Qur'anic Learning Management in Pesantren: Navigating the Tension Between Tradition and Innovation

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Keywords:	ABSTRACT
Pesantren, Qur'anic Education, Educational Management, Tradition and Innovation, Islamic Boarding Schools	Indonesian pesantren play a pivotal role in Islamic education, particularly in shaping the moral and spiritual character of the younger generation. Amid rapid modernization and technological advancement, pesantren are challenged to remain relevant while preserving their traditional values. This study examines the Qur'anic learning model at Pondok Pesantren Zainul Hasan Genggong, which integrates classical methods such as bandongan, sorogan, and wetonan with innovative, technology-based approaches. Employing a descriptive qualitative method, data were collected through observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation involving teachers and students. Findings reveal that the synergy between tradition and innovation enhances the quality of Qur'anic instruction, broadens access to global Islamic scholarship, and strengthens students' moral and spiritual foundations. From a management perspective, this integration demonstrates how adaptive leadership, resource optimization, and strategic curriculum design can preserve institutional identity while fostering innovation. The model offers a replicable framework for developing holistic, context-sensitive Islamic education systems capable of navigating both heritage preservation and future readiness.
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INTRODUCTION

Islamic boarding schools, or pesantren, have long served as central pillars in shaping the moral and spiritual foundations of Indonesian society. Beyond their role in transmitting religious knowledge, these institutions play a vital part in building social cohesion, nurturing ethical conduct, and preserving cultural identity. In an era marked by globalization and rapid technological change, the preservation of Islamic traditions faces unprecedented challenges. Communities increasingly require educational models that can maintain

doctrinal integrity while adapting to contemporary realities. According to Mulkan (2016), religious education must engage with modern platforms to remain accessible and meaningful for younger generations. This is especially critical for Qur'anic learning, which serves as the basis for aqidah, worship, and moral values. Without adaptive strategies, there is a risk of declining engagement among youth, potentially weakening their connection to Islamic teachings. Therefore, research on how pesantren balance tradition and innovation is not only relevant for religious educators but also for the broader goal of sustaining religious heritage in modern society.

Despite the historical significance of pesantren, they face mounting pressure to remain relevant in the digital age. Traditional Qur'anic pedagogy, which relies heavily on memorization (tahfidz) and direct teacher–student interaction, is often perceived by younger learners as rigid and less engaging compared to interactive, technology-based alternatives. This perception can lead to reduced enthusiasm for classical methods, potentially undermining the transmission of deep-rooted Islamic scholarship. Moreover, disparities in access to digital tools between urban and rural pesantren exacerbate educational inequality (Arifiahl, 2021). The central challenge lies in finding a sustainable model that preserves the richness of traditional learning while accommodating modern pedagogical tools. In the absence of such integration, pesantren risk losing their appeal to tech-savvy generations who are accustomed to multimedia-based learning. Addressing this issue is crucial not only for maintaining the quality of Qur'anic education but also for safeguarding the role of pesantren as both religious and community leadership centers in Indonesia's socio-religious landscape.

Field observations reveal that many pesantren across Indonesia are experimenting with new learning modalities while holding firmly to their heritage. At Pondok Pesantren Zainul Hasan Genggong, for instance, Qur'anic instruction remains rooted in classical methods such as halaqah (group discussion) and talaqqi (reciting directly to a teacher), yet these are complemented by digital innovations. These include mobile applications for Qur'anic memorization, recorded video lessons, and the use of social media platforms to share religious content. While such innovations improve accessibility and engagement, they also create managerial challenges— particularly in ensuring that technological tools enhance rather than dilute traditional values. Notably, the integration of digital resources has made it possible for students from diverse backgrounds to access supplementary materials beyond classroom hours (Mulkan, 2016). However, some teachers express concern that over-reliance on technology may reduce direct interaction with religious mentors, a cornerstone of pesantren pedagogy. This evolving

dynamic presents a valuable context for examining the balance between heritage preservation and pedagogical modernization.

Previous research on Qur'anic learning in pesantren largely emphasizes either the preservation of tradition or the adoption of innovation, with limited focus on their integration. Arifiahl (2021) categorizes pesantren learning methods into two main types: traditional approaches, deeply embedded in pesantren culture, and reformed approaches that incorporate modern teaching aids. Studies on traditional methods highlight their strengths in instilling discipline, spiritual intimacy, and memorization skills but also note their limitations in catering to diverse learning styles. Conversely, research on technology-based innovations underscores improved accessibility, learner autonomy, and exposure to global Islamic scholarship but often neglects the potential erosion of the teacher–student relational depth. These two strands of literature rarely intersect, creating a gap in understanding how pesantren can strategically combine both approaches. Addressing this gap could inform educational management practices in Islamic institutions seeking to modernize without compromising authenticity.

