

Modernising without Westernising: The Educational Transformation of Pesantren Traditional into KMI *Mu'adalah*

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the transformation of pesantren, traditional Islamic boarding schools, as they transition from conventional educational models to modernised frameworks. Focusing on the shift from Kulliyatul Mu'allimin Islamiah (KMI) salafiyah to KMI *Mu'adalah*, this research employs Robert Stake's case study approach to examine how these institutions adapt to contemporary educational demands while preserving their religious and cultural heritage. The findings highlight three key challenges in this transition. First, communication gaps among administrators, teachers, students, and parents created significant obstacles to the acceptance and implementation of the *Mu'adalah* system, a pattern also reflected in the results of this study. Second, despite aspirations for a comprehensive transformation, most reforms were only successfully applied to lower-grade curricula. Third, modernisation efforts extended beyond administrative restructuring, incorporating innovative teaching methodologies and institutional management strategies that align with contemporary educational standards. The novelty of this study lies in its holistic examination of pesantren's modernisation, moving beyond previous research that has often focused solely on either curriculum

development or administrative changes. This study underscores the interconnection between leadership, stakeholder communication, and phased pedagogical transformation as critical factors in the success of educational reform. For a sustainable transition, Islamic boarding schools must prioritise three key strategies: fostering inclusive communication among stakeholders, implementing gradual curriculum adjustments, and enhancing teacher professional development to equip educators with the necessary skills for

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 05 May 2025

Accepted: 31 March 2026

Published: 30 April 2026

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47836/pjssh.34.2.18>

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modern teaching practices. This research contributes to the broader discourse on Islamic education reform by offering a model for faith-based institutions, particularly pesantren, to engage with modernisation while safeguarding their ideological, cultural, and core values.

Keywords: Education transformation, Islamic education reform, KMI Muadala, pesantren modernisation, Stake's Evaluation Model

INTRODUCTION

“Modernisation without Westernisation” refers to an educational reform orientation within Indonesia Islamic boarding school (also known as pesantren). Its reform that integrates modern educational advancements while maintaining Islamic values and unique pesantren traditions. This concept is rooted in the historical role of pesantren as Indonesia’s oldest educational institution, like Java and Madura, long recognised as a centre for knowledge development and moral formation. As a firmly established Islamic educational institution since the 18th century, pesantren has played a crucial role in shaping the character and intellectuality of Indonesian Muslims (Budiharso et al., 2023; Dhofier, 2013; Mujahid, 2021; Ni’am, 2015; Rosyidin & Arifin, 2021). To this day, pPesantren institution has demonstrated remarkable resilience in adapting to changes while preserving its existence and identity amidst the dynamics of modernisation.

Pesantren’s resilience in adapting to change is embodied in the principle of *al-muhāfazatu’ ala al-qadīmi aṣ-ṣāliḥ wal-akhdu bi al-jadīdi al-aṣlah*—preserving valuable old traditions while adopting beneficial new practices. This measured approach allows them to integrate modern elements—whether in curriculum,

technology, or management—without compromising the spiritual and cultural foundations that define them. In practice, transformation within these institutions rarely happens overnight; instead, it unfolds gradually, shaped by reflection, community dialogue, and a persistent concern for preserving what truly matters amid shifting societal landscapes.

Pesantren's evolution can be analysed through two primary aspects: its societal function and its educational structure. Within society, pesantren maintain a significant presence, with the kiai acting as a source of moral guidance. Regarding education, pesantren have experienced various changes since its establishment. The modernisation of pesantren began in the early 20th century with the implementation of the madrasah system and the inclusion of secular subjects in the pesantren curriculum (Azra, 2012; Harits et al., 2016).

Lukens-Bull (2001, 2013) describes pesantren's adaptation to modernity as a dynamic process marked by tensions between preserving traditional values and addressing the demands for global competencies in education. This transformation highlights the challenges of balancing these dual priorities. Despite the tensions, innovative programmes have effectively bridged the gap between tradition and modernity.

One notable example is the Kulliyatul Muallimin Al Islamiyah (KMI) programme, developed at the Islamic boarding school (known as pesantren) Gontor, Ponorogo, East Java, by KH. Imam Zarkasyi. This programme integrates religious studies with general subjects in a six-year educational system. Through KMI, *santri* (students) study traditional Islamic books (kitab Kuning) while mastering general subjects like mathematics and language (Isbah, 2020; Jusubaidi et al., 2024). The programme has become a successful model of pesantren modernisation, widely adopted by pesantren and founded by Gontor alumni. Its main goal is to produce graduates with profound religious understanding and comprehensive general knowledge, equipping them to face global challenges without compromising their Islamic identity. With a cautious approach rooted in Islamic traditions, pesantren continues to transform into an adaptive educational institution, maintaining a balance between modernisation and its traditional heritage.

KMI, a crucial element of the pesantren system, encounters considerable difficulties in the context of globalisation. As a traditional Islamic educational institution, KMI must adjust to modern changes while preserving its fundamental Islamic principles. The educational standards of KMI have gained international acknowledgement, as demonstrated by the numerous pesantren alumni who have continued their education at prestigious universities in the Middle East, Europe,

and the United States. Furthermore, they participate in international collaborations through student exchange initiatives and contributions to global Islamic discussions, mirroring the actions of notable individuals like Ahmad Syafii Maarif, Nurcholish Madjid, and Din Syamsuddin.

The modernisation of pesantren education through the Kulliyat al-Mu'allimīn al-Islāmiyyah (KMI) programme has resulted in graduates proficient in both religious and general knowledge and formal recognition through the *Mu'adalah* programme. This recognition ensures the equivalence of pesantren graduates to general school alums, granting them opportunities in both higher education and the workforce. The synergy between KMI and *Mu'adalah* has strengthened pesantren's position as a modern educational institution aligned with national and global standards.

The Indonesian government's recognition of the *Mu'adalah* programme broadens opportunities for KMI graduates to pursue further studies or enter the job market. This recognition affirms that pesantren education meets national standards while opening pathways to international arenas. Integrating KMI with *mu'adalah*, pesantren graduates gain strong religious foundations and globally recognised academic competencies.

A notable example of this transformation is Pesantren Pabelan in Magelang. Since its inception, this pesantren has utilised the KMI programme by combining the national curriculum into its madrasah format.

However, a significant shift occurred in 2022 when pesantren Pabelan transitioned its educational system from madrasah to a unified *Mu'adalah* educational model across all class levels (grades 1 to 6). This transformation underscores pesantren's educational value on the national stage and demonstrates KMI's flexibility in adapting to changing times.

