



Transforming Islamic Religious Education into Kitab Based Learning and *Takhassus* Programs

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the transformation of Islamic Religious Education subjects into kitab-based learning and the implementation of a *takhassus* (specialization) program in an Islamic boarding school. This transformation is driven by the need to strengthen students' religious understanding through the integration of the formal curriculum with the traditional study of classical Islamic texts (*turath*). This study employs an exploratory sequential mixed methods design. Qualitative data were collected through interviews with the pesantren leader, head of the madrasah, and Islamic studies teachers, followed by quantitative data gathered through questionnaires administered to 30 students. Data were analyzed using descriptive qualitative analysis and descriptive statistics. The findings reveal that the transformation of IRE is implemented through the integration of the formal curriculum with classical Islamic texts in subjects such as Quran-Hadith, *Aqidab-Akblaq*, *Fiqh*, and Arabic language. The *takhassus* program is conducted through in-depth study of classical texts using the *sorogan* and *bandongan* methods, supported by the use of modern instructional media. The program has a positive impact on improving students' ability to read classical Arabic texts, enhancing their religious understanding, and increasing their learning motivation. This study concludes that the integration of kitab-based learning and the *takhassus* program strengthens the identity of Islamic boarding school education and enhances the overall quality of Islamic Religious Education in a holistic manner.

INTRODUCTION

Islamic education in Indonesia continues to develop in line with changing societal needs and the challenges of educational globalization (Malik, 2018; Rohman et al., 2023). Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) as the oldest Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia play an important role in preserving Islamic scholarly traditions while also innovating to remain relevant to contemporary developments (Ibrahim et al., 2025; Sani & Abdulmumini, 2025). In this context, curriculum development is a crucial aspect to ensure that *pesantren* not only maintain the tradition of classical Islamic text-based learning but also adapt to modern educational demands Sofyan et al., (2022).

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Islamic Religious Education in formal educational institutions is generally oriented toward mastering basic religious concepts based on the national curriculum (Busthomi & Wahyuni, 2024; Sakban et al., 2019; Sholihah et al., 2025). Learning activities often emphasize theoretical aspects, so in-depth engagement with classical Islamic scholarly traditions remains limited. On the other hand, *pesantren* have a strong foundation in the study of classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*), which has long served as a medium for transmitting Islamic knowledge. Therefore, the integration of formal Islamic Religious Education with classical text-based learning has become an important curricular innovation to be developed (Engkizar et al., 2022; Namira et al., 2023).

Kitab-based learning in *pesantren* is not only intended to improve students' ability to read classical Islamic texts, but also to develop a deep, critical, and tradition-based Islamic worldview rooted in classical scholars (Hidayatulloh et al., 2023; Muzzammil et al., 2021; Zulmuqim, 2017). Classical Islamic texts (*turath*) contain broader and more in-depth discussions compared to formal Islamic Religious Education materials. Through this learning process, students not only understand religious content but also learn the epistemological methods used by Islamic scholars in interpreting the Quran, understanding Hadith, and deriving Islamic legal rulings (Engkizar et al., 2025; Engkizar et al., 2026; Engkizar et al., 2026; Syafril et al., 2021).

Pondok Pesantren Madinatul Munawwarah Bukittinggi is one of the Islamic boarding schools that transforms Islamic Religious Education subjects into kitab-based learning and a *takbassus* (specialization) program. This transformation is carried out to strengthen the identity of the *pesantren* and improve students' religious understanding (Ikhwanuddin & Husnah, 2021; Thoha & Hannan, 2022). Quran-Hadith is developed into studies of *tafsir* and *hadith*, Aqidah-Akhlaq into *tawhid* and *tasawwuf*, while Arabic language and Fiqh are expanded through classical grammar sciences and classical jurisprudential texts.

In addition to regular learning, the *pesantren* also implements a *takbassus* program as an advanced learning track for students with higher interest and ability in classical Islamic studies. This program uses classical texts such as *Riyadbus Shalihin*, *Tafsir Jalalayn*, *Jawharat al-Tawhid*, *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*, and *Fath al-Mu'in*. The program reflects an effort to build a more structured learning system oriented toward strengthening students' religious competencies (Abdurrozzaq & Abidin, 2022; Anshari & Rahman, 2021; Burhanuddin et al., 2023; Ibrahim & Wiza, 2021).

Curriculum development based on classical Islamic texts can be analyzed through humanistic theory, competency-based theory, and Islamic perennialism (Hidayatulloh et al., 2023; Kholis & Mustofa, 2024; Khusniyah, 2025). Humanistic theory emphasizes the holistic development of students' intellectual and spiritual potential. In the context of *pesantren*, kitab-based learning is not only aimed at academic achievement but also at shaping students' character and moral values. Competency-based theory emphasizes measurable learning outcomes, where the *takbassus* program provides opportunities for students to develop skills in reading, understanding, and explaining classical texts in depth. Meanwhile, Islamic perennialism highlights education based on enduring values derived from the classical Islamic intellectual tradition as the foundation of scholarly formation (Arif et al., 2024; Furqan, 2019; Soleman et al., 2020).