While some studies have examined hybrid approaches in Islamic education, many fail to provide a comprehensive analysis of their managerial implications. For example, research on e-learning in religious contexts often focuses on the technical aspects of implementation, overlooking the leadership, resource allocation, and curriculum design strategies required for sustainable integration. Furthermore, there is little empirical work exploring how hybrid models impact the moral and spiritual development of students—an essential outcome in Qur'anic education. This is particularly relevant in pesantren settings, where educational objectives extend beyond cognitive mastery to include character formation and community service. The lack of management-focused perspectives in the literature limits the applicability of findings for pesantren leaders. Consequently, there is a pressing need for studies that bridge pedagogical theory with practical institutional governance, offering actionable insights for balancing tradition and innovation within the unique cultural framework of Indonesian pesantren.

This study distinguishes itself by focusing explicitly on the intersection of tradition, innovation, and educational management within a pesantren context. While prior research has addressed these elements separately, few have explored their interaction in a single, real-world case. Pondok Pesantren Zainul Hasan Genggong offers a unique setting due to its established reputation for preserving classical Qur'anic teaching methods while also pioneering digital learning initiatives. By examining how this institution designs, implements, and evaluates its hybrid Qur'anic learning model, the study provides both

descriptive and analytical contributions. It also highlights strategies for aligning technological adoption with the pesantren's mission, ensuring that innovation reinforces rather than undermines its spiritual mandate. This nuanced approach addresses the existing research gap by demonstrating that tradition and innovation are not mutually exclusive but can be harmonized through deliberate management choices. The findings are expected to contribute to the broader discourse on modernizing religious education without eroding its foundational values.

The central research problem addressed in this study is: How can pesantren integrate traditional and innovative methods in Qur'anic education without compromising core religious values? This question is critical because the tension between heritage preservation and modern educational demands is becoming increasingly pronounced in the digital era. The research assumes that an optimal balance can be achieved through intentional management strategies that respect the cultural ethos of pesantren while embracing pedagogical advancements. Specifically, the study investigates the practical mechanisms—such as curriculum adaptation, teacher training, and technological infrastructure—that enable such integration. By grounding the analysis in the lived experiences of teachers and students, the study aims to generate insights that are both contextually relevant and practically implementable. This approach not only addresses the pedagogical dimension but also informs institutional decision-making, making it valuable for policymakers, educators, and administrators in Islamic education.

This research argues that the integration of tradition and innovation in Qur'anic learning is most effective when guided by a holistic educational management framework. At Pondok Pesantren Zainul Hasan Genggong, such integration has demonstrated potential in enhancing learning outcomes, increasing accessibility to religious resources, and fostering adaptive skills among students. The study's contribution lies in articulating a replicable model that combines classical methods like bandongan, sorogan, and wetonan with digital tools, underpinned by strategic management practices. These include aligning innovation with institutional vision, training educators in technology use, and ensuring continuous evaluation to maintain educational quality. The findings are expected to benefit other pesantren and Islamic educational institutions seeking to modernize responsibly. Ultimately, the study reinforces the idea that heritage and progress are not opposing forces but complementary elements that, when managed effectively, can strengthen the role of pesantren in both preserving Islamic tradition and preparing students for contemporary challenges.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach in the form of field research, selected for its suitability in capturing rich, narrative accounts of participants' experiences and understandings within their natural setting (Sugiyono, 2008). The primary aim was to systematically and factually describe the implementation of both traditional and innovative Qur'anic learning models at Pondok Pesantren Zainul Hasan Genggong. In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the main instrument; therefore, direct presence in the field was essential. The researcher was involved throughout the entire process, from the initial approach to key figures at the pesantren, to conducting observations, interviews, and documentation.

The main informants comprised the Head of LPTQ, ustadz, and santri deemed relevant to the research focus (Moleong, 2018). Data were drawn from two primary sources: first-hand accounts gathered through interviews and classroom observations, and secondary materials including institutional structures and records of teaching activities (Sugiyono, 2008). Data collection techniques encompassed observing teaching and learning sessions in both morning and afternoon schedules, conducting structured interviews with the Head of LPTQ, the Head of Bin-Nadzor, several ustadz, and selected santri, as well as reviewing archives and documentation related to instructional practices and organizational structures.

