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Integrating Spirituality, Culture, and Technology through a Living Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education at Islamic Boarding Schools

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ABSTRACT

The Living Islamic Religious Education Curriculum (*Pendidikan Agama Islam*/PAI) represents an educational paradigm that emphasizes the internalization and sustainability of Islamic values within students' everyday lives. Central to this approach is the integration of spirituality, culture, and technology, which expands the scope of Islamic education beyond knowledge transmission toward character formation and personal transformation. This synergistic integration enables students to develop religious identities that are rooted in local cultural contexts while remaining responsive and competitive in a globalized environment, particularly within Islamic boarding school settings. Al Otsmani Islamic Boarding School serves as a representative case of this integrated curriculum implementation. The institution aligns its curriculum with the National Education Calendar, adapts learning materials to students' contextual needs, and equips learners with both religious knowledge and essential soft skills. This study employs a qualitative research approach, utilizing descriptive data collected through observations and in-depth interviews. Such methods allow for a comprehensive exploration of curriculum practices and their lived implementation within the boarding school environment. The findings reveal that Al Otsmani Islamic Boarding School has undergone a significant educational transformation by integrating spiritual values across formal and traditional learning systems. This integration reflects the core principles of the PAI Living Curriculum, emphasizing the relevance of local culture and the practical application of Islamic values in students' daily lives. Overall, the study highlights the

potential of the Living PAI Curriculum as a holistic educational model that fosters spiritual depth, cultural awareness, and adaptive competencies in contemporary Islamic education contexts.

Keywords
Educational Technology
Islamic Boarding School
Islamic Religious Education
Living Curriculum
Spirituality

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Introduction

Islamic Religious Education (*Pendidikan Agama Islam* or PAI) plays a strategic role in shaping the character, personality, and morality of students. In the context of globalization, marked by technological developments, rapid information flows, and cultural diversity, PAI is required to focus not only on cognitive aspects but also on delivering learning that is alive and relevant to social realities. The Living PAI Curriculum presents a new paradigm that integrates spirituality, culture, and technology into a unified whole. Islamic Religious Education (Pendidikan Agama Islam or PAI) plays a strategic role in shaping the character, personality, and morality of students. In the context of globalization, marked by technological developments, rapid information flows, and cultural diversity, PAI is required to focus not only on cognitive aspects but also on delivering learning that is alive and relevant to social realities. The Living PAI Curriculum presents a new paradigm that integrates spirituality, culture, and technology into a unified whole.

Spirituality is the primary foundation that instills the values of faith, piety, and noble morals [1], [2]. Culture serves as a connecting medium so that Islamic teachings can be grounded and accepted in accordance with the local wisdom of the community [3]. Meanwhile, technology provides a creative, innovative, and effective space for conveying Islamic educational messages in the digital era [4]. Within the scope of Islamic boarding schools, the integration of the three is expected to be able to answer the challenges of the times, strengthen Islamic identity, while equipping students to be able to adapt to the ever-evolving world.

Al Utsmani Islamic Boarding School is an example of an Islamic educational institution that has implemented progressiveness in educational management, including curriculum. This is evidenced by the implementation of a curriculum that follows the National education calendar, materials that are tailored to the needs, and students are equipped with religious knowledge and soft skills [5], [6]. Curriculum transformation plays a crucial role in shaping educational institutions, enabling them to adapt to the changing needs of students and society

[7]. Al Utsmani Islamic Boarding School represents the implementation of curriculum integration. This study examines how this transformation was carried out. It is also hoped that this research will shed light on how the Islamic boarding school curriculum system can address the challenges faced by students in the era of globalization .

Methods

This research uses a qualitative approach to examine phenomena based on descriptive data. This approach was chosen because it allows for detailed exploration of information related to the topic under study. The method used was data collection through observations and interviews. Using these methods, researchers were able to analyze and draw appropriate conclusions regarding the curriculum integration implemented at the Al Utsmani Islamic Boarding School, Pekalongan (Jalan Winong Gejlig Kajen 51161 Kota Pekalongan Jawa Tengah). See Fig. 1.