This study aims to analyse the transition of pesantren Pabelan from a madrasah-based KMI system to a fully integrated *Mu'adalah* model, focussing on the drivers, implementation process, and educational outcomes of this transformation. The alteration illustrates the evolution of pesantren education to maintain relevance while preserving its historic character. Moreover, it underscores that formal recognition enables pesantren to broaden their educational influence and effectiveness.

This research on Pesantren Pabelan's transition from a madrasah-based KMI programme to a *Mu'adalah* system is convincing, particularly in analysing its effectiveness. To systematically evaluate this transformation, the study adopts Stake's Countenance Evaluation Model, which assesses both descriptive and judgmental aspects of change. This allows for a comprehensive analysis of the antecedents, implementation process, and outcomes of *Mu'adalah* adoption. Through this technique, pesantren Pabelan's *Mu'adalah* transition will be assessed.

In contrast to previous studies on pesantren transformation that primarily

emphasise curriculum development or administrative management, this study adopts a broader analytical lens. It integrates leadership dynamics, stakeholder communication, and pedagogical adaptation as interrelated dimensions of institutional change. By doing so, this research presents a more holistic perspective on how pesantren modernisation operates in practice—revealing not only structural adjustments but also cultural negotiations within the educational ecosystem. This distinction marks the novelty of the present study in understanding pesantren reform as a multi-dimensional process rather than a mere curricular shift.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study contributes to the literature of Islamic education by introducing the concept of “local-value-based modernisation,” which strengthens the discourse of modernisation without Westernisation. It asserts that reform in Islamic education can evolve organically from within its own epistemological and socio-religious traditions. This perspective deepens the theoretical understanding of Islamic educational transformation, positioning pesantren as an active agent in shaping contextualised modernity rather than a passive recipient of external educational paradigms.

While the *Mu'adalah* programme and pesantren transformations have been widely studied, the reasons for varied adoption and implementation strategies across institutions remain unclear. Pesantren Pabelan accepts *Mu'adalah* despite opposition. A significant

question is how Indonesia can standardise the quality of education for *pesantren*. It investigates programme implementation and its consequences on the *pesantren* education systems. *Pesantren* Pabelan's transition is studied using four main questions. First, why go from madrasah-based KMI to *Mu'adalah*? Second, were the *pesantren* resources to support this transformation? Third, how did *Pesantren* Pabelan adopt *Mu'adalah*? What are the effects of this transition on learning and education quality?

The findings of this research are expected to provide deeper insights into how Islamic education in Indonesia, especially in *pesantren*, adapts to modernisation demands without compromising traditional values. While primarily relevant to *Pesantren* Pabelan, the study could also guide others facing similar challenges. Balancing tradition and modernity in Islamic education is a key takeaway from this research.

Nonetheless, this study has limitations. Stake's evaluation model requires subjective assessments of the transformation elements, potentially influencing the interpretation of findings and recommendations (Fitzpatrick et al., 2022). Data and method triangulation were employed throughout the research to mitigate bias and enhance the validity of the results. Despite these efforts, the limitations open avenues for further studies that refine evaluation approaches and expand the scope to other *pesantren*. Such studies could provide a more holistic understanding of the impact of the *Mu'adalah* system transformation on *pesantren* education across Indonesia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Pesantren: The Evolving Legacy of Islamic Education Indonesia and Global Context

Since the 18th century, *pesantren* have served as a cornerstone of Islamic education in Indonesia, preserving Islamic knowledge while nurturing the character and intellectual development of Muslim generations in the archipelago (Budiharso et al., 2023; Dhofier, 2013; Ni'am, 2015; Rosyidin & Arifin, 2021). Their enduring relevance amidst shifting societal dynamics is rooted in the principle of *al-muhāfazatu' ala al-qadīmi aṣ-ṣāliḥ wal-akhdhu bi al-jadīdi al-aṣlaḥ*, which emphasises maintaining beneficial traditions while embracing practical modern innovations. In this context, *pesantren* in Indonesia, particularly through the integration of the *Kullīyat al-Mu'allimīn al-Islāmiyyah* (KMI) and *Mu'adalah* models, demonstrate significant potential in addressing the challenges posed by modernity. However, understanding the global relevance of this approach requires comparison with similar institutions in other regions. Madrasahs in South Asia, particularly in Pakistan and India, for instance, have faced criticism for curricula seen as disconnected from contemporary societal needs and lacking balance between religious education and practical skills (Bano, 2014). Likewise, while *pesantren* in Malaysia share cultural and historical similarities with those in Indonesia, they are often perceived as less adaptable in aligning their curricula with both local and global demands (Munastiwi & Marfuah, 2019).

Similarly, traditional Islamic schools in West Africa, such as those in Nigeria, continue to struggle with modernising their curricula and teaching methodologies to meet present-day challenges (Hashim et al., 2011).

As the 20th century began, pesantren encountered significant challenges adapting to modernity. The rise of modern education compelled them to innovate to ensure that graduates could master religious sciences while competing globally (Azra, 2012; Harits et al., 2016). This transformation began with curriculum adjustments, integrating general subjects such as mathematics and foreign languages alongside traditional Islamic texts (*kitab Kuning*) studies.

A monumental innovation was the establishment of the Kulliyat al-Mu'allimīn al-Islāmiyyah (KMI) programme by KH. Imam Zarkasyi in pesantren Gontor. This six-year programme fused religious and general education, laying the foundation for what is now known as the "modern pesantren." The KMI model has since been adopted by numerous pesantren across Indonesia (Isbah, 2020; Jusubaidi et al., 2024; Samindjaya et al., 2024).

The KMI framework embodies a balanced educational approach encompassing traditional Islamic studies and modern disciplines such as science, foreign languages, and social sciences (K. Steenbrink, 1994). This approach equips students with the spiritual integrity and practical skills needed to navigate the modern world. KMI emphasises the holistic development of graduates, empowering them to contribute productively to society while maintaining their Islamic identity.

This model has proven effective in enhancing the quality of pesantren education and bolstering its relevance in globalisation. Graduates of KMI-equipped pesantren, such as Gontor, are recognised nationally and internationally, with many continuing their studies at esteemed universities in the Middle East, Europe, and the United States.

The successful integration of the KMI model has inspired further innovation through programmes like *Mu'adalah*. This programme secures formal recognition for pesantren graduates, equating their qualifications with those of general school graduates. The combination of KMI and *Mu'adalah* programmes underscores pesantren's ability to adapt to modern demands while retaining its traditional essence.

