection, and group discussion. Documentation involved analyzing the text of Salalahuk poems, pesantren curriculum records, and annual activity reports. The collected data were analyzed through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and verification. Data reduction was done by sorting out relevant information, data presentation was made in the form of descriptive narratives and tables, while verification was done through triangulation of data from interviews, observations, and documentation. The following coding table is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Coding of Interviewees

Source Code	Category	Description of Interviewee
I_AR	Pesantren caregiver	The main caregiver of Raden Paku Islamic Boarding School
I_FN	Senior Santri	Senior students with deep experience
I_AN	Junior Santri	Junior students who actively follow the tradition
I_HS	Community Leaders	Local figures who understand this tradition

The source coding table is used to maintain privacy while supporting systematic data analysis. With this method, the research is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of the Salalahuk tradition at Raden Paku Islamic Boarding School in the religious education and character of students.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Implementation of Salalahuk Tradition into Santri Education

The results showed that the Salalahuk tradition is effectively used as a medium to integrate spiritual values into the lives of santri. Based on observations made during the implementation of this tradition, it can be seen that the students are very enthusiastic about following the chanting of poems containing the teachings of the attributes of Allah and His Messenger. This tradition takes place every night after tarawih prayers, especially during the month of Ramadan, and involves all pesantren students in Senden Village. The atmosphere of the implementation of Salalahuk is very solemn, where students are actively involved both in chanting the poems and in contemplating the meaning contained in them. Observations also noted that this activity created a collaborative learning atmosphere, where each participant felt part of a deep spiritual learning process. In this context, Salalahuk becomes more than just a religious ritual, but also an effective medium for internalizing religious values in an atmosphere that supports the spiritual and social growth of santri.

Further observation revealed that the implementation of this tradition has a very organized structure, starting with the opening by the caregiver of the pesantren, followed by the chanting of poems, and ending with a joint reflection. Each chanted verse contains a deep moral message, ranging from the introduction of Allah's obligatory attributes to an invitation to live a life in accordance with the teachings of the Prophet. The santris seem focused and serious during this process, showing that they truly appreciate the spiritual values being taught. Moreover, the atmosphere of togetherness established during Salalahuk strengthens the social bonds among the santri, creating a learning community that supports each other.

The researcher also noted that some santri spontaneously discussed the meaning of the chanted verses, indicating that this tradition facilitates active learning outside of formal learning. Observations show that the integration of these spiritual values is done naturally through a collective experience involving all parties. Where the results of the observations made as attached above can be observed through figure 1.

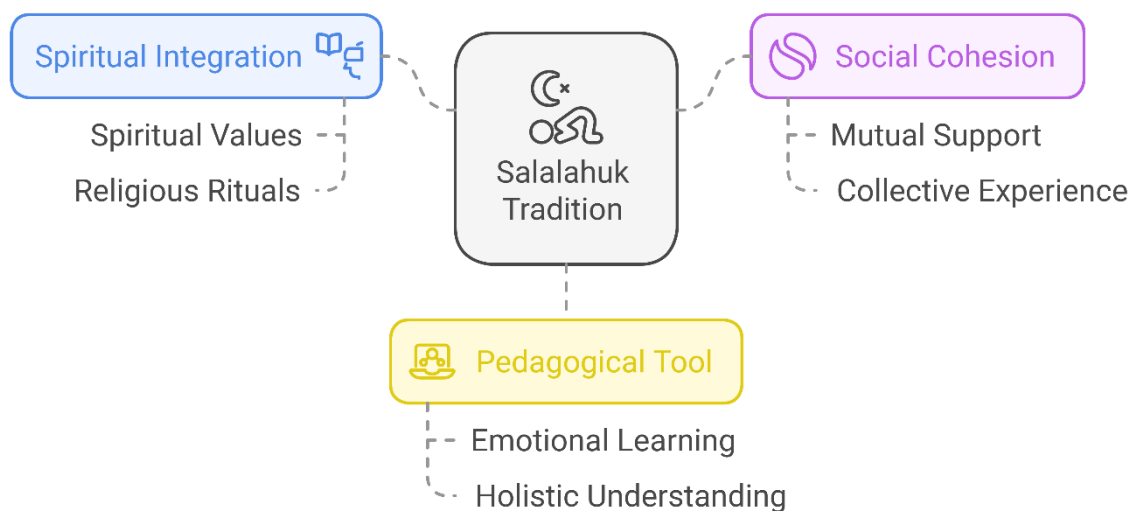


Figure 1. Implementation of Salalahuk Tradition into Santri Education

The Salalahuk tradition plays an important role in integrating spiritual values into santri education. This activity takes place in a solemn and passionate atmosphere, where santri not only chant the verses, but also reflect on their meaning. Observations revealed that this tradition enriches religious learning by creating a collective atmosphere that supports the internalization of spiritual values. The togetherness created during Salalahuk also strengthens social relationships among students, making learning more meaningful.