Previous studies have shown that classical Islamic text learning significantly contributes to students' religious understanding and character development. However, studies specifically addressing the transformation of Islamic Religious Education into kitab-based learning and *takbassus* programs remain limited. Therefore, this study is important to fill this gap by examining the integration of formal curricula and *pesantren* traditions and their impact on students' competencies (Alam, 2017; Hazin & Rahmawati, 2021).

This study aims to describe the transformation process of Islamic Religious Education into kitab-based learning and the *takbassus* program, analyze its implementation, and examine its impact on students' learning abilities and motivation. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of Islamic education curricula, particularly in strengthening kitab-based learning within *pesantren* environments.

METHODS

This study employs an exploratory sequential mixed methods design, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches in a sequential manner. The first phase utilizes a qualitative approach to explore in depth the transformation process of Islamic Religious Education subjects into kitab-based learning and the *takbassus* program. The second phase employs a quantitative approach to measure students' responses to the implementation of the program that was previously explored in the qualitative phase (Snelson, 2016).

In the qualitative phase, data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observation, and documentation. The participants were selected using purposive sampling and consisted of the *pesantren* leader, head of the madrasah, and Islamic studies teachers based on their involvement in the implementation of the program. The qualitative data were used to identify the processes of planning, implementation, and challenges of the kitab-based learning and *takbassus* program (Brandler & Roman, 2020; Saldaña & Omasta, 2021).

In the quantitative phase, data were collected through questionnaires administered to 30 students. The instrument was designed using a four-point Likert scale covering indicators of understanding of kitab-based learning, implementation of the *takbassus* program, learning motivation, learning outcomes, and students' perceptions of challenges and expectations regarding the program (Engkizar et al., 2024; Han, 2018; Mohajan, 2020; Paillat et al., 2012).

Qualitative data were analyzed using data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing techniques. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics by calculating the percentage of responses for each indicator. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation and method triangulation by comparing data obtained from interviews, observations, documentation, and questionnaires to ensure the consistency of the findings (Amaratunga et al., 2002; Antwi & Hamza, 2015; Purssell & McCrae, 2020; Takona, 2024; Weyant, 2022).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that the transformation of Islamic Religious Education into kitab-based learning and the implementation of the *takbassus* program are systematically designed and consistently implemented to enhance students' religious competence, learning engagement, and institutional learning structure within the Islamic boarding school.

Transformation of Islamic Religious Education into Kitab-Based Learning

The transformation of Islamic Religious Education subjects is implemented through the integration of formal curriculum content with classical Islamic texts. Quran and Hadith studies are developed into Quranic exegesis and hadith sciences, *Aqidah* and *Akhlak* into *Tawhid* and *Tasawwuf* studies, Arabic language into *Nabwu*, *Sharaf*, *Qawaid*, and *Balaghah*, while *Fiqh* is expanded through classical jurisprudential texts based on the *Shafi'i* school of law (Millah et al., 2024; Namira et al., 2023; Santi & Aini, 2022). Interview data show that this transformation is intended to strengthen students' understanding of Islamic teachings and maintain the continuity of classical Islamic scholarship. One informant stated:

“The purpose is to deepen students' understanding of Islam and maintain the tradition of

classical Islamic texts.”

Implementation of the *Takhassus* Program

The takhassus program is implemented as an advanced learning track conducted in the evening after formal classroom activities. The program uses classical Islamic texts such as *Riyadhus Shalihin*, *Tafsir Jalalayn*, *Jawbarat al-Tawhid*, *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*, and *Fath al-Mu'in*. Instructional methods include *bandongan*, where teachers explain texts collectively, and *sorogan*, where students read and interpret texts individually (Fuadah & Sanusi, 2017; Helwani, 2020; Wirayanti et al., 2024). In addition, digital learning media such as liquid crystal display projectors are gradually used to support understanding of classical texts.

A teacher stated:

“Bandongan is followed by sorogan so students can gradually understand the text.”

Evaluation, Learning Support, and Academic Monitoring

Evaluation is conducted continuously through observation, reading tests, and oral examinations. These assessments are used to monitor students' progress in reading accuracy, comprehension, and interpretative ability of classical texts. Institutional support, including curriculum coordination, structured scheduling, and adequate learning facilities, contributes to the smooth implementation of the program.

Quantitative Findings: Student Responses

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of students' responses regarding kitab-based learning and the *takhassus* program.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Student Responses

No	Indicator	Mean	SD	Agreement (%)	Interpretation
1	Understanding of Islamic studies through kitab-based learning	4.65	0.48	92%	Very High
2	Alignment between kitab materials and Islamic Religious Education	4.52	0.50	90%	High
3	Participation in takhassus program	4.40	0.62	88%	High
4	Motivation in learning Islamic studies	4.55	0.49	91%	Very High
5	Effectiveness of teaching methods	4.48	0.53	89%	High
6	Use of digital learning media	4.72	0.45	94%	Very High
7	Ability to read kitab without vowel marks	4.35	0.60	87%	High
8	Understanding of Islamic jurisprudence and theology	4.50	0.51	90%	High
9	Character development (discipline and morals)	4.58	0.47	92%	Very High
10	Interest in kitab-based learning	4.60	0.50	92%	Very High
11	Desire to continue takhassus program	4.62	0.49	93%	Very High
12	Challenges in Arabic language understanding	3.85	0.70	77%	Moderate
13	Time sufficiency for learning	3.95	0.68	79%	Moderate
14	Expectation for program improvement	4.70	0.46	94%	Very High

