

LEARNING FROM EGYPT: An '*Ulamâ*' Regeneration Initiative at MA Al-Azhar Asy-Syarif, North Sumatra

Dedi Sahputra Napitupulu

Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Tarbiyah Al-Ittihadiyah Labuhanbatu Utara
Jl. Lintas Sumatera, Gunting Saga, Kab. Labuhanbatu Utara, Sumatera Utara 21457, Indonesia
e-mail: dedisahputra_napitupulu@stit-al-ittihadiyahlabura.ac.id

Ahmad Asrin

Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Negeri Mandailing Natal
Jl. Prof. Dr. Andi Hakim Nst Kabupaten Mandailing Natal, Sumatera Utara 22977, Indonesia
e-mail: ahmadasrin@stain-madina.ac.id

Abstract: The shortage of qualified '*ulamâ*' in Indonesia remains a serious concern. This study examines the ulama regeneration initiative at MA Al-Azhar Asy-Syarif, which integrates the National, Cambridge, and Azhari curriculums. Using a qualitative design, data were collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis involving institutional leaders and curriculum managers. The findings show that curriculum planning is conducted collaboratively with academic validation from Al-Azhar University, producing a design that balances textual and rational sciences within the moderation paradigm. Implementation involves the use of classical texts, intensive language reinforcement, study circle activities, and a text-based learning model while responding to contemporary needs. Evaluation is carried out through continuous monitoring to maintain alignment with learning objectives and competency standards. The study demonstrates that the model offers strategic potential for strengthening '*ulamâ*' regeneration in Indonesia. These findings contribute to curriculum management theory in Islamic education and provide practical insights for institutions engaged in developing future '*ulamâ*'.

Keywords: Regeneration, '*Ulamâ*', *madrasah*, Azhari Curriculum

Corresponding Author	Dedi Sahputra Napitupulu			
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Introduction

Over the past several decades, the Indonesian Muslim community has confronted an increasingly urgent challenge: a profound scarcity of qualified '*ulamâ'*' (Islamic scholars). Nevertheless, to this day there remains no clear measure of the shortage of ulama nor any established benchmark for determining its ideal ratio, this concern is not merely a contemporary observation; it has been sounded as an alarm by numerous experts and religious leaders for years. As early as 1984, Ali Hasyimi penned a provocative piece in *Majalah Panji Masyarakat* titled "Ulama Are Becoming Increasingly Scarce," highlighting what was already becoming apparent to careful observers.¹ The decline is unmistakable: religious authorities with deep scholarly expertise, exemplary moral character, and the capacity to navigate complex contemporary challenges are becoming harder to find. Traditional pesantren (Islamic boarding schools), once the primary incubators of Islamic scholarship, are producing fewer '*ulamâ'*' even as society's appetite for authoritative religious guidance intensifies. This widening gap poses a fundamental crisis, as '*ulamâ'*' serve not only as guardians of Islamic orthodoxy² and moral stewards of the *ummah*³ but also as pivotal actors in shaping social, economic,⁴ and political⁵ transformation.

The landscape of Islamic education has simultaneously undergone a dramatic reorientation. Contemporary Islamic educational institutions increasingly prioritize general academic credentials and professional career preparation over the cultivation of religious scholars. Programs specifically designed to nurture '*ulamâ'*' cadres have become scarce. While some traditional pesantren maintain their commitment to this mission, they represent a dwindling minority, and many lack the international networks necessary to ensure competitive graduate outcomes. This marks a departure from historical precedent. As Azra has documented, *pesantren*

traditionally functioned as vital spaces for ulama cadre development.⁶ The result is a regeneration crisis that manifests as sluggish progress, stagnation, or in certain regions, virtual abandonment of ulama cultivation altogether.

The challenges confronting '*ulamâ*' cadre development in Indonesia are multifaceted and deeply rooted. Firstly, younger generations exhibit declining interest in pursuing ulama careers, largely due to perceived economic limitations. The '*ulamâ*' profession, when measured against modern professional alternatives, appears to offer neither prestige nor financial security. This perception creates significant recruitment obstacles for institutions seeking to attract high-caliber candidates. Isnanto's research reveals that societal pragmatism further compounds this issue: communities and families increasingly favor enrollment in elite general schools over institutions oriented toward producing religious scholars.⁷

Secondly, pedagogical approaches in many '*ulamâ*' training institutions remain anchored in traditional methodologies that struggle to engage with global intellectual currents. Curricula frequently emphasize rote memorization of classical texts while neglecting critical analysis, contemporary contextualization, and integration with modern knowledge systems. Consequently, graduates often find themselves intellectually unprepared to address the complex religious questions arising in contemporary contexts. The quality of circulated Islamic information becomes questionable and in need of serious repair.⁸ Third, inadequate institutional resources present formidable obstacles. Many programs suffer from limited access to essential classical reference works (*turâts*) and a shortage of highly qualified instructors. The absence of clearly defined competency standards for '*ulamâ*' further exacerbates these regeneration challenges.

Addressing this crisis demands a fundamental restructuring of ulama cadre development through formal educational pathways.

Institutions committed to producing religious scholars must offer curricula that are systematic, rigorously structured, and designed to cultivate both profound Islamic knowledge and strong character formation aligned with ulama traditions. The Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) has already initiated various cadre development programs across multiple sites, ranging from short courses to formal degree-granting institutions such as the Higher Education Institution for Ulama Cadres (PTKU), which MUI North Sumatra established in 1991.⁹

Formal institutional frameworks offer particular advantages for measurable '*ulamâ*' development. Consider, for instance, the revitalization of *pesantren* '*ulamâ*' traditions through advanced Islamic higher education (*Ma'had 'Aly*). These institutions now offer comprehensive degree programs from undergraduate through doctoral levels that rival conventional universities in academic rigor.¹⁰ The recent proliferation of *Ma'had 'Aly* institutions signal renewed momentum in ulama cultivation. Current Ministry of Religious Affairs data documents 91 *Ma'had 'Aly* institutions operating nationwide.

