

***PESANTREN* TRADITIONS CONTINUED AND TRANSFORMED: Evidence from North Sumatra, Indonesia**

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Abstrak: This study examines the continuity and transformation of pesantren traditions through the alumni network of Pesantren Musthafawiyah through a qualitative case study approach. Data were collected through document analysis, interviews, and field observations in several *pesantrens* established by Musthafawiyah alumni. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns of transmission, reproduction, and adaptation of pesantren traditions within the alumni network. The findings reveal that the alumni network plays a crucial role in sustaining the Musthafawiyah educational traditions. Through the establishment of new *pesantrens*, alumni reproduce key elements of Musthafawiyah's educational system, including the study of classical Islamic texts, the authority of the *kiai*, and the moral formation of santri. At the same time, alumni-founded *pesantrens* make adaptations, such as the integration of formal schooling systems, curriculum development, and organizational modernization. As such, the continuity of *pesantren* traditions is embedded in the role of alumni networks as agents of social and educational reproductions. The findings contribute to the broader scholarship on Islamic education by highlighting how *pesantren* traditions persist and evolve beyond the Javanese context.

Keywords: Continuity, transformation, pesantren tradition, alumni network, musthafawiyah, Southern Tapanuli.

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Introduction

Pesantren or traditional Islamic boarding schools, represent one of the oldest and most influential institutions of Islamic education in Indonesia. Historically, *pesantren* have functioned not only as centers for the transmission of Islamic knowledge but also as socio-cultural institutions that shape religious authority, moral values, and community leadership. Through the leadership of the *kiai* and the study of classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*), *pesantren* have maintained a distinctive educational tradition that integrates intellectual, spiritual, and ethical formation of students.¹ This educational model has enabled *pesantren* to sustain their institutional existence for centuries while preserving their identity as guardians of Islamic scholarly traditions within Indonesian Muslim society.

Despite their strong traditional roots, *pesantren* are not static institutions. In the contemporary era, *pesantren* or Islamic boarding schools increasingly face pressures arising from modernization, globalization, and the expansion of national education systems. These developments require *pesantren* to respond to new social demands such as curriculum standardization, institutional accreditation, and the integration of modern knowledge and digital technology into learning processes.² Consequently, *pesantren* must balance the preservation of their traditional educational values with the need to adapt to changing socio-educational environments.³ In many cases, *pesantren* have demonstrated remarkable adaptability by integrating formal education systems, modern curricula, and innovative learning methods into their traditional educational framework.⁴

Scholarly discussions on *pesantren* have extensively examined their historical development, institutional structure, and responses to modernity. Classical studies by Dhofier,⁵ Bruinessen,⁶ and Sukamto⁷ emphasize the central role of the *kiai* and the tradition

of classical Islamic scholarship in sustaining *pesantren* education. It also sustains its relevance by continuously regenerating *ulama* (Islamic Scholars) who lead the spiritual life of the community, albeit not without challenges.⁸ Meanwhile, contemporary studies highlight the capacity of *pesantren* to adapt to social transformation and modern educational challenges while maintaining their religious identity.⁹ These studies demonstrate that *pesantren* traditions are not merely preserved but continuously negotiated and reconstructed in response to changing socio-cultural contexts.

However, most existing studies on *pesantren* primarily focus on institutions located in Java, which has historically been considered the main center of *pesantren* development in Indonesia. Consequently, scholarly attention to *pesantren* traditions in other regions—particularly in Sumatra—remains relatively limited. This imbalance is significant because *pesantren* outside Java have played important roles in shaping regional Islamic educational landscapes and networks of religious authority.¹⁰

In addition, limited attention has been given to the role of alumni networks in reproducing *pesantren* traditions across multiple institutions. Previous studies tend to focus on institutional transformation within individual *pesantren* rather than examining the broader mechanisms through which *pesantren* traditions are reproduced and sustained across interconnected *pesantren* communities.

One important yet understudied mechanism in this regard is the role of alumni networks in maintaining and reproduction of *pesantren* traditions. Alumni who establish new *pesantren* frequently reproduce educational practices, religious values, and institutional cultures inherited from their original institutions while simultaneously adapting them to new social environments. Through this process, *pesantren* traditions are transmitted across generations and geographical spaces while undergoing gradual transformation.