The *Mu'adalah* programme represents a groundbreaking effort to modernise traditional pesantren education by seamlessly integrating religious and general curricula in a balanced and future-oriented way. Although the *Mu'adalah* programme is an innovative step in pesantren education, the existing literature on it remains relatively limited. Nevertheless, a growing body of research strongly supports the effectiveness of this approach. Anam and Marsum (2022) describe it as "an innovation that combines religious and general curricula," while Manshuruddin et al. (2025) highlight its comprehensive framework that brings together subject-centred, learner-centred, and problem-centred learning approaches.

In a study by Muslih et al. (2020), the programme's implementation showed an

impressive 95.32% success rate across input, process, and outcome dimensions. Faricha (2024) traced the programme's key innovations include maintaining a balance between traditional Islamic scholarship and modern pedagogical practices, fostering globally competitive students, and establishing formal educational equivalence for pesantren institutions. These studies offer valuable insights into how the integration of KMI and *Mu'adalah* can support the modernisation of pesantren education without compromising its traditional Islamic values.

The *Mu'adalah* programme provides pesantren graduates with more opportunities to pursue higher education or enter the workforce with formally recognised qualifications. Pesantren Pabelan is a prime example of successfully implementing the *Mu'adalah* curriculum across all academic levels. This achievement represents a significant shift from traditional madrasah-based systems towards more formalised and progressive education models. Despite its success, implementing the KMI model is not without obstacles. Research by Lukens-Bull (2001, 2013a), and Yusuf and Taufiq (2020) highlights challenges such as resistance from conservative factions, infrastructural limitations, and the need for ongoing curriculum adjustments to align with contemporary demands.

Pesantren that have embraced these innovations exhibit improved educational quality, increased community interest, and better graduate preparedness for higher education and employment. Those adopting

the KMI and *Mu'adalah* models are key contributors to these advancements. These models are crucial in ensuring pesantren remain relevant in an ever-changing world.

The transformation of pesantren reflects its capacity to harmonise tradition and modernity. Institutions like Pesantren Gontor and Pabelan exemplify how Islamic education can remain socially relevant while upholding its core values. Integrating spiritual and secular knowledge fosters a unique educational model that addresses global societal needs and preserves the Islamic identity of its graduates.

This achievement underscores pesantren's adaptability to globalisation challenges. By innovating without compromising their essence, pesantren continue to serve as vital pillars of Islamic education in Indonesia. Their ongoing contribution to educational development highlights their importance as enduring and transformative institutions within the broader landscape of Islamic learning.

Transformation of Pesantren: A Continuous Journey

Over the past decade, pesantren in Indonesia have undergone a significant transformation, demonstrating their ability to adapt to changing times. Research by Hasan (2014) confirms that pesantren have successfully adopted modern educational models without compromising the traditional values that define their identity. Suharto (2018) further supports this view, highlighting how the KMI programme has enhanced the quality of graduates, although challenges such as

alignment with national education standards remain. Collectively, these findings reveal that pesantren modernisation is driven more by pedagogical innovation than ideological transformation, reflecting a conscious effort to balance continuity and change within Indonesia's Islamic education landscape.

Parallel to curricular reform, recent studies have also examined how pesantren are embracing digital transformation as part of their broader modernisation efforts. Rahman and Asrohah (2022) note that the use of online platforms, educational applications, and digital devices has moved beyond a supporting role to become an essential part of pesantren's adaptive strategy. The integration of technology has opened access to a wider range of learning resources and enriched both teaching and learning experiences. These findings suggest that the digital turn in pesantren education is not simply about adopting new tools, but about redefining what it means to remain relevant in the age of the Industrial Revolution 4.0. However, much of the existing research tends to focus on well-resourced or urban pesantren, leaving smaller and rural institutions largely absent from discussions of digital inclusion. This gap underscores the importance of examining how unequal access to resources continues to shape the uneven progress of educational modernisation across Indonesia.

The *Mu'adalah* programme has contributed significantly to this transformation. According to Yasid (2018), the programme provides opportunities for pesantren graduates to pursue higher

education or enter the workforce with qualifications equivalent to those of graduates from general schools. Rohman et al. (2023) observed that pesantren integrating the KMI and *Mu'adalah* curricula successfully maintained traditional pesantren values while improving students' competencies in both religious and general subjects. Demonstrates that curriculum integration as a modernisation can balance preserving tradition and embracing innovation. The implementation of *Mu'adalah* often involves negotiation between government regulations and the institutional autonomy of pesantren, an area that remains underexplored in current scholarship. Future research could therefore explore how these negotiations shape pesantren's identity and independence as non-formal educational institutions within Indonesia's broader educational landscape.

Previous research by Steenbrink (1986) highlighted the significance of the principle *al-muhāfazatu' ala al-qadīmi aṣ-ṣāliḥ wal-akhdu bi al-jadīdi al-aṣlah*—preserving valuable traditions while embracing beneficial innovations—as a cornerstone for the development of Islamic education. This principle has dramatically influenced the transformation of the education sector within pesantren. As a result, pesantren continue to uphold their identity as centres of Islamic education while remaining relevant and dynamic in contemporary society. Viewed through this philosophical lens, scholars suggest that pesantren reform represents both a continuation of long-held traditions and an adaptive response to global change.

On a global scale, Lukens-Bull (2013b) stated that the integration model of education in Indonesian Pesantren could inspire educational reform in other countries. The long-term impact of programmes such as KMI and *Mu'adalah* on the career paths of pesantren alums, both in education and professional fields, further highlights the importance of this transformation. Pesantren preserve their traditions and contribute to the global development of Islamic education. Nevertheless, while existing studies have highlighted pesantren's success in bringing together tradition and modernity, few have considered how local socio-economic realities shape the pace and direction of this transformation. This gap points to the continuing need to understand how processes of globalisation intersect with local religious cultures in shaping the future of Islamic education.

According to Yasid (2018), the *Mu'adalah* programme provides opportunities for pesantren graduates to continue their university studies or enter the workforce. Rohman et al. (2023), observed the dynamic interplay between tradition preservation and innovation in pesantren implementing the KMI Gontor curriculum. Integrating religious and general sciences through the *Mu'adalah* programme has enhanced student competence without sacrificing pesantren's distinctive values. The modernisation adaptation in pesantren's educational process has improved accessibility and education quality while preserving traditional Islamic values. Aligns with Steenbrink (1994) perspective, which emphasises the importance of balancing

tradition and modernity in the development of Islamic education following the pesantren principle of *al-muhāfazatu' ala al-qadīmi aṣ-ṣāliḥ wal-akhḍhu bi al-jadīdi al-aṣlaḥ*. Therefore, the transformation of pesantren has not only impacted education but also reinforced their identity and contribution to society.