Islamic mass organizations also bear significant responsibility in this endeavor. These organizations have dual obligations regarding ulama regeneration: first, they inherit the legacy of the ulama who established them; second, they already operate educational institutions with distinctive institutional identities. The logical step involves integrating ulama cadre programs into their existing educational infrastructure. Through effective curriculum management, these institutions can ensure quality learning processes, conduct ongoing assessment, and guarantee that graduates meet established '*ulamâ*' competency standards. This becomes crucial to producing '*ulamâ*' that are not merely knowledgeable but genuinely capable of addressing the needs of modern Muslim communities.

Recognizing both the ulama scarcity phenomenon and the complexities of cadre development, Madrasah Aliyah (MA) Al-Azhar Asy-Syarif North Sumatra emerges as an institutional response to these challenges. Drawing upon the prestigious heritage of Al-Azhar University in Cairo, this institution has established an International Superior Class (*Kelas Unggul Internasional*, or KUI) in Religion, expressly designed to cultivate future ulama. The Religious KUI at MA Al-Azhar Asy-Syarif pursues an ambitious integrative approach, combining the National Curriculum (Ministry of Education), the Cambridge International Curriculum, and the Azhari Curriculum from Al-Azhar Egypt. This tripartite framework equips students not only with mastery of classical Islamic sciences but also with proficiency in Arabic and English alongside global intellectual perspectives. The objective is to produce ulama who are authoritative in religious knowledge, moderate in orientation, and responsive to contemporary societal needs.

Preliminary observations at MA Al-Azhar Asy-Syarif North Sumatra reveal a carefully architected curriculum structure. The learning program encompasses *halaqah* (study circles) focused on classical Islamic texts (*turâts*), intensive Qur'anic memorization, and Arabic-language religious discourse training. Supporting infrastructure includes residential facilities, language laboratories, and mentorship from experienced teachers with educational credentials from Middle Eastern institutions. However, fieldwork also uncovers persistent challenges. A shortage of instructors with genuine mastery of classical texts at international standards remains a significant constraint. Additionally, student adaptation to intensive learning demands requires careful pedagogical attention. These observations warrant systematic scholarly investigation to optimize Religious KUI curriculum management.

Previous scholarship underscores the critical role of formal educational institutions in ulama cadre development. Isnanto's

research demonstrates that Muhammadiyah has institutionally acknowledged the ulama shortage by establishing programs such as the Muhammadiyah Tarjih Ulama Education (PUTM) at both Muhammadiyah University of Yogyakarta (UMY) and Ahmad Dahlan University (UAD).¹¹ Isnanto further documents Muhammadiyah's efforts to strengthen pesantren under its administration and develop Muhammadiyah Boarding School Pesantren (PP. MBS) networks. Palahuddin's research identifies three strategic Muhammadiyah initiatives addressing the ulama deficit: establishing PUTM, revitalizing pesantren, and building partnerships with the Asia Muslim Charity Foundation (AMCF).¹²

Darwis's research identifies three formal models of '*ulamâ*' cadre development in Indonesia.¹³ First, Islamic Religious Higher Education Institutions (PTKI) provides students with comprehensive Islamic studies training. Second, *pesantren* particularly traditional institutions maintaining classical text (*kitab kuning*) instruction through *halaqah* methodologies continue their historical function. Third, the national MUI has pioneered Ulama Cadre Education (PKU) programs that, since 1985, have worked to balance academic rigor with deep Islamic learning.

Higher education institutions possess considerable potential for ulama cadre development through curricula emphasizing classical text study and *halaqah* learning systems that demand genuine expertise in Islamic knowledge (*tafaqquh fî al-dîn*). In this context, the PTKU initiated by MUI North Sumatra and the Ulama Cadre Education (PKU) program at Al-Washliyah University (UNIVA) Medan demonstrate how universities can effectively cultivate religious scholars.¹⁴ Similar initiatives have emerged at the Faculty of Ushuluddin, Adab, and Da'wah at IAIN Palangkaraya, particularly in the Qur'anic Sciences and Tafsir Study Program, operating in partnership with MUI Central Kalimantan.¹⁵

At the Madrasah Aliyah level, ulama cadre development has also gained traction, as exemplified by MAN 4 Jombang. This institution articulates its commitment through an institutional vision captured in the motto: “Producing Scholarly Ulama and Ulama Scholars.” The curriculum reflects this vision through materials encompassing classical texts, foreign languages (Arabic and English), Qur’anic and Hadith memorization, and self-development activities including literacy, IT-based soft skills, *bahts al-Masâ’il* (problem-based discussions), talk shows, *muhâdharah* (public speaking practice), *dibâ’iyyah*, Friday sermons, and community service. Pedagogical methods integrate the scientific approach with traditional techniques including *sorogan*, *bandongan*, *maknani*, *syâwir*, *ilqâ’ mufradât*, *talaqqî*, *murâja’ah*, and *ziyâdah*.¹⁶

These research findings collectively indicate that effective ulama cadre development requires specialized Islamic curricula grounded in classical texts while simultaneously incorporating 21st century skills particularly academic competencies and international perspectives demonstrated through Arabic and English proficiency. Al-Azhar Asy-Syarif North Sumatra’s establishment represents a significant contribution to Indonesia’s ulama regeneration landscape. The development of its Azhari curriculum offers valuable insights that can strengthen scholarly literature on Indonesian ‘*ulamâ*’ cultivation. This study aims to contribute both theoretically to Islamic education curriculum management scholarship and practically to the sustainability of ulama regeneration in North Sumatra and Indonesia more broadly. Specifically, this article examines ulama cadre curriculum management at MA Al-Azhar Asy-Syarif North Sumatra across four dimensions: planning, implementation, evaluation, and implications for ulama regeneration programs.

