

## Integrating Life Skills into Islamic Boarding School Education: Insights from Pesantren Modern Darul Ma'rifat Deli Serdang

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### ABSTRACT

This study explores the integration of life skills education within the curriculum of Pesantren Modern Darul Ma'rifat, aiming to prepare students with essential skills for personal, social, and professional life while grounded in Islamic values. As a pesantren that combines traditional religious education with practical life skills, Darul Ma'rifat addresses the growing need for pesantren graduates to adapt to modern societal demands. The research applies a qualitative framework, utilizing observations, interviews, and document analysis to investigate how various life skills spiritual, academic, social, critical thinking, and vocational are embedded in the students' daily routines and learning activities. Findings reveal that through structured religious practices, students develop discipline, responsibility, and self-awareness. Activities like bahtsul masa'il foster critical thinking and analytical skills, while participation in the student organization OPPMDM and mentoring programs enhance social skills and leadership. Additionally, the curriculum integrates Islamic studies with general knowledge subjects, encouraging intellectual development, and includes vocational training in entrepreneurship, agriculture, and martial arts to support students' independence and adaptability. The study concludes that Pesantren Darul Ma'rifat provides a model of holistic Islamic education, effectively blending religious values with life skills education to produce well-rounded individuals prepared for both personal growth and societal contributions. This approach demonstrates that Islamic education can adapt and remain relevant in addressing the complexities of modern life.

**Keywords:** *Integration; Life Skills; Pesantren*

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Education in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) has a long history as one of the institutions playing a significant role in shaping individual character based on religious values (Mujahid, 2021; Utami, Siregar, & Pratiwi, 2022). However, the evolving challenges of the times demand that pesantren evolve beyond being merely institutions that teach religious knowledge. Today, pesantren are also expected to prepare students for life beyond academia through the acquisition of relevant life skills (Hadinata, Andari, Ansori, & Purwanti, 2023). The Modern Pesantren Darul

Ma'rifat, established in 2021 in North Sumatra, seeks to address this need by integrating life skills into their curriculum. This concept is implemented through various activities designed to instill skills that encompass aspects such as discipline, teamwork, critical thinking, and other practical competencies.

As a pesantren adopting a modern concept, Darul Ma'rifat Pesantren understands the importance of preparing students with practical skills for real-life situations, especially in facing competition in the era of globalization. However, the integration of these life skills is not without challenges. One of the main issues faced is how to harmonize the existing religious curriculum with life skills activities without compromising the quality of religious education. In addition, the availability of facilities and the preparedness of teaching staff present their own challenges in implementing this program. This situation forms the primary background for this research, which aims to understand the strategies and approaches of Darul Ma'rifat Pesantren in integrating life skills into the education of its students.

The literature review shows that life skills education has become increasingly important in the era of globalization, where graduates of educational institutions are expected to possess skills that enable them to adapt to various social, economic, and cultural situations. Several educational theories, such as the theory of holistic development, emphasize that life skills encompass personal, social, academic, and vocational competencies (Azmi, Nasution, Anwar, & Nasir, 2022). In the context of Islamic education, the implementation of life skills not only supports success in practical skills but also strengthens the spiritual values held by the students. Based on this study, life skills in pesantren serve not only as technical skills but also as capital for students to live a life of integrity and meaning, in accordance with Islamic principles (Turwanto, Kurahman, Yulistiawati, Nasir, & Rahmatullah, 2023).

This study aims to describe how the integration of life skills is applied at Modern Pesantren Darul Ma'rifat and the implementation strategies used to achieve holistic educational goals. Specifically, this research examines the life skills teaching strategies implemented and identifies their impact on the development of students' skills in facing everyday life.

This study holds significant value in understanding the application of the life skills concept in pesantren education, which has the potential to provide best practices for other pesantren in Indonesia. The results of this research are expected to serve as a reference for developing a more integrative curriculum that is responsive to the needs of students, particularly in facing increasingly complex life challenges. Thus, Modern Pesantren Darul Ma'rifat is expected to become a pioneer in the

implementation of a life skills curriculum that not only supports the mastery of religious knowledge but also encourages students to become independent, competitive individuals with a tangible contribution to society.

## **2. METHODS**

A qualitative descriptive approach is used in this study, which allows for an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon of life skills integration at Modern Pesantren Darul Ma'rifat in Hamparan Perak, Deli Serdang. The qualitative descriptive research approach enables the researcher to observe and describe various related aspects without manipulating variables (Moleong, 2017).

Data were collected through in-depth interviews with each informant to gain a comprehensive perspective on the implementation of life skills education. Observations were made to understand the daily activities of students and the role of life skills education in their activities. Document study complemented the data collection process to understand the pesantren's vision and mission in developing students' skills.

Data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman technique, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and data verification (Salim dan Syahrudin, 2015). The analysis process was conducted through data triangulation to ensure the validity and reliability of the research results. Triangulation was carried out by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documents to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the implementation of life skills education at this pesantren (Sugiyono, 2019).