This finding is in line with spiritual-based education theory which emphasizes the importance of emotional and collective experiences in religious learning. Salalahuk serves as a pedagogical tool that integrates the spiritual dimension into the daily lives of santri, strengthening the connection between religious teachings and social practices. Previous literacy mentions that learning that involves emotional experiences is more effective in creating deep understanding. In this case, Salalahuk supports this theory by providing a relevant context for santri to understand Islamic teachings more holistically. Moreover, this tradition reflects an educational approach that blends formal and non-formal elements, creating a comprehensive learning experience.

Character Strengthening through Salalahuk Tradition

Based on in-depth interviews with pesantren caregivers, santri, and community leaders, it was found that the *Salalahuk* tradition has a significant role in the character building of santri. Kiai AR, the pesantren caregiver, explained, "Through *Salalahuk*, we try to convey moral values such as honesty, simplicity, and a sense of responsibility. The poems that we chant every night are messages that they can understand and practice in their daily lives" (I_AR, 2024). Senior student FN also stated, "Every night, we reflect on the meaning of the poems that are recited. There are many lessons on how to be kind to others and maintain a good relationship with God" (I_FN, 2024). This statement shows that the poems in the *Salalahuk* tradition are not only a means of conveying moral messages, but also motivate santri to reflect on their behavior. This shows that this tradition effectively combines the spiritual dimension with moral education.

Further interviews revealed the direct impact of the values contained in *Salalahuk* on santri interactions in daily life. One of the santri, AN, said, "When I hear the poem about the importance of maintaining trust, I feel that I have to be more responsible, such as completing the tasks given by the caregiver on time" (I_AN, 2024). This statement reflects how santri internalize the values taught through this tradition. In addition, a community leader, HS, added, "The *Salalahuk* tradition has become an important means of connecting religious teachings with real life. The values taught give santri an understanding that Islam is not only about rituals, but also guidelines for daily life" (I_HS, 2024). This statement shows that the *Salalahuk* tradition not only functions as a spiritual education tool, but also as a bridge that connects religious teachings with their application in a social context. Where through a series of interviews conducted above, then analyzed using thematic analysis to find important points from the research findings conducted. Where this is as shown in table 2.

Table 2. Thematic Analysis

Theme	Subtheme	Key Quotes
Character Reinforcement	Honesty	"We try to convey the value of honesty through poetry..." - Kiai AR (I_AR, 2024)
	Simplicity	"The value of simplicity is instilled in everyday life..." - Kiai AR (I_AR, 2024)
	Responsibility	"Hearing poems about trust makes me more responsible..." - AN (I_AN, 2024)
Social Relationship	Solidarity	"Salalahuk strengthens solidarity among santri." - HS (I_HS, 2024)
	Group Discussion	"We pondered the meaning of the poem together in a group discussion..." - FN (I_FN, 2024)
Education Integration	Non-Formal Curriculum	"Salalahuk is integrated into the pesantren curriculum as non-formal learning..." - Pesantren Curriculum
	Holistic Learning	"Through Salalahuk, holistic learning is created by combining spiritual and social aspects..." - Researcher

From table 2. it is known that the *Salalahuk* tradition plays a central role in the character building of santri by conveying relevant and applicable moral values. Interviews show that santri not only passively accept these values, but also strive to apply them in their daily lives. Through the chanted poems, santri learn about responsibility, tolerance and honesty as part of their lives. This tradition helps connect religious education with social practice, creating more contextualized and meaningful learning. The reflective atmosphere created by this tradition provides space for santri to explore the meaning of these values in a context relevant to their lives.

Salalahuk Tradition as a Medium for Internalizing the Value of Tawhid

The results revealed that the *Salalahuk* tradition in Senden Village, Kampak, Trenggalek, is an effective medium in instilling the value of monotheism in the community. Visual documentation supports this finding, as seen in Figure 2, where participants, consisting of cross-generational communities, chant *Salalahuk* verses together in the mosque. This activity is performed after tarawih prayers during Ramadan, creating a deeply spiritual atmosphere. The implementation of this tradition integrates local cultural elements, such as the distinctive rhythms and drum accompaniment, which strengthens its appeal and relevance to the local community.



Figure 2. The community and students chanting salalahuk verses

Further documentation shows the script of the poem used in this tradition (Figure 3), featuring Arabic text. The poem contains teachings on tawhid, such as the obligatory and impossible attributes of Allah, faith in the Messenger of Allah, and prayers for salvation. This manuscript reflects a cultural heritage that has been preserved for generations.

Analysis of this documentation shows that the poem text is designed to convey Islamic values in an easy-to-understand and engaging way, making it an effective tool for local culture-based religious learning.