Method

This qualitative field research employed an interpretive approach to comprehensively understand curriculum management implementation within the International Superior Class (KUI) Religion program at MA Al-Azhar Asy-Syarif North Sumatra. The data collection utilized multiple methods: in-depth interviews with key institutional leaders, direct classroom and institutional observations conducted non-participantly in religious subjects based on the Al-Azhar curriculum, and systematic analysis of curriculum documentation and internal policy materials. The research engaged three principal informants: the Director of Al-Azhar Asy-Syarif North Sumatra, the MA Principal, and the Azhari Curriculum Coordinator individuals possessing strategic authority and intimate knowledge of the program's design and operation. This investigation specifically examined how Religious KUI curriculum management functioned as a strategic mechanism for ulama regeneration. Following the analytical framework developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, the research employed a three-stage process: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification.¹⁷

Results and Discussion

Religious KUI Curriculum Planning

The International Superior Class (KUI) in Religion represents a distinctive program within Madrasah Aliyah (MA) Al-Azhar Asy-Syarif North Sumatra, conceived from its inception to concentrate on developing mastery in Islamic religious disciplines, with the explicit goal of producing future ulama. This mission aligns seamlessly with the institution's overarching vision: "Forming Muslim Intellectuals Who Remain Steadfast upon the Qur'an and Sunnah." This vision statement reflects an ambitious dual

objective: graduates should possess not only intellectual sophistication but also profound spiritual grounding. The formulation resonates with Naquib Al-Attas's influential argument that authentic Islamic education aims beyond producing merely "good people" or "good citizens" it aspires to cultivate believers characterized by both knowledge and piety.¹⁸ Azra articulates this synthesis more concisely, identifying the paramount goal of Islamic education as producing Muslims who are simultaneously intellectually accomplished and spiritually refined.¹⁹ Other scholars have also contributed to the topic; generally agreeing on the basic ideas.²⁰ From this perspective, MA Al-Azhar Asy-Syarif North Sumatra's institutional vision represents a faithful embodiment of classical Islamic educational ideals.

Beyond the Religious KUI, the institution has pioneered knowledge integration across multiple tracks, including the Social Studies KUI and the Medical Superior Class (KUK). The pedagogical rationale underlying this approach rests on a sophisticated curricular architecture incorporating three distinct frameworks: (1) the National Curriculum (Independent Learning framework), (2) the Cambridge International Curriculum, and (3) the Al-Azhar Egypt (*Azhari*) Curriculum. This curricular diversity necessarily influences teaching methodologies, teacher competency requirements, learning objectives, and ultimately, graduate educational trajectories.

The *Azhari* curriculum planning process at MA Al-Azhar Asy-Syarif North Sumatra exemplifies collaborative institutional development. Curriculum design emerged through extensive stakeholder consultations involving ulama and expert Islamic teachers (*ustâdz*). The madrasah administration proposed the *Azhari* curriculum framework and simultaneously engaged Al-Azhar Egypt alumni in substantive discussions regarding appropriate classical reference texts. Meanwhile, the foundation leadership

notably the General Chairman of MUI North Sumatra provided strategic direction on contemporary societal needs for Islamic scholarship. As the MA Principal explained:

“The Azhari curriculum, implemented at MA Al-Azhar Asy-Syarif North Sumatra beginning in 2022, specifically targets religious major students. We adopted this approach because these students are being prepared for university study at Al-Azhar in Egypt. Curriculum determination and design come directly from Al-Azhar Cairo, which we implement comprehensively to ensure our students possess the requisite preparation for continuing their education in Egypt” (Interview with MR).

This planning approach reveals a highly strategic institutional orientation. By adopting curriculum standards established directly by Al-Azhar Cairo, the institution ensures student competencies align precisely with academic requirements students will encounter in Egypt. From a curriculum planning perspective, this practice demonstrates the critical importance of alignment across institutional vision, student needs, and requirements of destination institutions for advanced study. Consequently, curriculum planning transcends mere administrative procedure, becoming visionary and adaptive integrating Al-Azhar’s global standards within local institutional contexts to ensure students achieve both academic and competency readiness for advanced study in Egypt.

The collaborative nature of *Azhari* curriculum planning becomes evident through the Azhari Curriculum Coordinator’s account:

“The Azhari curriculum at Al-Azhar Asy-Syarif North Sumatra was designed directly by the *Al-Lajnah I’dâd wa Tamwîr Manâhij* (Curriculum Preparation and Development Committee) of Al-Azhar Asy-Syarif Egypt. This committee comprises distinguished ulama and Islamic education specialists from Al-Azhar Egypt.

The curriculum design reflects a commitment to presenting *Manhaj al-Azhari* (the Azhar methodology) that emphasizes equilibrium between *naqli* knowledge (transmitted textual knowledge) and *‘aqli* knowledge (rational inquiry), while remaining contextualized for Indonesian educational realities. The curriculum foundation rests upon three pillars: (1) preserving Al-Azhar’s authenticated scholarly values and moderate orientation (*wasâthiyyah*), (2) integrating religious and general knowledge, and (3) cultivating student character and comportment as prospective ulama and Muslim intellectuals. Additionally, the curriculum grounds students firmly in Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah creed, Shafi’i jurisprudence, and Sufi spirituality” (Interview with AYH).

This account reveals that Azhari curriculum planning at MA Al-Azhar Asy-Syarif North Sumatra possesses robust academic and spiritual legitimacy, deriving directly from Al-Azhar Asy-Syarif Egypt’s official curriculum development body. Significantly, the curriculum represents not a localized adaptation but rather an authentic extension of the Al-Azhar knowledge tradition with direct continuity to the Egyptian institution. From a planning perspective, this indicates a predominantly top-down design process that nevertheless requires thoughtful local implementation. Middlewood and Burton observe that while curricula may be centrally designed whether by governments or other authorities successful implementation depends fundamentally on institution-level adaptation.²¹ Similarly, Aldridge and McLure note that *top-down* policies require explicit implementation planning to achieve meaningful school-level adaptation.²² The MA Al-Azhar case demonstrates how Al-Azhar’s knowledge paradigm can be successfully transferred and internalized within Indonesian educational contexts.