Data analysis followed the stages outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994), beginning with data collection through observation, interviews, and documentation, followed by data reduction to filter and organize relevant information. The refined data were then presented in descriptive narrative form, leading to the drawing of conclusions based on identified patterns and relationships. To ensure data validity, triangulation techniques were applied, including data triangulation—comparing information from different sources— and methodological triangulation, which involved using multiple data-gathering methods (Moleong, 2018). This approach provided a comprehensive and credible depiction of how traditional and innovative Qur'anic learning methods are implemented and managed within the pesantren context.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
Findings
Positioning within the Pesantren Typology

The analysis confirms that Pondok Pesantren Zainul Hasan Genggong occupies a semi-modern classification within Abdullah Syukri Zarkasyi's framework. While preserving traditional educational values—such as the use of

kitab kuning, strict disciplinary systems, and a lifestyle rooted in classical pesantren norms—it has integrated modern elements, including national curricula from both the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Education. This hybrid structure allows the institution to evolve with the times without losing its cultural identity.

Historical Legacy as a Driver of Adaptability

Founded in 1839 by KH. Zainul Abidin, the pesantren's evolution reflects a history of adaptation. The formal naming in 1959 to honor both KH. Zainul Abidin and KH. Mohammad Hasan symbolized the unification of heritage and progress. This legacy of leadership has shaped a culture of flexibility, ensuring that tradition remains central while responding to societal changes. The pesantren implements a dual curriculum that merges classical Islamic studies with formal schooling. Religious subjects are taught alongside modern sciences, but the integration of moral discipline, noble character, and ritual practice ensures that technological or academic advancements never overshadow spiritual formation.

Persistence of Traditional Qur'anic Learning Methods

Traditional instruction remains prominent through the use of sorogan, bandongan, and tikrar. These approaches foster personalized mentoring, communal learning, and disciplined repetition. Beyond developing technical skills in tajwid, they also preserve the sanad, reinforcing a sense of scholarly continuity and spiritual connection to past generations. While rooted in tradition, the pesantren incorporates digital Qur'anic applications, video lessons, and curated online resources. These innovations enhance accessibility, encourage independent study, and enable thematic Qur'anic interpretation within contemporary contexts. Importantly, these tools function as supplements rather than replacements for face-to-face guidance from kyai or ustadz.

Synergy between Tradition and Innovation

Observations and interviews reveal a deliberate balance: traditional methods instill discipline, moral grounding, and scholarly lineage, while modern tools increase reach and engagement among younger, tech-savvy learners. The management's strategic decision to integrate both approaches ensures continuity of values while embracing pedagogical efficiency.

Strategic Leadership as the Enabler of Integration

The success of this blended model is attributed to leadership vision and institutional governance. Administrators carefully align curriculum, teacher training, and technology adoption with the pesantren's mission to produce graduates who are spiritually steadfast, intellectually capable, and socially responsible. The findings indicate that Pondok Pesantren Zainul Hasan Genggong offers a replicable framework for Islamic education that harmonizes

heritage with innovation. Its approach demonstrates that modernization need not erode tradition; instead, when guided by strategic management, both elements can reinforce one another to meet the moral and intellectual needs of contemporary Muslim society.

Figure 1. The process of learning the Qur'an

Innovative Qur'anic Learning Model at Pondok Pesantren Zainul Hasan Genggong

The innovative practices implemented at Pondok Pesantren Zainul Hasan Genggong encompass the integration of technology, the adoption of active learning strategies, and an emphasis on understanding the relevance of the Qur'an in daily life. This transformation is not merely methodological but also affects students' perspectives and attitudes toward knowledge and religious practice. In this regard, Jack Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory offers a useful framework, as it explains how learning can fundamentally reshape an individual's frame of reference through critical reflection and meaningful experience. According to Mezirow, transformative learning involves revising established assumptions and reinterpreting experiences to develop deeper, more comprehensive understandings.

The pesantren's Qur'anic learning model has evolved significantly from a primarily mechanical memorization approach toward a more innovative and reflective pedagogy. This shift prioritizes not only reading and memorization skills but also the comprehension of meanings, contexts, and the contemporary relevance of each Qur'anic verse. The goal is to equip students to connect Islamic teachings to real-life situations, positioning the Qur'an not only as a sacred text but as a practical guide for navigating modern challenges.