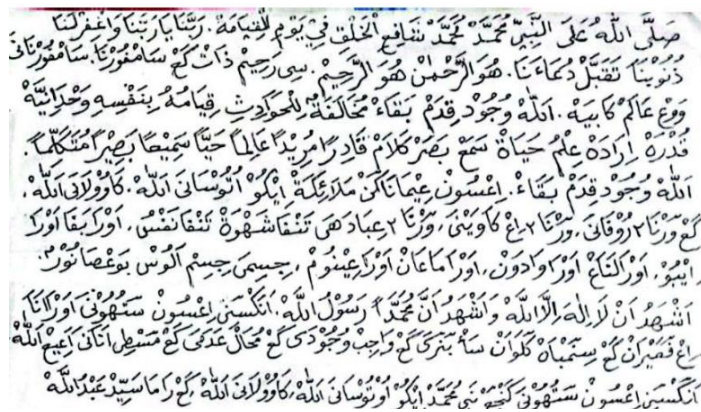


Figure 3. Salalahuk poem

The documentation confirms that the Salalahuk tradition not only functions as a means of cultural preservation, but also as a contextualized religious education tool. The active involvement of the community in the recitation of the poems shows a positive acceptance of this tradition. In addition, the use of verse texts as a learning medium provides an educational dimension that contributes to the understanding of monotheistic values by participants, including the younger generation.

Discussion

The first sub-finding highlights the implications of Salalahuk as a medium for integrating the values of tawhid into the lives of santri. The results show that the structured implementation of Salalahuk, through chanting, discussion, and reflection, provides an effective platform for embedding the teachings of tawhid into the daily practices of santri. This emphasizes the role of Salalahuk in enriching the spiritual understanding of santri contextually. This tradition is able to bridge religious teachings with daily experiences, creating an immersive learning environment. Local cultural elements such as the rhythm of the typical poem and the togetherness of the participants strengthen its appeal, making it a sustainable tradition in pesantren education. Moreover, the integration of Salalahuk ensures that religious education is not only theory-oriented, but also creates a holistic learning experience. Salalahuk's success in integrating the values of tawhid lies in its compatibility with the principles of culture-based education. Contextual learning theory states that learners understand concepts more easily. The study of Nasir & Rijal, (2021) reveals that local traditions integrated in religious education can increase engagement and understanding.

Salalahuk reflects this theory by connecting the values of tawhid to local cultural practices, making religious teachings more accessible and relevant to santri. The active participation of santri in chanting and reflection strengthens the emotional connection to the values taught.

This correlation shows how Salalahuk not only teaches tawhid, but also provides direct experience in internalizing the value. The second sub-finding reveals the impact of Salalahuk on the character building of santri. Through verses full of moral messages and reflective activities, the tradition succeeds in instilling values such as honesty, responsibility, and solidarity (Ali et al., 2021; Jamilah, 2021; Tohri et al., 2022). The santri testimonies show that the lessons from Salalahuk are applied in interpersonal relationships and daily responsibilities. For example, the verse about trustworthiness encourages santri to be more responsible for the tasks assigned. This reflects that Salalahuk is not just a spiritual activity, but also an effective character building tool, relevant to the needs of santri in daily life.

The correlation between Salalahuk and character building is explained through its reflective and participatory approach. Research by Tran & Nguyen, (2021) shows that participatory approaches in religious education encourage deeper moral engagement. Reflection carried out in the Salalahuk tradition provides space for santri to connect moral teachings with their personal experiences. Group discussions and interactions between students strengthen the collective understanding of these values. This correlation confirms that Salalahuk provides a moral learning platform that actively engages santri, making the values easier to understand and apply in real life.

The third sub-finding highlights the holistic educational approach facilitated by Salalahuk. By combining formal religious teachings with non-formal cultural practices, this tradition creates an educational model that is balanced between spiritual, cognitive, and social aspects (Alkhatib & Jaradat, 2021; Girivirya et al., 2024; Islamic et al., 2024). How Salalahuk strengthens individual growth while strengthening social relations within the pesantren. This tradition encourages collective reflection and mutual support, creating a solid learning community. By emphasizing spiritual and social integration, Salalahuk becomes an effective educational tool in shaping students as a whole.

The reason for Salalahuk's success as a holistic education model lies in its adaptability and cultural relevance. The study by Altinyelken, (2021) revealed that a combination of formal and non-formal learning produces better outcomes in religious education. Salalahuk applies this principle by combining structured pedagogical objectives with dynamic local cultural elements. This creates an educational framework that is adaptive to the needs of santri in the modern era. This correlation shows that Salalahuk is not just a ritual tradition, but also a sustainable and relevant educational model to support culture-based religious education.

CONCLUSION

This research shows that the Salalahuk tradition is an effective medium in integrating monotheistic values, building character, and creating a holistic educational approach in the pesantren environment. Through poetry readings, reflections, and discussions, Salalahuk succeeded in conveying religious teachings in the context of local culture that is familiar to students. These findings provide new insights into how local traditions can be relevant pedagogical tools in religious learning, bridging the gap between religious teaching theory and social practice. By providing a deep spiritual and emotional experience, Salalahuk not only enriches the understanding of monotheism, but also builds a collaborative and supportive learning community. The main lesson from this study is the importance of integrating local cultural elements in religious education to create a meaningful and relevant learning experience to the needs of learners. This research makes a significant contribution to the Islamic educational literature by presenting a teaching model that combines spiritual, social, and cultural dimensions.

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