From a global perspective, Lukens-Bull (2013b) suggests that the educational integration model in Indonesian pesantren could inspire educational reforms worldwide. This model demonstrates how tradition and modernisation can coexist to foster effective education. The lasting influence of KMI and *Mu'adalah* on the careers of pesantren alums highlights the transformative potential of these principles.

Stake's Evaluation Model

The Stake Evaluation Model, developed by Robert E. Stake, provides a simple yet powerful conceptual framework for analysing evaluation processes, particularly in education. This model emphasises two key aspects of evaluation: description and judgment, known as the "countenances of evaluation." These aspects guide the evaluation of programmes by describing and assessing their components (Fitzpatrick et al., 2022; R. E. Stake, 2002; R. E. Stake & Munson, 2008; R. Stake & Visse, 2023).

The model has three main components: antecedents, transactions, and outcomes. Antecedents refer to initial conditions, such as the characteristics of learners and available resources, before the learning process begins. Transactions involve interactions during the learning process, such as class

discussions and assignment completion. At the same time, outcomes refer to the results achieved by learners, both short- and long-term, including achievements, attitudes, and aspirations (Fitzpatrick et al., 2022). The evaluation process compares actual conditions with expectations and observes the relationships between these components.

In this study, the Stake Evaluation Model is applied to assess the transformation of the Kullīyat al-Mu'allimīn al-Islāmiyyah (KMI) programme at Pesantren Pabelan into a *Mu'adalah* KMI programme. The evaluation focuses on the three main components: antecedents, transactions, and outcomes. Antecedents examine the initial condition of the pesantren and the readiness of available resources, while transactions involve implementing the KMI programme. The outcome will assess student achievement and the pesantren's preparedness to serve as a *Mu'adalah* school.

The evaluation is conducted using descriptive data and assessment against pre-established standards. The data obtained will offer valuable insights into the strengths and weaknesses of the KMI programme's implementation at Pesantren Pabelan. The findings aim to provide recommendations for programme improvement and support the sustainability of the KMI programme as a *Mu'adalah* school in the future.

METHODS

This study involved 18 participants drawn from Pabelan Islamic boarding school in Magelang, Indonesia. They included two

caregivers (kyai/nyai), four madrasah administrators, seven teachers (ustadz and ustadzah), and six students who were actively engaged in the institution's educational life. These individuals were selected because they represented the core stakeholders in the pesantren's ongoing transformation toward the KMI *Mu'adalah* model, reflecting a range of perspectives within the educational ecosystem.

Participants were purposively chosen based on their roles and involvement in the transformation process. The selection followed the logic of the Stake Evaluation Model, focussing on three analytical dimensions—antecedents (inputs), transactions (processes), and outcomes (results). This approach ensured that each participant contributed to understanding how institutional change was experienced and managed from multiple positions within the pesantren community.

The recruitment process began with the researcher formally contacting the pesantren's leader (kyai) through an official letter outlining the purpose and scope of the study. After obtaining consent, the kyai introduced the researcher to administrators, teachers, and a group of students who met the study's inclusion criteria. During this stage, the kyai also explained the pesantren's ethical openness to research and its commitment to supporting studies that contribute to institutional improvement.

Once formal permission was secured, the researcher conducted an orientation session with all selected participants. In this session, participants were informed

about the research objectives, confidentiality assurance, and their voluntary right to participate or withdraw at any time. They also received an interview information sheet that detailed the research title, ethical commitments, and the general themes to be discussed during data collection.

The interview schedules were designed to be flexible and adaptive to the participants' daily responsibilities within the pesantren. The researcher coordinated individually with caregivers, administrators, and teachers to ensure that the interviews did not interfere with teaching, prayer, or administrative duties. This flexible arrangement helped build trust and encouraged participants to speak more openly about their experiences

and perceptions of the transformation process.

A summary of participant demographics, including their age, educational background, and institutional roles, is presented in Table 1. This information provides an overview of the diverse yet interrelated perspectives that shaped the study's findings. Such diversity strengthens the credibility of the data and enriches the interpretation of the pesantren's transformation dynamics.

Research Design and Data Collection

This research employs a qualitative evaluation approach using the Stake Evaluation Model (countenance) to assess the transformation of the KMI programme at

Table 1
Participants in research

No.	Participant ID	Age	Education	Status
1	NA	61	Bachelor	Kyai (the leader of pesantren)
2	MZ	51	Magister	Director of KMI
3	MT	48	Bachelor	Head of senior high school
4	ZB	63	Bachelor	Head of junior high school
5	AZ	50	Bachelor	Head of <i>Mu'adalah</i>
6	NF	55	Bachelor	Nyai
7	ZB	53	Bachelor	Teacher 2
8	K	56	Bachelor	Teacher 3
9	KD	44	Bachelor	Teacher 4
10	AS	47	Bachelor	Teacher 5
11	AH	60	Bachelor	Teacher 6
12	CT	40	Bachelor	Teacher 7
13	AR	15	Junior high school	Student 1
14	IS	15	Junior high school	Student 2
15	NU	18	Senior high school	Student 3
16	PL	18	Senior high school	Student 4
17	ATH	20	Senior high school	Student 5
18	AT	18	Senior high school	Student 6

Pesantren Pabelan from a formal madrasah into a *Mu'adalah* institution. This approach is selected for its ability to provide an in-depth understanding of the programme's process and context (Stake, 2002; Stake & Munson, 2008; Stake & Visse, 2023) while considering the global dynamics of Islamic education.

The research was conducted from May to December 2023 through several structured stages, including feasibility assessment, instrument preparation, proposal seminar, data collection, and analysis. Each phase was designed to ensure continuity between design, implementation, and interpretation, as summarised in the research timeline.

The study aims to evaluate the rationale, readiness, process, and outcomes of the KMI programme transformation in the context of educational globalisation. The Stake Evaluation Model was chosen because of its emphasis on description and decision-making during the evaluation process. This approach is particularly relevant in addressing the challenges posed by globalisation (Fitzpatrick et al., 2022).

Data was collected through triangulation methods—structured interviews, observations, and document reviews—to strengthen validity and minimise bias (Denzin & Lincoln, 2014). Prior to fieldwork, the interview and observation guides were reviewed in a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) involving experts from the National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN), Islamic education scholars, and pesantren leaders. Feedback from these sessions was used to refine the instruments for clarity and contextual accuracy.