Such innovation maintains the Qur'an's relevance amid societal and technological developments while preserving traditional values and instructional methods. One notable example is the pesantren's pengajian of Qur'anic exegesis (tafsir) delivered directly by the kyai. These sessions are now broadcast via live streaming, enabling access for students unable to attend in

person and extending the pesantren's reach to the wider public. This hybrid approach—rooted in tradition yet empowered by modern tools—reflects a deliberate strategy to adapt and evolve while ensuring that spiritual authenticity remains at the core of the learning process.

Figure 2. The process of learning the Qur'an using technological innovation

The findings show that the Zainul Hasan Genggong Islamic Boarding School has implemented an innovative learning model in teaching the Qur'an, one of which is through the study of the Qur'an interpretation book delivered directly by the kiai to the students, and broadcast via live streaming to reach students outside the assembly or the general public.

Discussion

The term pesantren originates from the Javanese construction pe-santri-an, where santri refers to a student or pupil in the Javanese language (Lundeto et al, 2021; Robani et al, 2022). The word pondok derives from the Arabic funduuq (قودنف), meaning "inn" or "hostel," which in the local context refers to modest lodging, traditionally built from bamboo. When combined as pondok pesantren, the term denotes an Islamic educational institution where students, or santri, reside and study religious sciences (Purwanto et al, 2021; Mujahid, 2021). According to K.H. Imam Zarkasyi, a pondok pesantren is an Islamic educational institution operating under a boarding system, with the kyai as the central figure, the mosque as the spiritual hub, and Islamic teaching under the guidance of the kyai as its primary activity (Syafe'i, 2017).

The educational system at Pondok Pesantren Zainul Hasan Genggong is grounded in a strong philosophical foundation, namely the classical pesantren maxim Al-Muhaafadhatu 'ala al-Qadiimis Sholeh wal Akhdzu bil Jadiidil Ashlah, meaning "to preserve the good of the old while adopting the better of the new." This principle serves as the guiding framework for all educational

development within the institution, reflecting its commitment to maintaining the traditional values of Salafiyah pesantren while embracing modern educational innovations that meet contemporary needs (Rudianto, n.d.; Dhofier, 2011).

A learning model is a conceptual framework that systematically outlines an approach to designing learning experiences, serving as a guide for curriculum designers and educators in achieving specific educational goals (Putri et al., 2025). Traditionally, pesantren employed a non-classical educational and instructional system characterized by methods such as bandongan, sorogan, and wetonan (Sailin, 2021). In the bandongan method, students collectively listen as the kyai recites and explains Qur'anic verses or classical texts, while in sorogan, students read or present their Qur'anic recitation individually to the teacher for correction (Kamal, 2020).

The wetonan method is typically held at designated times, during which the kyai reads aloud and explains the content of a text or Qur'anic passage to the assembled students (Arifin, 2024; Jamil, 2024). These methods prioritize direct teacher–student interaction, emphasize perseverance and patience, and underscore the spiritual merit (barakah) of the teacher–student relationship in the pursuit of knowledge (Lestari, Falah, & Muslimin, 2023).

Over time, pesantren as Islamic educational institutions have undergone significant transformations in form and practice, influenced by broader societal changes and advances in science and technology (Murdiono, 2024; Azra, 2019). These developments have encouraged shifts in Qur'anic learning models, moving from exclusively traditional approaches toward more innovative and contextually relevant methods. At Pondok Pesantren Zainul Hasan Genggong, this transition has not replaced the classical methods but rather integrated them with contemporary pedagogical strategies, ensuring that technological and methodological innovations complement rather than dilute the institution's traditional ethos.

CONCLUSION

Pondok Pesantren Zainul Hasan Genggong stands as a compelling example of how classical Qur'anic pedagogy can be harmoniously integrated with modern, technology-driven innovations. The preservation of traditional methods such as sorogan, bandongan, and wetonan continues to instill discipline, respect, and spiritual depth—core values that have long defined pesantren education. Simultaneously, the incorporation of digital media, live-streamed tafsir sessions, and technology-enhanced formal education has expanded the reach and relevance of Qur'anic learning in the contemporary era.

This synergy between tradition and innovation not only enriches the learning experience of the santri but also cultivates a generation that is both spiritually grounded and technologically adept. By demonstrating that modernization need not erode the integrity of tradition, the pesantren offers a model for sustainable Islamic education—one that preserves timeless values while equipping students to navigate and contribute meaningfully to an ever-changing global landscape.

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