




Classical Islamic Texts Learning Based on Ta'lim as an Instrument for Strengthening Students' Character A Qualitative Study in Islamic Boarding Schools

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ABSTRACT

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The learning of kitab kuning (classical Islamic texts) in Islamic boarding schools plays an important role in shaping students' character. The ta'lim approach not only emphasizes the transfer of knowledge but also instills moral values, discipline, and spirituality. This article aims to analyze the strategy of ta'lim-based learning of kitab kuning in shaping students' character by examining relevant academic sources. The method used is a literature study with content analysis of sources taken from Islamic education journals. The results show that strategies such as bandongan, sorogan, and the habituation of proper conduct significantly influence the development of students' religious character. In addition, several spelling errors were found in the analyzed sources, indicating the need for improvement in academic writing.

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INTRODUCTION

Islamic education plays a strategic role in shaping the character, morality, and personality of younger generations. Beyond the transmission of religious knowledge, Islamic educational institutions are expected to cultivate ethical values, spiritual awareness, and responsible behavior among students. In Indonesia, Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) have long been recognized as important centers for character formation, where educational processes integrate intellectual, moral, and spiritual development. Unlike conventional educational institutions that primarily emphasize academic achievement, pesantren provide a holistic learning environment in which students are continuously guided to internalize Islamic values in their daily lives. This distinctive educational model has enabled pesantren to maintain their relevance as institutions dedicated to producing knowledgeable individuals with strong moral foundations.

One of the defining characteristics of pesantren education is the study of kitab kuning (classical Islamic texts), which constitute the primary reference for understanding Islamic teachings. These texts, traditionally written in Arabic

without vowel markings, contain comprehensive discussions on theology, jurisprudence, ethics, spirituality, and social conduct. The study of kitab kuning serves not only as a means of acquiring religious knowledge but also as an instrument for cultivating character and moral virtues. Through the content and pedagogical traditions associated with these texts, students are introduced to values such as sincerity (ikhlas), patience (sabr), humility (tawadhu'), discipline, respect for teachers, and responsibility toward society. Consequently, the learning of kitab kuning represents a unique educational approach that combines cognitive development with moral and spiritual formation.

Among the classical texts widely studied in pesantren, Ta'lim al-Muta'allim by Burhanuddin Az-Zarnuji occupies a particularly significant position. This work focuses on the ethics of learning and provides comprehensive guidance on the attitudes and behaviors that students should develop in their pursuit of knowledge. The text emphasizes the importance of respecting teachers, maintaining sincerity in learning, managing time effectively, selecting righteous companions, and cultivating noble character. As a result, Ta'lim al-Muta'allim has become one of the most influential references in pesantren education for fostering students' moral development and strengthening their commitment to ethical conduct.

The learning strategy employed in teaching kitab kuning is commonly based on the concept of ta'lim, which emphasizes not only the transmission of knowledge (transfer of knowledge) but also the transmission of values (transfer of values). Traditional pedagogical methods such as bandongan, sorogan, musyawarah (discussion), and the habituation of proper conduct are integral components of the learning process. Through these methods, students are encouraged to engage actively with the text while simultaneously internalizing the moral and ethical values embedded within it. Therefore, effective learning strategies are essential to ensure that the teachings contained in classical texts are not merely understood intellectually but are also reflected in students' attitudes and behaviors.

Despite the central role of kitab kuning in character education, contemporary challenges indicate that not all students successfully translate the values learned from these texts into their daily lives. In some cases, a gap remains between theoretical understanding and practical implementation. Students may demonstrate adequate cognitive comprehension of ethical principles while experiencing difficulties in applying them consistently in social interactions and personal conduct. This situation highlights the need for more effective, contextual, and applicable learning strategies capable of strengthening the internalization of values and ensuring that character formation becomes an integral outcome of the educational process.