The interview framework followed the logic of the Stake model, organised into four components: antecedents (inputs), transactions (processes), outcomes (results), and standards (criteria) (Creswell, 2010; Creswell & Poth, 2016). Primary data were obtained from the kyai, KMI administrators, teachers, and students, while secondary data included guardian insights, institutional archives, and comparative international literature.

Data analysis is performed through a qualitative descriptive method using a thematic analysis approach, following the Stake Evaluation Model by comparing antecedents, transactions, and outcomes in a descriptive matrix (Stake & Munson, 2008; Stake & Visse, 2023). The analysis process involves data collection, data reduction, conclusion drawing, verification, and adapting the interactive analysis model from Miles and Huberman.

This research also integrates a comparative international perspective, referencing global studies on the transformation of Islamic education (Hefner & Zaman, 2010). The method enables a more comprehensive analysis of the position of the KMI programme within the global landscape of Islamic education. Considering international education trends and challenges, it is expected to generate new insights into the KMI programme's transformation process worldwide and serve as a foundation for future programme development decisions.

Data analysis applied a thematic approach aligned with the Countenance

Evaluation Framework. The process began with familiarisation and open coding of transcripts, observation notes, and documents. Emerging codes were organised into broader themes that reflected transformation dynamics—such as leadership adaptation, curriculum alignment, and stakeholder communication. These themes were then interpreted by comparing intended goals with observed realities to assess congruence across the antecedent, transactional, and outcome stages.

This integrative approach provided both depth and transparency, revealing not only what changes occurred in the KMI transformation but also how and why they took place. The combination of thematic interpretation and evaluative comparison ensured that the findings were both empirically grounded and analytically meaningful within the broader context of Islamic education reform.

RESULTS

Antecedents (Initial Conditions)

Pesantren Pabelan, established by K.H. Hamam Dja'far on August 28, 1965, in Magelang, Central Java, has a long-standing history dating back to the 1800s. This pesantren implements the KMI curriculum, which integrates formal education intending to develop students who are virtuous, healthy, knowledgeable, and open-minded. The institution underwent a significant transformation, shifting from the KMI Madrasah system to the KMI *Mu'adalah*, following Law No. 18 of 2019 regarding

pesantren. This change aimed to offer greater flexibility in management and strengthen alums' positioning across various fields.

In discussing the institutional transformation toward KMI *Mu'adalah*, several key informants highlighted the growing sense of autonomy and legal recognition that pesantren now experience.

The government's recognition and affirmation of the unique character of pesantren education, along with the autonomy granted to manage each institution according to its distinct identity, have been highly encouraging...The enactment of the Indonesian Law on pesantren provides a fresh momentum to adopt the Sistem Pendidikan *Mu'adalah* (SPM), with its broad flexibility, including the authority to issue legally recognised diplomas. Such recognition is expected to further strengthen the position of pesantren graduates as they enter the fields of education, employment, or even politics. (Mz, Director of KMI, interview June 2023)

Similarly, HZ, Head of the *Mu'adalah* Division, emphasised a structural distinction between the two systems:

The content structure of the curriculum differs significantly. The KMI Madrasah must follow the government's required teaching hours, whereas the KMI *Mu'adalah* is not bound by such regulations. This independence grants

pesantren the freedom to manage their affairs and determine their own direction. (Interview June 2023)

These testimonies illustrate how regulatory recognition and curricular independence serve as key drivers in pesantren modernisation, allowing institutions like Pabelan to align religious authenticity with educational legitimacy.

Preparation for the transition toward the KMI *Mu'adalah* system was shaped by deliberate organisational readiness rather than ad hoc adjustment. The pesantren leadership initiated the process by forming a dedicated coordination team responsible for identifying institutional challenges, learning from benchmark pesantren, and ensuring compliance with administrative requirements. This preparatory phase also included efforts to strengthen human resources, particularly by supporting teachers in further academic training to enhance instructional quality. Despite the heterogeneous backgrounds of incoming students and the absence of selective admission mechanisms, the transformation remained anchored in improving pedagogical standards and learning support, including the provision of textbooks and instructional materials. As noted by the Director of KMI:

Institutional familiarity with the *Mu'adalah* system—previously implemented between 2005 and 2013—contributed to a shared sense of readiness across the educational community, easing the re-adoption of the system. (Interview June 2023)

The KMI *Mu'adalah* curriculum at Pesantren Pabelan offers a deeper integration of religious studies and language than the previous madrasah system. This transformation included intensive socialisation efforts with students, their guardians, and administrators, and administrative adjustments to support the changes. While the teaching method emphasises *Thoriqoh Mubasyaroh* and a language-rich environment, the classical teaching of traditional Islamic texts (known as *Kitab Kuning*) is still conducted in the mosque with a *sorogan* system. Language development became a primary focus, while student mentoring continued through the dormitory system and extracurricular activities designed to sharpen talents and interests and build strong character.

Transformation into KMI *Mu'adalah*

A key distinction between the KMI Madrasah and KMI *Mu'adalah* systems lies in the flexibility of the curriculum and management. Specialised subjects, such as *Mantiq* (Logic) and Islamic Inheritance Law, were introduced to the new curriculum, which was not a part of the previous system. Additionally, the *Mu'adalah* curriculum emphasises strengthening language proficiency and religious education, sorted by extracurricular activities such as scouting, martial arts, and *muhadara* (public speaking).

In the first-level classes, the teacher reads the text, and the students follow by repeating it. In the higher levels,

all religious subjects are delivered in Arabic, while English subjects are taught entirely in English. (Teacher 3, interview June 2023).

Teacher 6 added that language mastery depends heavily on continuous practice:

Language skills require frequent and consistent practice. For beginners, Arabic is introduced through direct or drill-based methods, although the level of linguistic discipline among students tends to fluctuate over time. (Interview June 2023)

The interviews indicate that curricular flexibility in the KMI *Mu'adalah* system is enacted primarily through differentiated language pedagogy rather than formal curriculum design alone. Instruction progresses from guided repetition at lower levels to full language immersion at higher levels, reflecting assumptions about students' linguistic readiness and learning discipline. However, fluctuations in students' language consistency highlight that the effectiveness of this approach depends largely on sustained teacher commitment and pedagogical rigour.

The transformation also enhanced learning facilities, including providing books and kitab from KMI Gontor, although occasional delays were encountered. Looking forward, Pesantren Pabelan aims to improve educational facilities such as laboratories and libraries. Furthermore, various extracurricular activities continue

to foster student character development, including international programmes such as The International Award for Young People (IAYP).