This phenomenon can be clearly observed in the case of Pesantren Musthafawiyah Purbabaru (also known as the Musthafawiyah Purbabaru), one of the most influential traditional Islamic boarding schools in Sumatra. Established in 1912 by Sheikh Musthafa Husein al-Mandili, Musthafawiyah has developed into a major center of traditional Islamic learning in Southern Tapanuli-North Sumatera.¹¹ Over the decades, the institution has produced a wide network of alumni who later founded numerous *pesantren* across the region. Through this alumni network, the pedagogical system, religious values, and intellectual traditions of Musthafawiyah continue to be transmitted while simultaneously undergoing adaptation in response to local social conditions and contemporary educational developments.¹²

To understand this dynamic process, this study employs the perspective of continuity and transformation in educational traditions. This perspective highlights the interaction between the preservation of inherited educational practices and adaptive responses to changing social contexts. In addition, this study draws on Pierre Bourdieu's theory of habitus and social reproduction. This theory focuses how social class, culture and power are perpetuated from one generation to the next. According to Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and social reproduction, there are three interconnected pillars. The first is habitus, a collection of habits, ways of thinking, tastes, linguistic styles, and behaviors acquired by an individual through early socialization within the family, school, and social environments. The second is capital. Capital serves to mobilize habitus within society. It can take form of cultural capital (such as intellectual knowledge, academic degrees, speech patterns, appreciation of the arts, and inherited intellectual traditions) or social capital (such as friendship networks, relationships, and institutional connections that create opportunities). The third is social reproduction through educational

institutions and networks.¹³ Employing Bourdieu's theory, this study is more than just a historical description. It's a critical analysis of how symbolic power and religious traditions are maintained and transformed in the modern era; by explaining a micro level aspect such as the *pesantren* structure that shapes alumni mentality, and macro level aspects, specifically the alumni networks and traditions that serve as strategies for exerting influence within South Tapanuli society.

..... *pesantren*, the transmission of knowledge, values, and religious authority from teachers to students forms a system of habitus that shapes the worldview and educational practices of santri. When alumni establish new *pesantren*, they reproduce these inherited traditions while simultaneously adapting them to new institutional and social environments.

This study aims to explain the continuity and transformation of Islamic boarding school traditions through the alumni network of the Musthafawiyah Islamic Boarding School in South Tapanuli. By analyzing various issues. First, Musthafawiyah Islamic Boarding School as a Symbol of Tradition Continuity. Second, continuity of the Musthafawiyah Tradition in Alumni Islamic Boarding Schools. Third, values preserved and transmitted in the educational practices of Musthafawiyah Alumni Islamic Boarding Schools. Fourth, Ahl al-Sunnah Tradition across the Musthafawiyah Alumni Network. Fifth, formal and non-normal curriculum as instruments for preserving scientific traditions. Sixth, negotiating tradition and modernity: musthafawiyah alumni islamic boarding schools.

Method

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a multi-location case study type. This approach was chosen because it is able to describe in depth and contextually the

phenomenon of continuity of Islamic boarding school traditions in Islamic boarding schools of the Musthafawiyah alumni network, as well as how values and curriculum are maintained and adapted to the dynamics of the times. The research location is focused on 5 Islamic boarding schools of Musthafawiyah alumni in the Southern Tapanuli region, namely: 1) Roihanul Jannah Islamic Boarding School, Mandailing Natal, 2) Al Azhar Bi'Ibadillah Islamic Boarding School, South Tapanuli, 3) Darul Istiqomah Islamic Boarding School, Padangsidempuan, 4) Purba Sinomba TPI Islamic Boarding School, North Padang Lawas, and 5) Paringgonan NU Islamic Boarding School, Padang Lawas.

These locations were selected purposively because they have strong historical and ideological ties to Musthafawiyah and showcase diversity in the form of preserving traditions. The research subjects included: alumni Islamic boarding school leaders/caretakers, senior teachers, active alumni, and final-year students.

To obtain in-depth and authentic data, several techniques were used, namely: 1) in-depth interviews (*in-depth interview*) with the head of the Islamic boarding school, senior teachers, and alumni to explore the understanding and strategies for preserving traditions, 2) participatory observations were conducted on learning activities, social interactions, and religious practices in the Islamic boarding school environment and 3) documentation studies of the Islamic boarding school archives, curriculum, organizational structure, and local historical records related to Musthafawiyah.