Based on these considerations, this study seeks to examine how ta'lim-based learning strategies in the study of kitab kuning contribute to the formation of students' character. Specifically, the research aims to explore the methods, practices, and educational processes through which moral values are transmitted

and internalized within the pesantren environment. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the theoretical development of Islamic educational discourse, particularly in the area of character education, while also providing practical recommendations for pesantren seeking to enhance the effectiveness of character-building programs through the teaching of classical Islamic texts.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of how ta'lim-based learning strategies in the study of kitab kuning contribute to the formation of students' character. The research was conducted at Bahrul Ulum Almurisyidi Islamic Boarding School (Pesantren Bahrul Ulum Almurisyidi), located in Cibeureum, Tasikmalaya, West Java, Indonesia. This pesantren was purposively selected as the research site because it has implemented a structured and intensive kitab kuning learning system that is widely recognized for its contribution to the development of students' religious character and moral values. The case study approach was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to explore the educational processes, learning strategies, and character-building practices within their natural setting.

Data were collected through three primary techniques: observation, interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted to examine the implementation of kitab kuning learning activities and students' behavioral practices within the pesantren environment. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with teachers, pesantren leaders, and students to obtain comprehensive insights into the learning process and its influence on character development. In addition, relevant documents such as learning schedules, institutional regulations, curriculum materials, and supporting records were analyzed to strengthen the research findings. Data analysis followed the interactive model consisting of data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Throughout the analysis process, particular attention was given to the theoretical framework of kitab kuning learning implementation and religious character formation, which served as the primary analytical lens for interpreting the findings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Implementation of Kitab Kuning Learning at Bahrul Ulum Almurisyidi Islamic Boarding School

The findings reveal that the implementation of kitab kuning learning at Bahrul Ulum Almurisyidi Islamic Boarding School is systematically organized as a core component of character and religious education. The institution views kitab kuning not merely as a source of Islamic knowledge but also as a medium for cultivating students' moral values, spirituality, and religious identity. Through a structured educational system, the pesantren integrates the study of classical Islamic texts into various learning programs aimed at developing both

intellectual competence and character formation. The implementation of kitab kuning learning is divided into three main educational components: Ma'had Education, Madrasah Education, and Moral Education. Ma'had Education is conducted every morning from 08:00 to 11:00 a.m. and focuses on the study of classical Islamic sciences, including Arabic grammar (*nahwu* and *sharaf*), jurisprudence (*fiqh*), principles of jurisprudence (*usul fiqh*), hadith, Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsir*), theology (*tauhid*), Sufism (*tasawuf*), ethics (*akhlaq*), Islamic history, rhetoric (*balaghah*), and inheritance law (*faraid*). Learning activities are carried out in flexible locations within the pesantren environment, such as dormitories, courtyards, mosques, and open spaces, creating a more engaging and student-centered learning atmosphere. This approach encourages active participation and reduces learning fatigue among students.

Madrasah Education serves as a complementary learning program and is organized into four educational levels: I'dad, Ula, Wustha, and Takhassus. The I'dad level is designed for beginners with limited prior knowledge of Islamic studies. The Ula level primarily focuses on Qur'anic reading and basic religious practices for children from the surrounding community. The Wustha level introduces students to a broader range of kitab kuning studies through traditional learning methods, while the Takhassus level emphasizes advanced discussions and teacher preparation. Classes are conducted from 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. and are compulsory for all resident students. The findings indicate that these educational stages provide a gradual and systematic framework for developing students' religious understanding and moral character. The third component, Moral Education, is specifically designed to strengthen students' ethical and spiritual development. This program focuses on the study of classical texts related to morality and Sufism, such as *Bidayah al-Hidayah*, *Syarh al-Hikam*, *An-Nashaih ad-Diniyyah*, *Ayyuhal Walad*, and *Taisirul Khallaq*. These lessons are conducted after the Maghrib prayer and are led directly by senior teachers and pesantren leaders. The findings demonstrate that these texts serve as the primary reference for instilling virtues such as sincerity, humility, discipline, patience, and respect toward others. Additional learning activities, including the study of *Tafsir al-Jalalayn* after the Fajr prayer and the implementation of the *Al-Miftah Lil Ulum* acceleration method for reading classical texts, further support students' religious and intellectual development.