The transformation under the KMI *Mu'adalah* framework has also altered the way of classical Islamic texts are taught. As one teacher explained:

Instruction has shifted from the traditional *qawā'id-tarjamah* method toward lecture-based classroom delivery for syllabus-based materials, while texts outside the formal curriculum continue to be studied through evening *sorogan* sessions in the mosque. These instructional changes are supported by the availability of selected *Mu'adalah*-approved texts supplied from KMI Gontor, which generally meet curricular needs despite occasional delays in distribution. (Interview June-July 2023).

Within Stake's Countenance framework, the outcome component focuses on the observable results of institutional change in relation to its original intentions. At Pesantren Pabelan, the transformation toward the KMI *Mu'adalah* system has produced outcomes that are still emerging and uneven across levels, reflecting the gradual nature of implementation. The following section outlines these outcomes by examining curriculum application, stakeholder response, and early pedagogical effects of the transformation.

The Outcome of the Transformation to KMI *Mu'adalah*

In essence, the primary difference between the KMI Madrasah and KMI *Mu'adalah* curricula is the increased focus on religious subjects in the latter. The curriculum structure now aligns more closely with Education units *Mu'adalah*, under the Directorate of Education for Islamic Boarding Schools, offering greater flexibility in educational management while enhancing students' religious and academic competencies.

One challenge faced during this transformation was the decreased in new students, partly due to insufficient socialisation. Some prospective guardians have not fully understood the benefits of the KMI *Mu'adalah* system and have only received information that may seem less favourable, such as the obligation to stay at the pesantren for six years without the option to transfer. The declining public interest requires improved communication strategies to highlight better the advantages and benefits of the KMI *Mu'adalah* system.

Nevertheless, the transformation provides excellent potential to enhance the quality of education at Pesantren Pabelan. With the support of guardians and connections to other *mu'adalah* pesantren, Pesantren Pabelan is continuously adapting and refining its system. The networking opportunities through events like national gatherings also give Pesantren Pabelan a chance to further develop within the *mu'adalah*-based educational framework.

In the long term, the transformation to the KMI *Mu'adalah* system is expected

to strengthen students' religious understanding, language proficiency, and character formation. The more flexible curriculum structure, combined with gradual improvements in learning resources and instructional practices, provides a foundation for sustained educational development. Through this process, Pesantren Pabelan seeks to consolidate its role as a pesantren that integrates strong religious scholarship with adaptive institutional innovation.

Beyond limited socialisation efforts, the observed decline in new student enrolment points to a misalignment of understanding between institutional intentions and stakeholder perceptions. Core features of the KMI *Mu'adalah* system—such as the six-year residential commitment and the concentration of religious subjects—are designed to ensure curricular coherence and character formation, yet they are not consistently interpreted as such by prospective guardians. As a result, elements intended as educational strengths may be perceived externally as constraints, shaping enrolment outcomes during the transition period. These patterns suggest that the effectiveness of the transformation is closely linked to how institutional objectives are understood and negotiated by stakeholders; an issue examined more critically in the subsequent discussion.

Phased Implementation and Emerging Longitudinal Implications

The implementation of the KMI *Mu'adalah* curriculum at Pesantren Pabelan, which at the time of this study was limited to

entry-level classes (Grade VII), reflects a deliberate strategy of phased adoption rather than incomplete execution. Introducing the curriculum to new cohorts allowed the institution to assess organisational readiness, particularly in terms of teacher preparedness, pedagogical alignment, and administrative adjustment. From a risk management perspective, this gradual approach reduced the potential disruption to ongoing learning processes and minimised resistance among internal actors, while providing space to refine instructional practices before extending the system to higher grade levels.

This phased implementation also served as a mechanism for institutional learning. Early experiences at the initial level enabled the pesantren to identify practical challenges related to curriculum delivery, language immersion, and stakeholder communication. Rather than viewing partial implementation as a limitation, the leadership treated this stage as an adaptive period in which feedback from classroom practice and community response could inform subsequent expansion. Such an approach is consistent with changing processes in tradition-based educational institutions, where stability and continuity are considered essential to maintaining institutional legitimacy.

Looking toward the medium-term period (2024-2025), the outcomes of this gradual strategy are expected to become more visible. As cohorts progress and the *Mu'adalah* curriculum is extended to higher levels, greater consistency in pedagogical practices and clearer communication of

institutional objectives to guardians are anticipated. These developments are likely to strengthen alignment between curriculum design, teaching implementation, and stakeholder understanding, thereby providing a more robust basis for evaluating the longer-term effectiveness of the KMI *Mu'adalah* transformation.

DISCUSSION

This perspective becomes clearer when Pesantren Pabelan is viewed in comparison with established *Mu'adalah* institutions such as Pesantren Gontor, where the KMI system was developed organically as an original institutional model. Rather than replicating Gontor's institutional pathway, Pabelan selectively recontextualises core elements of the KMI *Mu'adalah* framework—particularly curriculum structure, language immersion, and residential discipline—while negotiating local constraints related to organisational readiness, stakeholder expectations, and historical educational practices. This comparison highlights that the outcomes of *Mu'adalah* adoption are shaped not solely by curriculum design, but by the institution's capacity to reinterpret and operationalise the model within its own socio-organisational context.

Institutional Ambidexterity in Pesantren Transformation

The transformation of Pesantren Pabelan toward the KMI *Mu'adalah* system illustrates a form of institutional ambidexterity, in which the pesantren simultaneously preserves established religious traditions while

adopting modern educational governance and curricular structures. Empirically, this dual orientation is evident in the retention of classical Islamic texts and residential discipline alongside increased curriculum flexibility, language immersion, and formal administrative alignment with *Mu'adalah* education units. Rather than signalling institutional inconsistency, this coexistence reflects a deliberate balancing strategy, allowing the pesantren to innovate without destabilising its normative foundations or religious authority.

This ambidextrous configuration also explains why the transformation was implemented gradually and selectively. The phased adoption of the *Mu'adalah* curriculum—initially applied to entry-level cohorts—can be understood as an organisational mechanism to managing the tension between continuity and change. By maintaining familiar pedagogical practices for existing students while experimenting with new structures among incoming cohorts, the pesantren reduced organisational risk and safeguarded institutional legitimacy. In this sense, ambidexterity operates not merely at the curricular level but as a broader governance strategy that shapes how reform is paced, communicated, and sustained.