Meanwhile, data analysis was conducted using the Miles & Huberman¹⁴ approach, namely: 1) data reduction, simplifying and selecting data relevant to the research focus, 2) data presentation, compiling findings in narrative, table, or matrix form and, 3) drawing conclusions and verification, carried out in stages and

repeatedly (iteratively) to ensure the validity of the findings. Data validity was maintained through source triangulation: comparing information from *kiai*, teachers, and students, member check: confirming interview results with respondents and audit trail, namely systematic recording of the research process.

Results and Discussion

Musthafawiyah Islamic Boarding School: a Symbol of Tradition Continuity

The Musthafawiyah Islamic Boarding School is an authentic representation of the continuity of the Salafiyah Islamic boarding school tradition, which has successfully survived and thrived amidst socio-cultural dynamics for over a century. Founded in 1912 by Sheikh Musthafa Husein al-Mandili, this Islamic boarding school consistently maintains classical Islamic educational systems such as the *bandongan* method, *halaqah*, and *sorogan*, which are characteristic of traditional Islamic boarding school education. The continuity of these methods is an important indicator of the continuity of the Islamic boarding school's epistemology, which is rooted in the classical Islamic scholarly tradition.

In their research, Salamuddin¹⁵ and Musa¹⁶ demonstrated that the Musthafawiyah not only maintained teaching methods but also actively maintained the social and cultural structures of Islamic boarding schools. This is reflected in the presence of the *kiai* as a center of scholarly and spiritual authority, who remains highly respected. Furthermore, discipline in pursuing knowledge and the ethos of *khidmah* (devotion to the *pesantren* and *kiai*) constitute a value system that is not only taught verbally but also instilled through daily practices passed down through generations.

Within the framework of the continuity and change theory proposed by Voll,¹⁷ the Musthafawiyah Islamic boarding school can be understood as an Islamic institution that not only maintains its traditional values but also actively responds to social change and the challenges of the times. Traditions in this Islamic boarding school are not merely maintained because of hereditary customs, but also because they are believed to possess substantive values that remain relevant and important to be passed down across generations.¹⁸ Thus, the Musthafawiyah Islamic boarding school is not only a guardian of the heritage of the past but also an agent of transformation that reconstructs these traditional values in a contemporary context, making them an integral part of the institution's identity and sustainability.¹⁹

In other words, the Musthafawiyah Islamic boarding school has become a model for the continuity of the Islamic boarding school tradition, one that is not only conservative but also reflective—capable of upholding principles while still understanding the context of the times. The continuity established is not a form of stagnation, but rather a dynamic process of maintaining the continuity of values, norms, and socio-religious structures that have become the hallmark of Islamic boarding schools as educational institutions and institutions for the development of ulama.

Continuity of the Musthafawiyah Tradition in Alumni Islamic Boarding Schools

The results of this study generally indicate that alumni of Musthafawiyah Islamic boarding schools in the Southern Tapanuli (Tabagsel) region have demonstrated a strong commitment to preserving and preserving the traditions of classical Islamic scholarship and pedagogical practices inherited from the Musthafawiyah Islamic boarding school. This commitment is not only evident

in symbolic or ritualistic dimensions, but also touches on the structural and practical aspects of education, consistently implemented from generation to generation.

One of the most prominent forms of continuity is in the teaching method of the *kitab kuning*, which still adheres to the system *bandongan* and *sorogan*. The *bandongan* approach—where the *kiai* reads and interprets classical texts before a group of students—illustrates a teacher-centered pedagogy grounded in scholarly authority. In contrast, the more individualized *sorogan* method highlights direct engagement between student and *kiai*, fostering both intellectual depth and spiritual connection. Together, these methods function not only as instructional techniques but also as channels for conveying values, ethical conduct, and the preservation of authoritative knowledge traditions.