The curriculum’s deliberate emphasis on balancing *naqli* and *‘aqli* knowledge exemplifies the distinctive *manhaj al-Azhari*

approach, which harmonizes spiritual depth with rational inquiry. In curriculum planning terms, this balance reflects integrative principles where learning design aims not merely at intellectual development but equally at moral formation and religious moderation.²³ This pedagogical philosophy aligns with Islamic curriculum theory that positions values and ethics as foundational dimensions alongside cognitive objectives. Thus, Azhari curriculum planning at MA Al-Azhar Asy-Syarif translates Al-Azhar's universal values into a national curriculum framework oriented toward character development and knowledge integration.

Furthermore, the curriculum's explicit grounding in Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah theology, Shafi'i jurisprudence, and Sufi spirituality coupled with *wasâthiyyah* (moderation) as methodological framework establishes clear ideological foundations. The three stated pillars (preserving authenticated scholarship, integrating religious and general knowledge, and forming student character) indicate holistic planning that encompasses intellectual, spiritual, and ethical dimensions. Regarding Azhari curriculum planning at MA Al-Azhar Asy-Syarif North Sumatra, this underscores that curriculum development operates not merely at administrative or technical levels but fundamentally at ideological and philosophical levels.²⁴ In essence, the curriculum seeks to produce '*ulamâ*'-intellectuals capable of rigorous critical thinking while remaining rooted in authentic Islamic spiritual and scholarly traditions.

Religious KUI Curriculum Implementation

The curricular structure of the International Superior Class (KUI) Religion program at MA Al-Azhar Asy-Syarif reflects a learning design oriented toward *tafaqquh fi al-dîn* (deep understanding of religion) through comprehensive and systematic religious knowledge cultivation. Analysis of the subject offerings and assigned texts reveals that this curriculum extends beyond normative instruction

to embrace classical Islamic scholarly traditions as practiced at Al-Azhar Egypt, the preeminent reference institution for Islamic learning. The incorporation of classical Islamic texts (*turâts*) demonstrates the program's commitment to developing robust text-based critical thinking (*text-based learning*) while maintaining scholarly authentication chains (*sanad*). This curricular approach aligns with KUI's vision as an integrative model synthesizing international Islamic educational systems with the imperative to form ulama possessing contemporary analytical capabilities.

The following table details the subjects supporting future ulama knowledge development at MA Al-Azhar Asy-Syarif North Sumatra.

Table 1.1: Azhari Curriculum for Religious KUI at Al-Azhar Asy-Syarif North Sumatra

No	Subject	Grade X	Grade XI	Grade XII
1	Aqidah or Tauhid	<i>Syarh Jawharat at-Tauhid</i> , vol. I	<i>Syarh Jawharat at-Tauhid</i> , vol. II	<i>Syarh Jawharat at-Tauhid</i> , vol. III
		<i>Fath al-Majid Syarh ad-Durr al-Farid</i>	-	-
2	Akhlaq	<i>Washâyâ al-Âbâ' li al-Abnâ'</i>	<i>Ta'lim al-Muta'allim</i>	<i>Ta'lim al-Muta'allim</i>
3	Fiqh	<i>Syarh al-Ghâyah wa at-Taqrîb</i>	<i>Syarh al-Bâjûrî</i>	<i>al-Iqnâ'</i>
		<i>al-Iqnâ'</i>	<i>al-Iqnâ'</i>	
4	Ushul Fiqh	<i>Syarh al-Waraqât</i>	<i>Syarh al-Waraqât</i>	<i>Syarh al-Waraqât</i>
5	Tafsir	<i>Tafsîr al-Jalâlain</i>	<i>Tafsîr an-Nasafi</i>	<i>Tafsîr an-Nasafi</i>
		<i>Tafsîr an-Nasafi</i>		
6	Hadis	<i>Hâsiyah alâ Mukhtashar Abî Jamrah</i>	<i>Fath al-Mubdi'</i>	<i>Fath al-Mubdi'</i>
		<i>Fath al-Mubdi'</i>		

7	Tarikh	<i>Khulâshah Nûr al-Yaqîn</i>	<i>Târîkh al-Adab wa an-Nushûsh</i>	<i>Târîkh al-Adab wa an-Nushûsh</i>
		<i>Târîkh al-Adab wa an-Nushûsh</i>	-	-
8	Arabic Language	<i>al-Kâtib al-‘Arabî I</i>	<i>al-Kâtib al-‘Arabî II</i>	<i>al-Kâtib al-‘Arabî III</i>
9	Nahu	<i>Syarî al-Ajrûmiyyah</i>	<i>Syarî Ibn ‘Aqîl ‘alâ Alfiyyah Ibn Mâlik</i>	<i>Syarî Ibn ‘Aqîl ‘alâ Alfiyyah Ibn Mâlik</i>
		<i>Syarî Ibn ‘Aqîl ‘alâ Alfiyyah Ibn Mâlik</i>	-	-
10	Sharaf	<i>Matn al-Binâ’ wa al-Asâs al-Sharf al-Muyassar</i>	<i>al-Sharf al-Muyassar</i>	<i>al-Sharf al-Muyassar</i>
		-	-	-
11	Mantiq	-	<i>al-Sullam al-Munawwaraq</i>	-
12	Balaghah	<i>al-Balâghah al-‘Arabiyyah</i>	<i>al-Balâghah al-‘Arabiyyah</i>	<i>al-Balâghah al-‘Arabiyyah</i>
13	Faraidh or Mawaris	-	-	<i>al-Wajîz fî al-Mîrâts</i>

From the perspective of curricular comprehensiveness, this program design proves exceptionally thorough and well-suited for producing ulama candidates with holistic mastery of Islamic legal sciences. Core subjects—creed, jurisprudence (*fiqh*), legal theory (*Ushûl al-Fiqh*), Qur’anic exegesis (*tafsîr*), and *Hadîts* studies—progress systematically from foundational to analytical levels, reinforced by instrumental disciplines (*nahwu*, *sharf*, *balâghah*, *manthiq*) that provide essential foundations for textual interpretation. The inclusion of complementary subjects including Islamic history, ethics, and inheritance law demonstrates attention to historical consciousness, moral development, and practical legal applications. Consequently, this curriculum not only meets

minimal knowledge standards for prospective ulama but reflects a sophisticated balance between rational and transmitted knowledge ('*aqlî* and '*naqlî*'), encompassing cognitive, affective, and spiritual dimensions hallmarks of international-standard Islamic education grounded in Al-Azhar values.