Learning Materials of Kitab Kuning

The findings show that kitab kuning serves as the principal curriculum and intellectual foundation of the pesantren educational system. The classical texts studied at Bahrul Ulum Al-mursyidi encompass a broad range of Islamic disciplines, including Arabic grammar (*nahwu*), morphology (*sharaf*), jurisprudence (*fiqh*), principles of jurisprudence (*usul fiqh*), legal maxims (*qawa'id fihiyyah*), hadith, hadith sciences, Qur'anic exegesis, theology, Sufism, ethics, Islamic history, rhetoric, and inheritance law. These texts vary from introductory manuals to advanced multi-volume works, allowing students to progress

gradually according to their level of understanding. Among the various texts taught, two books were identified as particularly influential in shaping students' religious character: *An-Nashaih ad-Diniyyah* by Habib Abdullah bin Alawi Al-Haddad and *Ayyuhal Walad* by Imam Al-Ghazali. These works emphasize religious advice, moral conduct, spiritual development, and ethical behavior. Interview data indicated that students frequently referred to the teachings contained in these texts when reflecting on their daily conduct and interpersonal relationships. Consequently, these books function not only as educational resources but also as practical guides for cultivating religious values and moral responsibility.

Methods of Kitab Kuning Learning

The findings indicate that Bahrul Ulum Almursyidi employs a variety of teaching methods to enhance students' engagement and facilitate the internalization of Islamic values. Rather than relying exclusively on traditional methods such as *bandongan* and *sorogan*, teachers combine multiple instructional approaches to accommodate students' learning needs and maintain motivation throughout the learning process. The first method is the lecture method, which is commonly used after teachers explain and translate the classical text. This approach enables teachers to provide moral advice, clarify ethical concepts, and connect textual teachings with contemporary life situations. The second method is the question-and-answer method, which encourages students to actively seek clarification and deepen their understanding of the material. This interactive approach promotes critical thinking and strengthens teacher-student communication. The third method is storytelling, in which teachers share stories about prophets, companions of the Prophet, scholars, and righteous individuals from Islamic history. The findings reveal that this method is particularly effective in inspiring students to emulate exemplary figures and internalize moral values through reflection and personal identification. The fourth method is discussion (*munadharah*), which is frequently conducted among senior students. Through discussions, students analyze contemporary social and religious issues, develop problem-solving skills, and learn to respect differing opinions. This method also promotes democratic values and intellectual openness within the pesantren environment. Finally, the pesantren employs the assignment method, whereby students are given tasks such as independently translating texts, researching the biographies of Islamic scholars, and completing religious learning projects. These assignments encourage independent learning, responsibility, and self-discipline. Overall, the combination of these diverse instructional methods contributes significantly to the effectiveness of kitab kuning learning and supports the development of students' religious character, intellectual growth, and moral behavior.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the implementation of kitab

kuning learning at Bahrul Ulum Almursyidi Islamic Boarding School extends beyond the transmission of religious knowledge and functions as a comprehensive system for character formation. The integration of Ma'had Education, Madrasah Education, and Moral Education reflects the pesantren's commitment to developing students intellectually, spiritually, and morally. This finding supports the view that Islamic education should not be limited to cognitive achievement but should also cultivate ethical values and noble character. The structured and continuous nature of the learning process allows students to internalize religious teachings through both formal instruction and daily practice, thereby creating a holistic educational environment that nurtures religious character.