The charismatic-paternalistic relationship between the *kiai* and the students is a crucial pillar of the educational ecosystem of the Musthafawiyah alumni Islamic boarding schools. The *kiai* is not merely a teacher, but also a moral and spiritual figure who serves as the primary reference in all aspects of the students' lives. This position strongly legitimizes the *kiai's* authority as both the guardian of traditional values and the director of educational transformation in the Islamic boarding school. From Voll's perspective,²⁰ the authority of the *kiai* is a key element in maintaining the continuity of Islamic tradition, as it is through the *kiai* that the intellectual, spiritual, and social heritage of the *pesantren* is transmitted across generations. At the same time, the role of the *kiai* also enables a process of directed change, as they have the authority to interpret and adapt traditional values to face contemporary challenges. Thus, the *kiai's* presence is central to the dialectic between preservation and transformation that ensures the sustainability of the *pesantren*.

Common rituals and daily practices in Islamic boarding schools—such as post-dawn recitations, the completion of classical texts during specific months (particularly *Rajab*, *Sya'ban*, and *Ramadhân*), the chanting of *nazhâm* (didactic poetic verses), and communal activities like *tahlilan* and *wiridan*—continue to be maintained and widely practiced across nearly all of the alumni *pesantren* examined. This indicates that the transmission of Musthafawiyah traditions is not limited to formal teachings, but also occurs in worship spaces and the daily spirituality of students.

Furthermore, the institutional structure of the alumni Islamic boarding school tends to replicate the Musthafawiyah pattern. Starting from the division of dormitories based on seniority, the system *service* or devotion of the students, to an internal hierarchy that positions senior students as mentors to their juniors. This system not only regulates the internal life of the Islamic boarding school but also serves as a medium for internalizing values such as responsibility, discipline, humility, and leadership. These values indirectly shape the students' character as both religious and social individuals.²¹

These findings reinforce the thesis that there is institutional and cultural continuity of tradition within the network of Musthafawiyah alumni Islamic boarding schools. Within the framework of Voll's theory of continuity and change,²² the patterns of practice within Islamic boarding schools reflect the ability of traditional Islamic institutions to maintain core values while remaining adaptive to change. Islamic boarding school traditions are not merely preserved as symbolic legacies but are actively implemented in educational practices and daily life, thus becoming an integral part of the institution's identity.

In this context, learning in Islamic boarding schools is not merely the transmission of cognitive knowledge, but rather a process of inheriting values, manners, and social structures

that are continuously reproduced within a collective consciousness. Thus, the continuity practiced is not passive, but rather the result of conscious choices that enable Islamic boarding schools

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This preserved tradition also functions as cultural capital. This distinguishes the Musthafawiyah alumni Islamic boarding school from other educational institutions. The unique teaching methods, value systems, and strong scholarly identity shape the *pesantren*'s distinctive position in the contemporary Islamic educational landscape. Therefore, maintaining these methods is essential. The *sorogan*, *bandongan*, and *service* systems not only play a role in preserving cultural and scholarly traditions, but also function as strategic markers of institutional identity in responding to the homogenizing tendencies of modern education.

Based on classical Islamic educational theory and modern sociological insights,²⁴ the continuity of *pesantren* tradition is reflected through practices such as: (1) the use of kitab kuning (classical texts) in the learning process; (2) the preservation of sanad (chains of transmission) in both knowledge and ethics; (3) the oral transmission of knowledge through methods such as halaqah, *sorogan*, and *bandongan*; and (4) the inculcation of values such as humility (*tawâdhu*'), respect for teachers (*ta'zhîm*), and discipline in religious life. Continuity is not merely repetition; rather, it represents cultural reproduction, the strengthening of identity, and the preservation of epistemological and spiritual frameworks that define the *pesantren* as an Islamic educational institution.²⁵

In perspective living tradition as Rahman²⁶ points out, the Musthafawiyah alumni is a concrete example of a living and contextually evolving tradition. Tradition is not seen as a static and frozen legacy of the past, but as a dynamic and relevant legacy, capable of adapting to the challenges of the times while maintaining its essence. The limited use of technology, administrative

adjustments, and the development of additional curricula do not necessarily eliminate traditional character; instead, they strengthen the institution's ability to adapt to ever-changing realities.²⁷

Overall, the results of this study indicate that the alumni of the Musthafawiyah Islamic boarding schools in Tabagsel are not merely replicas of their parent Islamic boarding schools, but also serve as nodes for the transmission of classical Islamic values and educational systems, successfully maintained amidst the tide of modernization. Their traditions are not ahistorical but contextual, with their strength lying in their ability to survive and transform within the boundaries of established values.