Regarding pedagogical strategies, MA Al-Azhar Asy-Syarif North Sumatra implements an integrative approach combining classical learning methods (*halaqah*, *talaqqî*, *musyâfahah*) with contemporary active learning pedagogies. As one educator explained:

“Learning methods within the Azhari curriculum are deliberately integrative, combining modern and classical approaches proportionally. On the classical side, we preserve *halaqah*, *talaqqî*, and *musyâfahah* methods, where students read texts directly before their teacher, receive immediate corrections, and engage with textual meanings and contexts. These methods prove essential for maintaining scholarly authentication continuity. Simultaneously, we employ modern pedagogical approaches including active learning strategies, thematic discussions, scientific presentations, and project-based learning, enabling students to develop analytical, critical, and communicative capacities. Thus, Azhari learning at Al-Azhar Asy-Syarif North Sumatra extends beyond text mastery toward deep comprehension and real-world application” (Interview with AYH).

This pedagogical integration reflects thoughtful attention to both preserving Islamic scholarly traditions and addressing contemporary educational demands. Classical methods such as *halaqah*, *talaqqî*, and *musyâfahah* serve to maintain the authenticated knowledge transmission (*sanad*) that characterizes classical Islamic learning, where direct teacher-student relationships form the axis of knowledge transfer. The practice of reading before teachers with immediate correction cultivates not only linguistic precision and textual understanding but also proper scholarly comportment (*adab*) and respect for intellectual authority.²⁵ This illustrates

how spiritual and ethical formations remain foundational to learning processes at MA Al-Azhar Asy-Syarif North Sumatra.

Concurrently, modern pedagogical methods including active learning, thematic discussions, scientific presentations, and project-based learning respond directly to contemporary educational imperatives. These approaches actively engage students, cultivate critical thinking, and enable meaningful connections between religious knowledge and contemporary challenges. This pedagogical synthesis helps achieve equilibrium between deep textual comprehension and the analytical, communicative, and collaborative competencies essential in modern contexts.²⁶ Learning outcomes thus transcend mere memorization or textual understanding to encompass reflective and solution-oriented thinking capacities.

The integration of classical and modern methods embodies the Azhari curriculum's philosophical commitment to harmonizing *naqlîyah* (text-based and tradition-based knowledge) with *'aqlîyah* (rational and scientific inquiry). Within curriculum planning and implementation contexts at MA Al-Azhar Asy-Syarif North Sumatra, this integration demonstrates that educational objectives operate not solely at cognitive levels but equally at ideological and philosophical levels²⁷ forming students who are morally grounded, scientifically minded, and embrace *wasâthiyyah* (moderation). Through this pedagogical model, the Azhari curriculum both preserves Al-Azhar Egypt's scholarly heritage and adapts it to Indonesian national education requirements that demand integration of spirituality, intellectuality, and social relevance.

Consistent with this approach, the MA Principal noted that learning implementation integrates classical methods such as *halaqah* and *talaqqî* for classical texts and Qur'anic memorization with modern approaches utilizing digital technologies including iPads and laptops. This hybrid pattern exemplifies Religious KUI implementation that balances pesantren scholarly tradition

preservation with 21st century competency development.²⁸ Consequently, Religious KUI implementation not only facilitates deep Islamic sciences mastery but simultaneously enhances student digital literacy and technological proficiency:

“Learning methods at MA Al-Azhar Asy-Syarif North Sumatra combine classical and contemporary approaches. Students continue engaging in *halaqah* for certain subjects, particularly classical texts, while also benefiting from modern learning methods incorporating digital media such as iPads and computers. Qur’anic memorization similarly employs the *talaqqî* method” (Interview with MR).

Arabic serves as the predominant instructional language throughout the learning process at MA Al-Azhar Asy-Syarif North Sumatra, consistent with Azhari curriculum characteristics rooted in classical Islamic texts (*turâts*) and traditional Islamic scholarship. Arabic functions not merely as a communication medium but as a vehicle for internalizing values, methodological thinking, and authentic Islamic scholarly traditions. For selected subjects particularly those engaging modern sciences or global studies English supplements instruction to broaden student perspectives and facilitate engagement with international scholarly literature. This bilingual approach yields significant positive implications for ulama regeneration curriculum implementation,²⁹ simultaneously cultivating deep religious textual comprehension and developing communicative competencies essential for navigating global challenges. This language policy thus strengthens religious knowledge mastery while preparing prospective ulama with expansive perspectives capable of contributing to international scholarly conversations.

‘*Ulamâ*’ character formation proceeds integratively through worship habituation, moral strengthening, and direct community engagement through preaching (*da‘wah*) programs.³⁰ Students develop disciplined worship practices encompassing obligatory

and recommended acts, including congregational prayers, Qur'anic recitation, and night prayers (*qiyâm al-Lail*) that cultivate spiritual consciousness and submission to Allah. Moral development occurs through teacher modeling, cultivation of proper learning comportment (*adab*), and disciplinary practices that instill humility (*tawâdhu*), responsibility, and Islamic fraternity (*ukhuwwah islâmiyyah*). Meanwhile, preaching and community service activities provide practical contexts for students to develop communication skills and religious leadership capacities within their social environments; one notable program is "Mayasa Goes to Masjid." These activities constitute integral components of 'ulamâ' regeneration curriculum implementation, emphasizing not merely scholarly knowledge but holistic formation of knowledgeable, action-oriented, morally exemplary 'ulamâ'.