“Modernising without Westernising” as an Epistemological Position

The findings further demonstrate that the transformation at Pesantren Pabelan embodies the epistemological stance of “Modernising without Westernising,” not

as an abstract slogan but as a practical orientation embedded in daily educational practices. Modernisation expressed through structured curriculum management, administrative compliance, and enhanced language instruction, while epistemic authority remains grounded in Islamic knowledge traditions and pesantren values. This is particularly visible in the continued centrality of kitab-based learning, religious discipline, and character formation as core educational outcomes.

Importantly, the observed tensions with prospective guardians during the transition period underscore that this epistemological position is not always immediately legible to external stakeholders. Features intended to protect epistemic coherence—such as a six-year residential commitment and intensified religious curriculum—may be misinterpreted as rigidity rather than as deliberate safeguards against epistemic dilution. These findings suggest that “Modernising without Westernising” functions not only as an internal institutional logic but also as a communicative challenge, requiring ongoing negotiation between pesantren identity, reform objectives, and public perception.

Congruence Transformation Analysis on the Antecedent Component

Stake’s Countenance framework provides a helpful basis for analysing how Pesantren Pabelan’s transition toward the KMI *Mu'adalah* system aligns with its intended objectives. By working through its four elements, observation, standards, and

judgment, the framework guides the examination of where the transformation is progressing as expected and where inconsistencies still emerge. Although it was introduced decades ago, this model continues to be relevant for evaluating gradual reforms within culturally rooted educational institutions, where change often moves in measured and layered ways (Frye & Hemmer, 2012).

The results indicate that the transactional components of the transformation are reflected through adjustments across several core activities within the pesantren. Shifts can be seen in teaching practices, language-development routines, administrative procedures, and student engagement systems. Activities such as muhadharah, muhadatsah, curriculum restructuring, and the gradual integration of digital administrative tools demonstrate how learning processes and organisational practices are beginning to adapt to the expectations of the *Mu'adalah* model.

In the intent's component, changes are observed in the qualifications of teachers (in pesantren known as *ustadz/ustadzah*) and the addition of new programmes. At the same time, elements such as infrastructure, the role of the Kyai, and the foundational curriculum have not undergone significant changes. Aligning with the concepts of change and stability reflects an institutional ambidexterity by O'Reilly and Tushman (2013), where the pesantren selectively explores new opportunities—particularly those mandated by national regulation—while exploiting long-standing strengths

embedded in its tradition. The stability of Kyai leadership underscores the continued importance of charismatic and moral authority in pesantren governance (Abdurrahman, 2016).

Observations show consistency in implementing several key elements in the pesantren, including infrastructure, the role of the Kyai, the guidance of students, and teaching duties. The curriculum in use still adheres to the guidelines set by the Directorate of Islamic Education, with no significant changes in its implementation. This consistency can be explained by the concept of "institutional persistence" (Muhtadin et al., 2023; Simsek et al., 2023). This concept describes how organisations tend to preserve their structures and practices, even in the face of pressures to change.

However, consistency does not imply that the pesantren are entirely static. The concept of "institutional work" by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006), explains that actors within an institution actively preserve, disrupt, or create institutions. In the case of Pabelan, leaders and teachers may perform "maintenance work" to sustain traditional elements. Hefner and Zaman (2010), explain that pesantren often adopts a "selective modernisation" approach, blending appropriate modern elements while preserving core values.

Although the pesantren retain traditional structures, changes in teaching methodologies and the gradual use of technology are beginning to emerge. This indicates that adaptation may be occurring

gradually behind the apparent consistency. Thus, this consistency reflects the interaction between tendencies to preserve tradition, the influence of organisational imprinting, and selective modernisation processes.

While appearing stable on the surface, pesantren, like Pabelan, may undergo more significant, gradual changes. The effects of this adaptation will become more apparent in the long term as the interaction between maintained traditions and cautiously integrated modernisation takes shape.

Congruence of Transformation in Transactional Components

The Countenance Theory developed by Robert Stake is an important foundation for evaluating the transformation of KMI Madrasah into KMI *Mu'adalah* at Pabelan Islamic Boarding School. This evaluation involves the analysis of context, input, process, and outcomes of the changes that have taken place (Stake & Visse, 2023). The transformation is driven by the need to align the educational institution with Indonesian government regulations, such as those outlined in Law No. 18 of 2019, PMA No. 30 of 2020, and Director-General's Decree No. 6842. This alignment aims for the pesantren to remain relevant and meet contemporary educational standards.

Globally, many educational institutions face similar challenges in adapting to new regulations and standards that emphasise the quality of education, accountability, and readiness for the 21st century (OECD, 2021). Countries like Finland and Singapore have adjusted their curricula to focus on

developing 21st-century competencies such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and digital literacy (Schleicher, 2018). The transformation at Pabelan is not only an effort to comply with national standards but also a response to global educational trends that are more relevant and adaptive to the changes of the times.

The input in the transformation at Pabelan includes resources, regulations, and policies that have been implemented. One of the adjustments is the transition from the *Simpatika* system to EMIS and the socialisation of prospective students and their guardians (Direktorat Pendidikan Islam, 2023). On a global scale, educational input is increasingly focused on technology and digital resources, such as using advanced Learning Management Systems to support administrative processes and learning (UNESCO, 2021). Pabelan's adoption of this digital system demonstrates alignment with global trends, although further improvements are needed.

To clarify how these transactional inputs and practices align with the institution's stated goals, Figure 1 summarises the congruence between intent and observation in the transactional domain.

The transactional component shows that change at Pabelan is moving forward, but the pieces have not yet formed a cohesive whole. (Stake & Visse, 2023), remind us that real congruence appears when what institutions plan matches what happens in daily practice. In Pabelan's case, the transition reflects only partial alignment: teacher readiness varies, digital systems such as EMIS are adopted