In other words, the Musthafawiyah alumni Islamic boarding schools are a manifestation of tradition that is not only preserved but also fostered. They are not in conflict between the past and the present, but rather form a bridge that harmoniously connects the two. Renewal is carried out with the principle of *al-muhâfadzah 'alâ al-qadîm al-shâlih wa al-akhdzu bi al-jadîd al-ashlah* (preserving good old traditions and adopting better new ones). Various innovations such as the classical system and integration of national education have been implemented, yet the tradition of studying *kitab kuning*, the *halaqah* system, and the values of *ahl as-sunnah wal-jamâ'ah* remain strongly maintained.²⁸ In the context of contemporary Islamic education, this model is crucial as an alternative to the modern education system, which tends to be pragmatic and lacks spiritual roots and authentic values.

Values Preserved and Transmitted in the Educational Practices of Musthafawiyah Alumni Islamic Boarding Schools

This study also found that alumni of Musthafawiyah Islamic boarding schools actively maintain the core values of Islamic boarding school education, which have long been the foundation

of the students' personalities. The primary value strongly emphasized is proper conduct and ethics, encompassing respect for teachers, reverence for knowledge, and harmonious relations with fellow students. These values are taught continuously, not only in the classroom, but also through exemplary behavior in daily life at the Islamic boarding school.

Second, the values of independence and simplicity are strongly emphasized. These are reflected in the students' way of life, as they are trained to manage their own time, prepare their own meals, and live with modest facilities. *Third*, sincerity is a central value in both learning and teaching processes; *ustadz* and *kiai* impart knowledge without expecting significant material compensation, while students pursue learning not merely for formal credentials, but to attain the blessings of knowledge. *Fourth*, the values of togetherness and collectivity are manifested through mutual cooperation and shared responsibilities, such as communal cleaning, night patrols, and the organization of extracurricular activities led by senior students.

These values are not taught explicitly through a written curriculum, but rather through cultural internalization. Students learn through direct experience (learning by living), and the instillation of values is carried out through continuous interaction between students and the Islamic boarding school environment. This shows that the educational system of Musthafawiyah alumni Islamic boarding schools is not only oriented towards the transmission of Islamic knowledge, but also towards the formation of character and personality based on values.

Values such as etiquette, sincerity, simplicity, and independence as identified in this study reflect the most fundamental dimensions of Islamic education: character formation and spirituality. These four values are not merely complementary to the teaching and learning process, but serve as the main pillars supporting the

entire Islamic boarding school education system. In the Islamic boarding school tradition, education is not solely directed at intellectual achievement, but rather, at the development of a holistic personality—rooted in faith, grounded in morals, and directed toward devotion to God Almighty and society.²⁹

In contrast to modern educational approaches that tend toward a cognitive-formalistic approach, Islamic boarding schools prioritize an integrative and applied educational process, where values are taught not only through theory but also through everyday practice. As noted by Lukens-Bull: “*Adab* (manners) toward teachers, toward knowledge, and toward fellow students are not taught as theoretical subjects but are embodied in the daily routines and interactions within the pesantren community.”³⁰ Manners, for example, are not taught in structured subject matter, but through familiarization with interactions with teachers, fellow students, and with the scriptures and learning environment. Sincerity is not merely a concept discussed in class, but is understood through the exemplary behavior of the *ustadz* and *kiai* who teach selflessly, as well as the enthusiasm of the students who learn without seeking worldly rewards. This reflects what Tan describes as a “unique educational ecology where values are lived rather than simply taught.”³¹

The instillation of these values takes place through an educational mechanism which experts call “*hidden curriculum*” or hidden curriculum. In an ethnopedagogical approach, the hidden curriculum refers to the process of internalizing values and norms that are not written in formal curriculum documents, but are actually implemented through routines, social relations, and institutional culture. In Islamic boarding schools, the practice of living simply, community service, respect for teachers, and adherence to rules are all concrete forms of the hidden curriculum that significantly influence the character formation of students.

The effectiveness of the hidden curriculum lies in its subtle yet powerful ability to shape character in a natural and lasting way. Because it is not delivered explicitly, students do not feel that they are being instructed or compelled; instead, they internalize values through observation of role models and immersion in the communal environment. This process is inherently transformative rather than merely informative, as it influences students' mindsets and behaviors from within, through continuous lived experiences within a distinctive social and spiritual setting.