Infrastructure and facility availability constitutes a critical factor supporting optimal curriculum implementation,³¹ particularly for ulama cultivation curricula. The institution maintains extensive collections of classical texts (*turâts*) serving as primary references for religious sciences instruction, enabling students to engage directly with authoritative sources consistent with Al-Azhar scholarly traditions. Additionally, digital resources and online learning platforms enable students to bridge classical scholarship with contemporary discourse, expanding their intellectual horizons within modern contexts. Combined with comfortable, conducive residential facilities, the knowledge and character development process proceeds continuously, integrating formal learning activities with daily life practices. This comprehensive facility infrastructure demonstrates that MA Al-Azhar Asy-Syarif North Sumatra's curriculum management has established a holistic educational environment supporting both ulama curriculum implementation and ulama regeneration processes.

Religious KUI Curriculum Evaluation

The evaluation system within the International Superior Class (KUI) Religion Curriculum at MA Al-Azhar Asy-Syarif North Sumatra constitutes a vital component reflecting the program's comprehensive implementation quality and direction. Evaluation functions extend beyond academic achievement measurement to encompass character formation³² and scholarly integrity development among prospective ulama. Within Al-Azhar-based Islamic education contexts, assessment systems are designed to evaluate equilibrium across intellectual capacity for understanding religious texts, spiritual depth in practicing Islamic teachings, and practical and communicative competencies required in contemporary contexts. Examining this evaluation system becomes essential for assessing how effectively the Religious KUI curriculum integrates cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions within a coherent framework aligned with international-standard Islamic education excellence.

The assessment approach encompasses multiple dimensions, as the Azhari Curriculum Coordinator explained:

“The evaluation system is comprehensively designed to assess student's cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions. Evaluation forms include: (1) Written Examinations (*tahrîrî*): Students demonstrate their capacity to read, comprehend, and explain classical text contents appropriate to their level through multiple-choice and essay formats covering dictation (*imlâ'*) and composition (*insyâ'*). (2) Qur'anic Memorization Assessment (*tahfîzh*): Our memorization evaluation employs two mechanisms: *Jilsah Itqân*, requiring students to recite six Juz or more in a single sitting, and *tasmî'*, testing memorization retention. (3) Oral Examinations (*syafawî*): Students are assessed across four Arabic language competencies (*istimâ'* or listening, *kalâm* or

speaking, *qirâ'ah* or reading, *kitâbah* or writing) to verify both active and passive Arabic proficiency, including oral *Hadîts* memorization assessment” (Interview with AYH).

This multifaceted evaluation framework demonstrates careful attention to the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor objectives central to Islamic education. The *tahrîrî* (written) examination measures students' intellectual capacity for comprehending classical texts, interpreting textual meanings, and constructing scholarly arguments in written form. This assessment reflects curriculum orientation emphasizing *tafaqquh fî al-dîn* (religious knowledge deepening) grounded in classical textual engagement, consistent with Al-Azhar educational traditions. Consequently, this assessment system evaluates not merely learning outcomes but critical thinking processes, linguistic command, and expressive capacities.

The *tahfîzh* (memorization) assessment, encompassing both *Jilsah Itqân* and *tasmî'*, evaluates Qur'anic memorization while simultaneously assessing consistency, discipline, and depth of student Qur'anic engagement. This evaluation form affirms that Religious KUI curriculum pursues objectives beyond academic achievement, cultivating spiritual dimensions and ulama ethics. Within curriculum evaluation contexts, this demonstrates careful balance between knowledge and practice, between memorization and comprehension,³³ distinctive characteristics of Al-Azhar values-based curricula. Affective dimensions including sincerity, diligence, and commitment to memorization maintenance serve as important learning success indicators.

The *syafawî* (oral) examination assessing four Arabic language competencies (*istimâ', kalâm, qirâ'ah, kitâbah*) demonstrates attention to student communicative competencies within global contexts. This evaluation aligns with Religious KUI curriculum development emphasizing active Arabic proficiency as both a

vehicle for textual understanding and a medium for scholarly dialogue within international contexts.³⁴ Through these three complementary evaluation forms, MA Al-Azhar Asy-Syarif North Sumatra's assessment system achieves authentic evaluation principles in Islamic education: holistically assessing knowledge, attitudes, and skills. This indicates Religious KUI curriculum relevance not only for forming ulama with deep textual comprehension but also for responding to 21st century competency requirements.

These findings align with the MA Principal's description of comprehensive evaluation implementation through written, oral, and practical daily assessments reflecting authentic competency assessment. Classical text evaluation occurs through direct reading before teachers, enabling real-time correction and meaning clarification, while Qur'anic proficiency assessment employs *tasmi'* and *Jilsah Itqân* programs requiring reading accuracy in single sittings. The ambitious target of six Juz memorization combined with comprehensive Arabic assessment encompassing grammar (*nahwu*), morphology (*sharf*), and rhetoric (*balâghah*) demonstrates rigorous, high-standard evaluation structures. Within Azhari Religious KUI curriculum contexts, this evaluation system exemplifies quality-oriented assessment models evaluating not merely outcomes but learning processes,³⁵ core religious competency precision, and alignment with Al-Azhar international standards, ensuring objective and consistent graduate quality measurement.

Below are the results of the author's interview with the head of MA Al-Azhar Asy-Syarif North Sumatra:

"The evaluation system operates through comprehensive examinations written, oral, and daily practice assessments. For classical texts, teachers conduct learning through students reading before them, with immediate error correction and meaning explanation. For Qur'anic memorization, MA Al-Azhar Asy-Syarif maintains *tasmi'* programs and full *Jilsah Itqân* completion

in single sittings. Religious major students target six Juz memorization. Arabic, a compulsory subject for religious majors, encompasses multiple components including grammar, morphology, rhetoric, and related disciplines” (Interview with MR).