The quantitative results show that students demonstrate consistently high positive responses toward kitab-based learning and the *takhassus* program. The highest mean score is observed in the use of digital learning media (Mean = 4.72; 94%), while the lowest score is related to Arabic language comprehension difficulties (Mean = 3.85; 77%). Overall, students report strong agreement that the program improves their understanding of Islamic studies, learning motivation, and engagement in classical Islamic learning.

Despite the positive outcomes, several challenges are identified in the implementation process. The main constraint is limited instructional time due to the dense schedule of formal and non-formal learning activities. In addition, students show varying levels of Arabic language proficiency, which affects comprehension of classical texts. To address these challenges, students are grouped based on competency levels, and continuous coordination is conducted among teachers and institutional management to improve learning effectiveness.

The findings of this study demonstrate that the transformation of Islamic Religious Education into kitab-based learning and the implementation of the *takhassus* program represent a structured effort to strengthen Islamic learning traditions while improving students' religious competencies in a contemporary educational context.

Curriculum Integration and Continuity of Islamic Knowledge

The transformation of Islamic Religious Education into kitab-based learning reflects the integration of formal education with classical Islamic scholarly traditions. This integration shows that Islamic Religious Education materials are recontextualized into deeper classical frameworks such as *tafsir*, *hadith sciences*, *tawhid*, *tasawwuf*, and classical jurisprudence. The high quantitative agreement regarding the effectiveness of kitab-based learning (Mean = 4.65; 92%) and curriculum alignment (Mean = 4.52; 90%) confirms that students perceive this integration as meaningful and beneficial for their understanding of Islamic knowledge.

Pedagogical Integration of Traditional and Digital Learning

The learning process combines traditional pedagogical approaches such as *bandongan* and *sorogan* with digital learning tools. This combination indicates an adaptive learning model within Islamic boarding schools. The highest quantitative score for digital learning media (Mean = 4.72; 94%) confirms that students perceive technology as an effective supporting tool in understanding classical Islamic texts. Similarly, teaching methods are rated positively (Mean = 4.48; 89%), indicating strong acceptance of blended instructional approaches.

Development of Students' Competencies in Classical Islamic Literacy

The *takhassus* program contributes to the development of students' ability to read and understand classical Arabic texts. Students demonstrate improvement in reading kitab without vowel markings (Mean = 4.35; 87%) and understanding Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and theology (*aqidah*) (Mean = 4.50; 90%). These results indicate that structured specialization programs effectively enhance students' Arabic literacy and textual interpretation skills.

Student Engagement and Learning Motivation

Students show strong engagement in kitab-based learning and the *takhassus* program. Quantitative findings indicate high motivation (Mean = 4.55; 91%), interest in learning kitab (Mean = 4.60; 92%), and willingness to continue the program (Mean = 4.62; 93%). These findings suggest that learning based on classical Islamic texts fosters strong intrinsic motivation and sustained engagement among students.

Learning Challenges and Institutional Adaptation

The study identifies two main challenges: limited learning time (Mean = 3.95; 79%) and variation in Arabic language proficiency (*'arabiyyah*) (Mean = 3.85; 77%). These challenges indicate structural constraints in implementing integrated Islamic education programs. However, the institution applies adaptive strategies such as ability-based grouping and continuous coordination among teaching staff to address these challenges effectively.

This study demonstrates that the integration of Islamic Religious Education with kitab-based learning and *takhassus* programs provides a structured model for strengthening Islamic education in Islamic boarding schools (Nashoiha & Gresik, 2020; Thoha & Hannan, 2022). The findings highlight that *pesantren* education

operates through a balanced system of tradition preservation and pedagogical adaptation, supported by both qualitative evidence and quantitative validation.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the transformation of Islamic Religious Education into kitab-based learning and the *takbassus* program represents an effective curricular innovation model for strengthening Islamic education within Islamic boarding schools. This model demonstrates the integration of formal education systems with the continuity of classical Islamic scholarly traditions. The implementation of the program contributes to improving the quality of Islamic learning, both in terms of scholarly competence and students' character development. In addition, the findings indicate that the kitab-based learning approach receives a high level of acceptance among students, highlighting the relevance of this model in the context of contemporary Islamic boarding school education.

However, the effectiveness of its implementation is still influenced by several structural challenges, particularly limited instructional time and variations in students' learning abilities. Therefore, strengthening learning management and developing differentiated instructional strategies are required to optimize the implementation of the program. Overall, this integration model has the potential to be further developed as an adaptive, sustainable Islamic education curriculum approach that is relevant to the need for strengthening Islamic literacy in the modern era.

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