In line with classical Islamic educational thought, values such as *adab* (proper conduct), sincerity, simplicity, and independence cultivated in Islamic boarding schools constitute an essential pathway toward the realization of Islamic educational ideals. These ideals aim to nurture individuals who embody faith (*mu'min*), (*'âlim*), and demonstrate noble character.³² Accordingly, the objectives of Islamic education extend beyond mere cognitive and intellectual development, encompassing spiritual, ethical, and social dimensions as well.

Within this perspective, Islamic boarding schools should not be understood solely as centers for the transmission of knowledge (*'ilm*), but rather as spaces of moral and spiritual transformation (*tahdzîb al-nafs*), where every aspect of students' lives is intentionally guided toward the formation of individuals who are spiritually grounded and socially responsible.

These values are embodied in everyday educational practices, both through formal learning activities—such as the study of *kitab kuning* and *halaqah*—and through informal engagements like service, communal living, and disciplined routines. In this regard, the thought of Burhan al-Din al-Zarnuji in his classical work *Ta'îlm al-Muta'allim Tharîq al-Ta'allum* remains highly relevant. He underscores that an effective educational process must begin with proper manners preceding knowledge (*al-adab*

qabl al-‘ilm) and be grounded in sincere intention in the pursuit of learning.³³ According to him, knowledge that is not accompanied by good character will lose its blessings and fail to bring benefit, both to the individual and to society. As a matter of fact Al-Zarnûji was just one of countless Islamic scholars throughout history who place great attention on the matter of *adab*. Indeed it has always been an important feature of Islamic education; and a great deal of works has been produced on the subject.³⁴

The ideas of Burhân al-Dîn al-Zarnûji align closely with the pedagogical practices found in Musthafawiyah alumni Islamic boarding schools, where the cultivation of *adab* (proper conduct) is considered a fundamental prerequisite for students to be deemed worthy of acquiring and developing knowledge. The relationship between teacher and student is marked by respect, obedience, and spiritual closeness, serving as the primary medium for the transmission of ethical values. Thus, education in Islamic boarding schools extends beyond intellectual development, encompassing the formation of character, life orientation, and patterns of thought grounded in Islamic values.

Furthermore, this kind of values education is very important in the context of modernity, where many educational systems are experiencing a crisis of ethics and meaning. By upholding the principles *maqâshid al-tarbiyah*, Islamic boarding schools have emerged as an alternative educational model that is not only capable of producing intelligent graduates, but also those with high moral and spiritual integrity.³⁵

***Ahl al-Sunnah* Tradition Across the Musthafawiyah Alumni Network**

The accounts of the pesantren leaders—including Ustaz Zainuddin Arifin of Darul Istiqomah and their counterparts

across the five Musthafawiyah alumni Islamic boarding schools in Southern Tapanuli—affirm a robust ideological continuity in upholding the *ahl al-sunnah wa al-jamâ‘ah* doctrine, a principle that has been institutionally transmitted across generations as their shared foundational vision. This aligns with Musa’s finding that *ahl al-sunnah* Islamic boarding school preserve established

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This doctrine traces its lineage through centuries of pesantren scholarship, originating in the *Haramayn* and transmitted by Sheikh Musthafa Husein at Musthafawiyah to students. This chain of knowledge transmission from the *Haramayn* to Musthafawiyah, and subsequently across the alumni pesantren network throughout Southern Tapanuli, exemplifies what Tan³⁷ terms an *educative tradition*, wherein religious knowledge is inherited through sustained teacher-student relationships. Indeed this can be claimed safely as the model by which pesantren traditions throughout Indonesia developed and sustained.³⁸

Across the Musthafawiyah alumni pesantren network, the *ahl al-sunnah* commitment is concretely manifested through the uniform use of classical texts (*al-kutub al-mu‘tabarah*) across three domains: *Syâfi‘î* jurisprudence (*fiqh*), *Asy‘arî-Mâturîdî* theology, and Ghazalian Sufism (*tashawwuf*). This curriculum institutionalizes the doctrine systematically rather than merely professing it, demonstrating a shared pedagogical heritage among alumni-established pesantren.