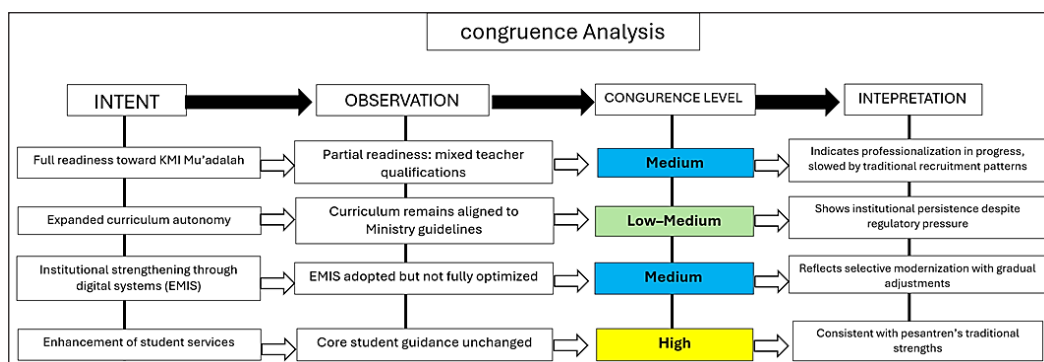


Figure 1. Congruence analysis of the educational transformation of pesantren traditional into KMI *Mu'adalah*

but not fully optimised, and communication with stakeholders still leaves important gaps. These mismatches become visible when the intended goals are compared with observable processes, revealing that improvements in teaching, curriculum execution, and administrative routines are progressing but remain uneven. Experiences from international reforms—such as Finland’s shift toward student-centred and problem-solving approaches (McCulloch, 2017), show that successful transformation requires coherence across inputs, processes, and engagement strategies. Pabelan’s journey is moving in that direction, but the alignment still needs to be strengthened to achieve the intended outcomes of the KMI *Mu'adalah* transformation.

This transformation is not solely focused on administrative alignment but also demands improved teaching quality and the engagement of all stakeholders. The socialisation process and communicating the transformation goals to student guardians is crucial for understanding the ongoing changes. With improvements in these

aspects, the KMI *Mu'adalah* transformation at Pabelan is expected to be more optimal, bringing significant benefits to the students and the institution.

Congruence of Transformation Outcomes Toward KMI *Mu'adalah*

The transformation of KMI Madrasah into KMI *Mu'adalah* at Pabelan Islamic Boarding School can be analysed using Robert Stake's Congruence Outcome Theory, which emphasises the alignment between initial goals and achieved results (R. E. Stake & Munson, 2008; Stake & Visse, 2023). Although this evaluation theory has been established for some time, Zhang et al. (2020) assert its continued relevance in education evaluation. The primary goal of this transformation is to comprehensively implement the KMI *Mu'adalah* curriculum following the standards set by the government, as outlined in Minister of Religious Affairs Regulation No. 18 of 2014 on *Mu'adalah* Education Units in Islamic Boarding Schools.

Observations indicate that the KMI *Mu'adalah* curriculum at Pabelan Islamic boarding school has been adopted only at the first-class levels, namely Grade VII, and has not been expanded to encompass other levels. This constraint underscores a disparity between the original goals and the actual execution, which, as noted by Stake, may impede the programme's overall efficacy (Stake & Munson, 2008). The incomplete implementation indicates difficulties in the curriculum adjustment process and associated policies, which need more refinement and extra time for complete optimisation and successful deployment across all educational levels.

The success of educational transformation dramatically depends on the alignment of context, input, process, and outcomes. At Pabelan, middle and upper-level challenges indicate that the adjustment process is not proceeding well. Rohman et al. (2023) highlight the importance of integrating traditional values with modern needs in transforming pesantren curricula. Ideally, such changes are implemented gradually with adequate support to ensure alignment between objectives and the desired results.

Compared to the curriculum transformations in other countries such as Finland, South Korea, and Singapore, success often depends on implementation flexibility and effective communication between schools and parents (Isozaki, 2019; McCulloch, 2017; Ng, 2017). At Pabelan, the decline in the number of students and insufficient socialisation

regarding the system change show a need for improved communication strategies. The strategy aligns with Rogers (2010) in Diffusion of Innovations Theory (2010), which emphasises the importance of communication in spreading and adopting new ideas.

Overall, the Stake's Countenance Theory evaluation provides crucial insights into aligning the KMI *Mu'adalah* transformation at Pabelan with global educational trends. This evaluation also highlights areas that require improvement, such as communication strategies and community engagement. Lukens-Bull (2013b), emphasises that pesantren leaders, such as Kyai, must be able to adapt to changes in the environment to ensure the relevance of pesantren in the modern era.

The shift from KMI Madrasah to KMI *Mu'adalah* at Pabelan captures the layered challenges of reforming Islamic education in Indonesia. On the one hand, the pesantren are expected to comply with national standards; on the other, they must uphold traditions that have shaped their identity for decades. The evaluation highlights several issues that influence the pace of this transition—ranging from gaps in communication to uneven levels of understanding among stakeholders and the gradual nature of adopting new procedures. Despite these hurdles, Pesantren Pabelan continues to work toward harmonising its internal system with contemporary educational expectations while protecting the cultural and spiritual values that define its character.

At a deeper level, this process shows how institutions must navigate between continuity and change. Lukens-Bull (2013b), points out that lasting reform in pesantren settings largely depends on the Kyai's ability to reinterpret inherited traditions in response to new demands. Pabelan's current efforts reflect this balancing act: adopting selected elements of modernisation, adjusting to regulatory requirements, and slowly aligning itself with broader educational trends, yet still anchoring its practices in long-standing pesantren principles.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the transformation from KMI Madrasah to KMI *Mu'adalah* at Pabelan is a gradual and complex process shaped by the pesantren's effort to balance long-standing traditions with modern educational demands. The findings indicate three main points. First, communication gaps and uneven understanding, especially among parents, remain the main barrier to full alignment between institutional intentions and day-to-day practices. Second, curriculum implementation still falls short of initial plans, as it is currently applied only at early-grade levels. Third, the transition reflects Pabelan's broader attempt to stay relevant while protecting the cultural and spiritual identity that defines the pesantren.

The study contributes theoretically by showing how selective modernisation and institutional persistence influence educational reform in culturally rooted settings. Practically, it points to the need for

clearer communication, gradual curriculum expansion, stronger teacher preparation, and better use of digital administration systems.

Several limitations should be noted. The study focuses on a single pesantren, so its findings cannot be generalised without caution. The qualitative approach also limits the ability to measure broader patterns or long-term impacts. In addition, the reliance on interviews may reflect the perspectives of informants more strongly than institutional realities.

Based on these insights, several targeted actions are recommended. The pesantren should adopt a structured communication plan for parents, develop a phased roadmap for curriculum expansion, strengthen teacher capacity through continuous training, and improve administrative efficiency through full optimisation of EMIS and simple LMS tools. Future research should compare multiple *Mu'adalah* institutions, track changes over time, and combine qualitative insights with quantitative data to deepen understanding of this transformation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We, Dwi Istiyani, A.M. Wibowo, Ruruh Sarasati, Umi Masfiah, and Muhammad Aji Nugroho, would like to express our deepest gratitude to Pesantren Pabelan for their invaluable support and collaboration throughout this research. We also extend our sincere thanks to all participants and other stakeholders whose contributions were crucial to the successful completion of this study.

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