The study further reveals that kitab kuning serves as an effective medium for character education because it contains not only doctrinal knowledge but also moral guidance and ethical principles. Classical texts such as *An-Nashaih ad-Diniyyah* and *Ayyuhal Walad* provide practical teachings on sincerity, humility, discipline, patience, and respect for others. These findings are consistent with the traditional understanding of pesantren education, which regards classical Islamic texts as sources of both knowledge and moral wisdom. Through regular engagement with these texts, students are exposed to ethical ideals that influence their attitudes and behaviors. Thus, the learning of kitab kuning contributes significantly to the development of religious character by linking intellectual understanding with moral responsibility. Another important finding concerns the use of diverse instructional methods in the learning process. While traditional methods such as *bandongan* and *sorogan* remain central to pesantren education, Bahrul Ulum Almursyidi complements these approaches with lectures, question-and-answer sessions, storytelling, discussions (*munadharah*), and assignments. The use of varied methods helps maintain students' motivation and engagement while facilitating deeper understanding of the material. Educational theory suggests that effective learning occurs when students actively participate in the learning process rather than merely receiving information passively. The findings indicate that interactive methods such as discussion and questioning encourage critical thinking, communication skills, and intellectual curiosity, while storytelling and lectures provide opportunities for moral reflection and value internalization.

The effectiveness of the storytelling method is particularly noteworthy. Stories of prophets, companions, scholars, and righteous individuals provide students with concrete examples of virtuous behavior that can be emulated in daily life. This finding aligns with social learning theory, which emphasizes the importance of observational learning and role models in character formation. By identifying with exemplary figures from Islamic history, students are encouraged to adopt similar attitudes and behaviors. Consequently, storytelling becomes a powerful educational tool that bridges the gap between abstract moral concepts and practical application. The discussion method (*munadharah*) also plays a significant role in developing students' intellectual and social

competencies. Through discussions, students learn to analyze contemporary issues, express opinions respectfully, and appreciate diverse perspectives. These skills are essential not only for academic development but also for fostering tolerance, democratic attitudes, and social responsibility. The findings suggest that the discussion method contributes to character formation by teaching students how to engage constructively with differing viewpoints while maintaining Islamic ethical principles.

Furthermore, the assignment method promotes independence, responsibility, and self-discipline among students. By completing learning tasks independently, students develop habits of perseverance and accountability that are essential components of character education. The findings indicate that these assignments reinforce the values taught in class and encourage students to take ownership of their learning process. Such practices are consistent with contemporary educational perspectives that emphasize active learning and student-centered instruction. Overall, the results of this study confirm that ta'lim-based kitab kuning learning serves as an effective strategy for religious character formation in the pesantren context. The combination of classical Islamic texts, diverse instructional methods, and a supportive educational environment enables students to internalize religious values and translate them into daily behavior. These findings support the argument that character education is most effective when moral values are integrated into the entire educational process rather than taught as separate subjects. Therefore, the educational model implemented at Bahrul Ulum Almursyidi offers valuable insights for Islamic educational institutions seeking to strengthen character development while preserving the rich intellectual tradition of kitab kuning learning.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of kitab kuning learning at Bahrul Ulum Almursyidi Islamic Boarding School, which is characterized by the integration of Ma'had Education, Madrasah Education, and Moral Education, and supported by various instructional methods including lectures, question-and-answer sessions, storytelling, discussions, and assignments, has been proven to contribute significantly to the development of students' religious character. This influence is particularly evident in the dimensions of worship practices and moral behavior. The effectiveness of this educational approach can be observed through the relatively low number of students who violate pesantren regulations, as well as through their daily conduct.

The findings indicate that students consistently perform the five daily prayers in congregation with discipline and order, regularly engage in voluntary acts of worship such as fasting and sunnah prayers, and demonstrate respectful behavior in their daily interactions. Their character development is reflected in courteous actions, polite speech, and adherence to Islamic ethical values. These positive changes are strongly supported by the study of *An-Nashaih ad-Diniyyah* and *Ayyuhal Walad*, which serve as the primary texts in the pesantren

curriculum. Both books contain profound moral and spiritual guidance, offering wise advice on character education, ethical conduct, and personal development, accompanied by exemplary stories and experiences of righteous individuals from the past. As a result, these texts play a central role in shaping students' religious character and moral consciousness at Bahrul Ulum Almursyidi Islamic Boarding School.

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