The doctrine is further embodied across the alumni network through habitual religious practices uniformly institutionalized: recitation of *sûrah Yâsîn*, *tahlîl*, *wird*, *qunût*, *shalawât*, *barzanjî*, Qur’anic completion (*khatam*), and grave visitation (*ziyârah al-qubûr*). These practices serve as vehicles for value internalization and identity reinforcement, consistent with Puspitarini et al.,³⁹

who identified role modeling and habituation as key methods of value instillation in pesantren. They also reflect affiliation with Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), the primary institutional bastion of *ahl al-sunnah* in Indonesia.

Thus, the Musthafawiyah alumni pesantren network exemplifies how religious tradition is sustained through the convergence of three interrelated factors: the transmission of a shared classical curriculum, the institutionalization of ritual practices through habituation, and embeddedness within broader organizational networks. This continuity across multiple institutions demonstrates that the tradition is not preserved in isolation but actively reproduced through an interconnected network of alumni-established pesantren.

Formal and Non-Formal Curriculum as Instruments for Preserving Scientific Traditions

In the context of curriculum management, Musthafawiyah alumni exhibit a flexible adaptability while remaining firmly grounded in the principles of the Islamic scholarly tradition. Formal curricula aligned with national standards—such as the 2013 Curriculum and the “Merdeka Curriculum”—are implemented to ensure the continuity of formal education in madrasas or schools, enabling graduates to obtain state-recognized diplomas. At the same time, these curricula are harmoniously integrated with the distinctive pesantren curriculum, which encompasses the study of *kitab kuning*, the memorization of *nazhâm* (didactic Arabic poetry), and *bahtsul masâ’il* (scholarly discussions on religious issues grounded in classical Islamic jurisprudence).

The non-formal curriculum, a key characteristic of traditional Islamic boarding schools, remains the backbone of Islamic boarding school education. Within it, students study instrumental

sciences such as grammar, *sharf* (students' grammar), *balâghah*, *ushûl al-fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), and traditional Islamic texts in various disciplines such as *'aqidah* (belief), *fiqh* (jurisprudence), *tashawwuf* (sufism), and *tafsîr* (interpretation of the Qur'an). This curriculum is not strictly regulated by a written syllabus, but is implemented through a system of *halaqah* (study groups) and levels of religious study that have become a tradition passed down through generations. Some Islamic boarding schools have also begun to incorporate contemporary issues into their learning, such as social media ethics, women's jurisprudence, and Islamic discourse on *rahmatan lil 'âlamîn* (mercy for all the worlds), as a form of response to the challenges of the times.

The curriculum of the Musthafawiyah alumni Islamic boarding school shows two important characteristics: *first*, as dual system which combines formal (national) and non-formal (Islamic boarding school) curriculum; *second*, as integration mechanism between classical religious knowledge and contemporary issues. In this context, alumni of Islamic boarding schools do not ignore the legal and social demands of the state, but maintain the spirit of traditional Islamic education based on yellow books and *halaqah*.

This kind of curriculum model can be analyzed through the integrative theoretical approach proposed by Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, who views that knowledge in Islam should be understood as a unity between *fardhu 'aîn* and *fardhu kifâyah* knowledge in an epistemological system that is not separated from the value and purpose of human creation.⁴⁰ According to him, true knowledge is knowledge that instills good manners and shapes a personality based on monotheism. In this context, the Musthafawiyah alumni Islamic boarding schools exhibit an educational model that maintains a balance between religious knowledge and the practical knowledge needed in social life. Al-Attas has played crucial parts in introducing these ideas

which has strong roots in classical heyday of Islamic education as voiced by scholars of the time.⁴¹

On the other hand, the implementation of this curriculum is also in line with the concept of adaptive Islamic education, namely an Islamic educational approach that is able to adapt to the dynamics of the times and social needs without losing its Islamic identity, both in terms of faith, sharia, and morals.⁴² The curriculum implemented by the Musthafawiyah alumni Islamic boarding school shows structural flexibility, such as integrating the national curriculum and strengthening social competencies, but still makes the yellow book and the development of adab as the spirit of education. Thus, Islamic boarding schools are able to respond to the challenges of modernity without having to abandon their traditional identity.⁴³

Negotiating Tradition and Modernity: Musthafawiyah Alumni Islamic Boarding Schools

Recent findings indicate that although Musthafawiyah alumni have a traditional orientation, they are not closed to social change and developments. Most Islamic boarding schools have now opened formal educational institutions such as MTs (Islamic junior high school) and MA (Islamic senior high school), and some have even established skills-based vocational schools (SMA/SMK). This is done to meet public demands for legal education and to provide broader access for students to continue their education to higher education. Furthermore, Islamic boarding schools have begun utilizing digital technology, both for learning purposes (for example, using projectors and instructional videos) and for communication and *da'wah* (Islamic outreach) through social media.