## **3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **3.1 Implementation of Life Skills Education**

Modern Pesantren Darul Ma'rifat adopts a comprehensive approach to life skills education, which not only equips students with practical skills but also provides them with a strong spiritual foundation. The implementation process utilizes daily routines that combine aspects of worship, learning, and social activities as mediums for life skills education. Every day, students engage in routines that include congregational prayers, Quran recitation, and other structured religious activities. These activities are conducted in a disciplined environment, regulated by a strict schedule, aiming to instill values of discipline and responsibility in students from an early age. Therefore, life skills education at this pesantren aims not only to equip students with life skills but also to shape strong character, grounded in Islamic religious values.

Religious routines, such as congregational prayers and Quran recitation, play a crucial role in developing students' self-awareness, self-control, and discipline at Pesantren Darul Ma'rifat. These activities are not only seen as ritual obligations but also as opportunities to foster unity, teamwork, and solidarity. Students are taught to adhere to schedules, respect time, and fulfill social obligations, creating a balanced approach to personal and community life. Additionally, these routines instill a sense of responsibility, as students learn to care for the cleanliness and orderliness of worship spaces, forming habits that extend to daily life. This integration of responsibility and discipline is key to life skills education, helping students become caring, responsible individuals who contribute positively to their community and environment..

The integration of life skills in daily activities at Pesantren Darul Ma'rifat emphasizes orderliness, sincerity, and social responsibility. Students are trained to perform tasks with genuine intent and avoid individualism, fostering cooperation and mutual support within the community. This approach not only provides technical skills but also instills moral and spiritual values. In line with Sari et al. (2022), life skills education in pesantren curricula combines spiritual guidance with practical skills like communication, time management, and financial literacy, preparing students for personal and professional challenges after graduation..

Moreover, the emphasis on religious values in life skills education provides a strong foundation for students to maintain integrity and consistency when facing temptations or pressures outside the pesantren. The students are taught to use religious values as the primary basis for decision-making, with the expectation that they will develop a resilient character and the ability to act in accordance with high moral principles (Achmad, 2024).

Life skills education at Pesantren Darul Ma'rifat successfully combines practical skills with deep spirituality, fostering resilient and well-rounded individuals. The integrated approach in daily routines demonstrates that spirituality and life skills can support each other in shaping strong, responsible character (Abrianto, 2023; Imran & Tambunan, 2003). This model of education harmonizes religious values with practical skills, offering an adaptive and relevant approach to Islamic education in response to contemporary needs (Harahap & Mukti, 2023).

### 3.2 Critical Thinking Skills

The development of critical and analytical thinking skills at this pesantren is facilitated through the *bahtsul masa'il* activity, a discussion forum for exploring fiqh issues found in classical texts. In this activity, students are encouraged to analyze texts, discuss their interpretations, and present arguments based on a deep understanding. This activity not only develops students' logical thinking skills but also hones their ability to express opinions systematically and defend arguments. According to an interview with Ustadz Wahyu, students who participate in *bahtsul masa'il* show significant improvement in their critical and analytical thinking abilities, which are essential competencies in modern life. This aligns with Helmi's (2023) research, which suggests that *bahtsul masa'il* can enhance students' critical thinking.

In addition to *bahtsul masa'il*, the development of critical and analytical thinking skills at Pesantren Modern Darul Ma'rifat is also supported through daily activities like *tadarus* and *tafsir Al-Quran*. Santri are encouraged to not only read the Quran but also understand the context and values behind its verses. Through group discussions, they explore interpretations, share insights, and ask critical questions, enhancing their reflective thinking. This process teaches them to think deeply and consider various aspects when analyzing information, an essential skill for developing critical and analytical thinking (Harjito, Maharani, dan Septiana, 2015).

### 3.3 Social Skills and Leadership

The Student Organization of Pondok Modern Darul Ma'rifat (OPPMMDM) helps santri develop social and leadership skills by involving them in managing various activities within the pesantren. Through teamwork, responsibility, and problem-solving tasks, santri learn to work together, manage conflicts, and collaborate with peers from diverse backgrounds. This experience fosters leadership, tolerance, and cooperation, which are essential for their future social interactions.

In addition to involvement in the Student Organization (OPPMMDM), the development of social and leadership skills at Pesantren Darul Ma'rifat is also strengthened through a mentoring program. Senior students mentor junior students, helping them adjust to daily routines and academic tasks. This interaction fosters responsibility, empathy, and patience in senior students, while providing juniors with role models to guide them through their pesantren life. The mentoring program enhances communication skills, promoting active listening, clear guidance, and emotional support, while building solidarity, respect, and unity among the students.