Continuous monitoring of discipline, responsibility, and preaching capacity forms an inseparable component of Religious KUI curriculum evaluation. This supervision extends beyond academic assessment to encompass ulama character formation reflected in daily student behavior. Discipline monitoring tracks worship punctuality, learning activity attendance, and regulatory compliance. Student responsibility assessment evaluates commitment to maintaining trust, completing collaborative assignments, and consistency in social and religious activities. Meanwhile, preaching capacity evaluation occurs through active involvement in sermons, Friday addresses, and community development activities integral to service curricula. These three dimensions serve as crucial indicators for assessing Religious KUI curriculum implementation effectiveness, reflecting institutional success in balancing intellectual achievement, moral development, and social competencies among students as prospective knowledgeable, morally upright ulama.

Supervision mechanisms within Religious KUI curriculum implementation at MA Al-Azhar Asy-Syarif North Sumatra operate through structured, layered monitoring systems. The Director functions as principal supervisor ensuring all academic and co-curricular activities align with ulama cultivation vision and Al-Azhar educational quality standards. The *madrasah* Principal bears responsibility for operational supervision, including teacher performance monitoring, learning schedule implementation oversight, and student discipline management. Additionally, intensive inter-institutional coordination involving foundations, teaching councils, and Al-Azhar Egypt partners maintains alignment

between local curriculum implementation and international standards. This supervision system functions not merely as administrative control but as teacher professionalism development and learning quality enhancement,³⁶ ensuring Religious KUI implementation remains consistently aligned with producing knowledgeable, morally exemplary, globally oriented *‘ulamâ*.

Evaluation follow-up within curriculum implementation proceeds systematically through two primary focal areas: teacher competency development and educational facility enhancement. Curriculum evaluation outcomes encompassing teaching-learning process assessment, student learning achievement, and pedagogical method effectiveness inform institutional decisions regarding teacher training and professional development workshops, particularly addressing Arabic language mastery, classical text pedagogical methodologies, and educational technology integration. Simultaneously, MA Al-Azhar Asy-Syarif North Sumatra pursues facility and infrastructure improvements including updated reference text acquisition, language laboratory optimization, and enhanced digital access supporting global scholarly literacy-based learning. These follow-up measures reflect management commitment to ensuring Religious KUI curriculum quality and relevance continues producing excellent ulama generations with international competitiveness.

4. Curriculum Management Implications for *‘ulamâ*’ Regeneration

Curriculum management assumes a pivotal role in determining both the direction and sustainability of *‘ulamâ*’ regeneration processes at MA Al-Azhar Asy-Syarif North Sumatra. As an institution adopting the Azhari curriculum model, curriculum management extends beyond religious content delivery to encompass scholarly tradition formation, spiritual cultivation,³⁷ and ethical development characteristic of Al-Azhar *‘ulamâ*’. Examining curriculum management implications thus becomes essential for understanding how learning planning, implementation, and

evaluation combine to form students who are not merely intellectually capable but morally and spiritually mature. Through systematic, sustained curriculum management, MA Al-Azhar Asy-Syarif aspires to produce young '*ulamâ*' generations possessing deep knowledge, noble character, and adaptive capacity for contemporary challenges while maintaining Islamic identity.

The Azhari Curriculum Coordinator provided valuable perspective on the curriculum's role:

"The Azhari curriculum implemented at Al-Azhar Asy-Syarif North Sumatra provides sufficient foundational grounding for students pursuing ulama paths. This curriculum equips students with religious sciences foundations, instrumental sciences (*nahwu, sharf, balâghah, ushûl al-fiqh*), and Al-Azhar's distinctive intellectual traditions. However, consistent with Al-Azhar educational tradition in Egypt, becoming authentic ulama requires *tazkiyah an-nafs* (spiritual purification), *mulâzamah* (sustained discipleship with teachers), and continuous scholarly journeys. In other words, this curriculum represents not a terminal degree but rather a robust foundation for producing young '*ulamâ*' generations who are knowledgeable, morally upright, and broadly minded, embodying Al-Azhar's spirit: *al-'Ilm wa al-akhlâq wa al-wasâthiyyah* (knowledge, morality, and moderation)" (Interview with AYH).

This perspective reveals that the Azhari curriculum implemented at MA Al-Azhar Asy-Syarif North Sumatra functions strategically as foundational infrastructure for ulama regeneration processes. From curriculum management perspectives, learning designs emphasizing religious legal sciences and instrumental sciences mastery represent sound decisions ensuring classical Islamic intellectual tradition continuity. This reflects curriculum planning operating not merely at academic achievement levels,³⁸ but functioning as cultivation systems for young ulama that understand scholarly methodologies and can interpret religious sources through moderate,

contextualized approaches. Thus, curriculum management fulfills its strategic function by preparing educational frameworks aligned with Al-Azhar '*ulamâ*' cultivation vision.

The same thing was also confirmed by the head of the MA Al-Azhar Asy-Syarif North Sumatra as per the results of the author's interview as below:

"The Azhari curriculum currently provides sufficient foundation for students as initial preparation for ulama paths, given the comprehensive religious content students study at MA Al-Azhar Asy-Syarif North Sumatra. Nevertheless, students require substantial additional religious knowledge to strengthen their development as prospective '*ulamâ*'" (Interview with MR).

Nevertheless, these interviews reveal that ulama regeneration cannot conclude at formal curriculum levels.³⁹ Non-academic dimensions including *tazkiyah an-nafs* (spiritual development) and *mulâzamah* (intensive teacher mentorship) require supporting attention. These dimensions demand managerial policies integrating formal learning processes with mentorship systems and moral value habituation alongside scholarly comportment cultivation. Curriculum management implications here underscore the importance of synergistically managing time, activities, and human resources to ensure ulama character formation proceeds in balance with knowledge acquisition.