In response to social dynamics, several Islamic boarding schools have also begun developing empowerment programs

such as entrepreneurship training, agricultural training, digital skills training, and public speaking training based on Islamic preaching. However, despite these innovations, the *pesantren*'s identity remains intact. Characteristics of *pesantren* include the use of *sarongs* and *peci* (traditional Islamic caps), the system of service, a simple lifestyle, and strict time discipline are still enforced. Thus, Musthafawiyah alumni of Islamic boarding schools demonstrate a pattern of selective adaptation to modernity: they accept new things that do not conflict with basic Islamic values and Islamic boarding school culture, but still reject elements deemed detrimental to morals, ethics, and scholarly traditions.

The adaptive response of Islamic boarding schools to developments in the times shows the existence of what is called by Geertz as a form of “pragmatic traditionalism”, namely the attitude of maintaining old traditions while selectively accepting elements of modernity.⁴⁴ In this context, the alumni of the Musthafawiyah Islamic boarding school are not closed to technological developments, such as use of social media, digitalization of administrative systems, or modern strategy-based institutional management, but still considers the limits of Islamic values and principles that are the main foundation of Islamic boarding school education. This approach shows that Islamic boarding schools are not static entities that reject change, but rather institutions that have dynamic adaptability, as long as the changes do not damage the scientific substance, morals and relationships typical of Islamic boarding schools such as authority of the *kiai* and scientific chain.⁴⁵ In this way, Islamic boarding schools are able to survive in the context of rapidly changing times without losing their spiritual and cultural identity.

This also aligns with Scott's⁴⁶ theory of cultural resistance, which observes that traditional communities like Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) have their own unique ways of managing

change. This is not done by outright rejection, but through cultural negotiation, absorbing elements deemed positive, and rejecting those that conflict with their values. Therefore, even if an Islamic boarding school opens a formal *madrasah*, uses digital technology, or provides entrepreneurship training, it remains grounded in a commitment to upholding morality, simplicity, and the blessings of knowledge.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the Musthafawiyah alumni *pesantren* network in Southern Tapanuli sustains a strong continuity of Islamic educational traditions, encompassing the use of *kitab kuning*, an *adab*-based system of education, and the preservation of core values such as sincerity, simplicity, and independence. This continuity extends beyond pedagogy into the ideological domain, particularly through the consistent transmission of *ahl al-sunnah wa al-jamâ'ah* doctrine rooted in a scholarly lineage connecting the *Haramayn*, Musthafawiyah, and its alumni network.

This tradition is institutionalized through the use of *al-kutub al-mu'tabarah* across jurisprudence, theology, and Sufism, as well as through the habituation of ritual practices that reinforce religious identity. At the same time, Islamic boarding schools' response to social dynamics and developments is characterized by selective adaptation. They have begun to utilize technology, opened formal *madrasahs*, and introduced life skills training without abandoning their Islamic boarding school identity.

Overall, this study shows that the continuity of *pesantren* tradition is actively reproduced through the interplay of curriculum, doctrine, ritual practice, and alumni-based networks. These findings underscore the importance of strengthening *pesantren* networks as a basis for developing adaptive yet tradition-rooted Islamic

education models, and offer insights for policymakers in supporting *pesantren*-based educational frameworks grounded in local Islamic wisdom.

The implications of this research are the importance of documenting and strengthening alumni-based Islamic boarding school networks as a form of cultural and spiritual continuity for Islam in the Indonesian archipelago. This research also provides a basis for designing an Islamic boarding school-based education model that adapts to changing times without losing its identity. Furthermore, these findings can serve as a reference for the government, educational institutions, and stakeholders in developing Islamic education policies that recognize and support local wisdom based on traditional Islamic boarding schools.

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