In addition to the mentoring program, extracurricular activities managed by OPPMDM, such as public speaking training, scouting, and community service, play a key role in developing students' social and leadership skills. Public speaking exercises, for example, help students build confidence in speaking in front of an audience, organizing their thoughts, and delivering persuasive and effective messages (Sari, Meryati, dan Yetri, 2024). Scouting activities enhance teamwork, organizational skills, and group management through outdoor activities requiring coordination and collective decision-making (Nabila Farhana, Rizki, Badrus, & Tiara, 2024). Additionally, routine community service teaches students the importance of cooperation and contributing to the shared environment (Nainggolan et al., 2023). Through these activities, students not only learn leadership and social responsibility but also strengthen bonds with their peers, fostering a harmonious and supportive pesantren community.

### **3.4 Academic Skills**

The academic curriculum at Pesantren Darul Ma'rifat combines religious studies with formal subjects to foster intellectual development. Quranic studies, hadith, Arabic, and other disciplines are taught alongside a life skills approach that promotes independent learning and critical thinking. Students are trained in problem-solving through religious studies, such as fiqh, which encourages flexible and open thinking. This curriculum prepares students not only in religious knowledge but also equips them with relevant skills for their educational and professional futures.

In addition to Quranic studies, hadith, and Arabic, the academic curriculum at Pesantren Darul Ma'rifat also includes general subjects such as mathematics, science, and technology, integrated within the context of Islamic education. These subjects aim to provide students with fundamental knowledge useful in daily life and professional settings. By studying both religious and general sciences, students are encouraged to develop a holistic mindset that combines religious values with scientific rationality. This approach fosters the understanding that religious knowledge and general science are complementary, not conflicting, and together help achieve broader life goals (Fatimah dan Sumarni, 2024). For instance, in science classes, students reflect on the wonders of creation as evidence of Allah's greatness, which also deepens their love for knowledge.

Pesantren Darul Ma'rifat emphasizes independence and personal responsibility in learning. Teachers encourage students to plan their study schedules, explore topics in-depth independently, and report their progress regularly. This

approach aims to develop students' time management and resourcefulness, key components of life skills. For example, in tafsir studies, students are tasked with researching additional references from classical texts and presenting their findings to peers (Ismaraidha, Harahap, & Hannum, 2024). This not only deepens their understanding of tafsir but also hones presentation and argumentation skills, which are valuable in higher education and the professional world. Through this method, the pesantren equips students with academic skills and self-management abilities to face future intellectual and professional challenges (Rachman dan Komariah, 2020).

### **3.5 Vocational Skills**

Pesantren Darul Ma'rifat integrates vocational skills into its life skills education to foster students' independence. Through entrepreneurship activities, students learn to manage small businesses, from production to marketing. For example, they are trained to produce and sell snacks within the community, gaining practical experience in business management. Additionally, pencak silat training helps develop students' physical and mental resilience, teaching discipline, patience, and respect for hard work. Observations indicate that pencak silat strengthens students' physical health and boosts their self-confidence and courage. These vocational skills equip students to live independently and contribute productively to society after graduation.

Besides entrepreneurial activities and martial arts training, Pesantren Darul Ma'rifat also teaches other technical skills, such as farming and basic workshop skills, aimed at providing a broader practical understanding for the students. The farming activities, for example, involve students in planting vegetables and managing land within the pesantren grounds. Through this activity, students are taught basic agricultural techniques and the responsibility of caring for plants, fostering an appreciation for the environment and the ability to produce their own food. On the other hand, workshop skills train students to familiarize themselves with basic tools and simple techniques for repairing everyday items, which is useful for their independence in maintaining personal belongings and pesantren facilities. With these additional skills, students are equipped with a more comprehensive practical foundation, preparing them to become independent individuals capable of adapting to various life conditions in society (Aliyyah dan Rahmah, 2017).

These findings indicate that Pesantren Modern Darul Ma'rifat has successfully implemented life skills education through a structured and holistic approach. The daily activities of the students are designed to sharpen essential life skills, which not only support character development but also prepare them for broader roles in

society. This pesantren demonstrates that Islamic education can be integrated with life skills education, shaping students into individuals ready to face the challenges of globalization with a strong foundation of religious values.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Pesantren Modern Darul Ma'rifat has successfully integrated life skills education into its curriculum, covering spiritual, academic, social, critical thinking, and vocational aspects. Through routines like communal prayers and Quranic recitations, students are instilled with discipline, self-awareness, and responsibility. Activities such as bahtsul masa'il and kitab studies enhance critical thinking, while the student organization (OPPMDM) and mentoring program develop social and leadership skills, fostering cooperation and conflict management. This holistic approach prepares students to interact effectively and ethically in society.

Additionally, the combination of religious studies and general sciences in the academic curriculum supports students' intellectual growth, proving that religious and modern sciences can complement each other. Vocational training in entrepreneurship, agriculture, martial arts, and basic workshop skills equips students with practical skills for independent and productive lives. Pesantren Darul Ma'rifat offers an adaptive model of Islamic education, where life skills and religious values combine to produce students who are devout, independent, and competitive in society.

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