Furthermore, these perspectives affirm that the Azhari Religious KUI curriculum functions as a launching point for continuous '*ulamâ*' regeneration processes rather than representing culminating achievement. In curriculum management terms, this necessitates developing continuation systems whether through alumni tracking mechanisms, scholarly networks, or partnerships with domestic and international Islamic higher education institutions ensuring ongoing graduate intellectual and spiritual development. Through dynamic, long-term oriented curriculum management,

MA Al-Azhar Asy-Syarif can function as a center of excellence producing young ulama with profound knowledge, exemplary character, and global perspectives embodying the spirit of *al-'Ilm wa al-akhlâq wa al-wasâthiyyah* inherited from Al-Azhar Egypt.

Religious KUI curriculum management implementation at MA Al-Azhar Asy-Syarif carries strategic implications for ulama regeneration. Structured curriculum management enables intensive Arabic and English competency cultivation as foundations for engaging global Islamic scholarship, alongside classical text mastery through integrated written, oral, and practical daily assessment.⁴⁰ This ensures students not only acquire classical text reading abilities but develop contextual understanding and critical engagement with historical '*ulamâ*' arguments within contemporary contexts. Additionally, pedagogical approaches encouraging dialogue, consultation (*musyawarah*), and critical textual analysis cultivate sharp analytical reasoning and sophisticated religious interpretation capacities. The synergy among language proficiency, classical text literacy, and critical thinking renders Religious KUI curriculum highly effective in preparing competent ulama generations capable of addressing contemporary religious intellectual challenges.

Subsequent implications emerge through graduate achievements, notably students successfully continuing education in the Middle East. The inaugural cohort achieved remarkable success, with five students gaining admission to Al-Azhar University in Egypt tangible evidence of effective language development and classical text mastery. This outcome represents excellent foundational preparation, as Azra documented in his dissertation regarding the necessity of Middle Eastern intellectual networks for classical ulama formation.⁴¹ Indeed other studies had also been made and came to the same conclusion.⁴² This success demonstrates the

curriculum's effectiveness in strengthening not only academic foundations but also mental and intellectual readiness for adapting to Middle Eastern scholarly traditions demanding diligence and textual precision. Simultaneously, alumni not pursuing international study have demonstrated readiness as effective community preachers through their capacities for delivering religious teachings that are argumentatively sound, moderate, and contextually relevant outcomes of critical thinking cultivation and classical literature engagement throughout their education. Thus, Religious KUI curriculum contributes directly to producing young ulama generations capable both of competing in international academic contexts and serving competently in social-religious community roles.

Beyond academic achievements and alumni readiness for Middle Eastern studies, Religious KUI's presence at MA Al-Azhar Asy-Syarif generates significant social impact as a center producing competent '*ulamâ*' cadres throughout North Sumatra. With curriculum emphasizing language mastery, classical text literacy, and critical reasoning,⁴³ KUI functions as a strategic space cultivating young intellectuals capable of addressing societal needs for moderate religious authorities with expansive perspectives and effective preaching skills. Graduates accepted at Al-Azhar Egypt and alumni actively engaged in regional preaching strengthen KUI's social legitimacy as an institution producing new ulama generations with qualified scholarly capacities and robust religious leadership character. More broadly, KUI's presence enriches North Sumatra's Islamic education ecosystem while potentially serving as a replicable model for sustainable ulama regeneration in other regions.

Looking toward long-term prospects, the Religious KUI curriculum management model at MA Al-Azhar Asy-Syarif North Sumatra possesses considerable potential as a prototype for Indonesian ulama regeneration educational institutions. The curriculum

design integrates classical scholarly traditions with modern managerial approaches ensuring sustained learning process quality. Success in producing graduates admitted to Al-Azhar Egypt alongside alumni prepared for effective preaching demonstrates this model's replicability potential for other madrasahs seeking to strengthen ulama education ecosystems adaptive to contemporary challenges. With clear management structures, comprehensive evaluation standards, and developmental orientations emphasizing language competencies, classical textual comprehension, and critical reasoning, KUI holds promise as a national reference point for building professional, globally minded ulama cultivation systems responsive to modern Muslim community needs.

Conclusion

The International Superior Class (KUI) Religion curriculum management at MA Al-Azhar Asy-Syarif North Sumatra represents a systematically designed educational model addressing ulama scarcity through integrating national, international, and Azhari curricula. Curriculum planning proceeds collaboratively with robust scholarly legitimacy from Al-Azhar Egypt, ensuring graduate competency standards align with both global academic requirements and classical Islamic scholarly traditions. Implementation emphasizes classical text study circles (*halaqah*), intensive Arabic and English language development, and character formation grounded in moderate Azhari methodology (*manhaj al-Azharî*). Nevertheless, this research identifies persistent challenges, including limited instructors with genuine mastery of classical texts meeting international standards and student adaptation requirements for intensive learning patterns. Religious KUI demonstrates strategic value for *'ulamâ'* regeneration while requiring strengthened implementation approaches.

To enhance ulama cadre development effectiveness, MA Al-Azhar Asy-Syarif should strengthen teacher quality through specialized training programs, enhanced networking with Middle Eastern alumni, and sustained partnerships with Middle Eastern scholarly institutions. Additionally, developing more rigorous evaluation standards becomes essential for monitoring student mastery of classical texts, Arabic proficiency, and Islamic knowledge methodologies. Expanding facility support including dormitories, language laboratories, and academic counseling services will help ensure intensive learning demands remain pedagogically supportive rather than burdensome. The novelty of this study lies in its identification of the KUI Religious Studies model as an integrated curriculum approach that effectively supports ulama regeneration, while also highlighting implementation aspects that have not been addressed in previous research. At macro levels, the Religious KUI model merits replication by other Islamic educational institutions, with appropriate contextual adaptations, enabling more equitable and sustainable ulama regeneration nationwide.

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