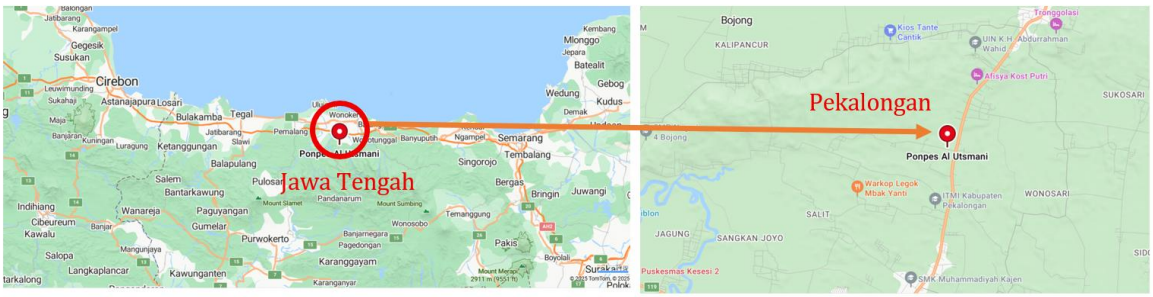


Fig. 1. The Location of the Boarding School

Results and Discussion

Based on observations and interviews with Islamic boarding school administrators, it was found that the curriculum at Al Utsmani Islamic boarding school focuses not only on religious education, dominated by the study of yellow books as the source of learning materials. The curriculum also encompasses how to develop character and provides facilities to support students' abilities in the current era of globalization. The Islamic boarding school has taken several progressive steps, including:

A. Spiritual Integration in the Living Curriculum of Islamic Boarding Schools

Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) are among the Islamic educational institutions whose existence has not faded in the current era of globalization [8], [9]. This is because they are transforming various aspects, including their curriculum. The process of curriculum integration within pesantren environments is not uniform, but rather depends on the characteristics and readiness of each institution. Al Utsmani Kajen Islamic Boarding School, for example, has demonstrated progressive steps in integrating spiritual values into its learning.

At its inception, the Al Utsmani Islamic boarding school only taught religious knowledge through classical texts using traditional learning methods such as sorogan and bandongan.

However, over time, the Al Utsmani Islamic boarding school transformed from a traditional Islamic boarding school to one that integrated formal education, such as the establishment of Radhatul Athfal, Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, Madrasah Tsanawiyah, and Madrasah Aliyah Al Utsmani.

The existence of formal education does not diminish the spiritual values inherent in Islamic boarding schools; instead, it serves as a platform for implementing and integrating these spiritual values with formal education. This aligns with the research findings, which emphasize that Islamic education must be able to address global challenges without losing its traditional roots [10].

A significant finding from this study is that Islamic boarding schools have taken steps to integrate spirituality. Spiritual integration includes introducing, understanding, and cultivating religious values, as well as practicing Islamic values in personal and social life. Ultimately, the instillation of Islamic values aims to optimize human potential, reflecting the dignity and worth of servants of Allah SWT [11], [12]. The instillation of Islamic values in question encompasses faith, sharia, and morals as a form of shaping good personalities for students.

1. Routine activities and daily practices

   In general, the routine activities implemented at the Al Utsmani Islamic boarding school are carried out every day except Friday, starting from the five daily prayers in congregation, tadarus al-Qur'an through the Muassasah Pendidikan Al-Qur'an (MPQ) program, book study activities through the Madrasah Diniyah program, and Musyawarah (Syawir). In addition, there is also a routine every Friday night in the form of Tahlil Bersama, reading of Surah Al-Kahfi, reading dibaiyah, barzanji, and manaqib. The existence of these routine activities is an effective strategy in instilling spiritual values in forming good habits. Ahmad stated that routine activities are those frequently performed, with or without a structured schedule, through habituation in daily life. As is well known, Islamic boarding schools are places filled with the daily activities of productive female students [5]. Deden also said that the instillation of moral values through routine activities, such as teaching and learning activities, in which there is a study of moral books as a means of instilling these values by teaching and informing female students how to behave towards Allah SWT, their morals towards others, and their morals towards the environment [5].

2. Learning and role model

   Integrating spiritual values is also carried out through learning. Islamic boarding schools not only focus on cognitive aspects (knowledge), but also on the formation of morals and spirituality, such as learning resources in the form of yellow books that discuss issues of fiqh, morals, monotheism, Sufism, and others that instill spiritual values [9], [13].

Students are given explanations on how to become moral and civilized human beings. The material contained in the learning is largely directed towards the formation of Islamic attitudes. In addition to the content of the learning material, students are also given role models through examples from guardians and the board of directors regarding how to behave in accordance with Islamic law. This example is embedded in the students' minds and will serve as a reminder when carrying out daily activities.

3. Islamic Boarding School Culture

Islamic boarding schools have long been seen as a process of practicing a simple, disciplined life and being encouraged to serve (khidmah). In addition to a student learning sharia, students at the Al Utsmani Islamic boarding school are also taught a simple life, from clothing to the food they consume daily, so that students are accustomed to eating with what is available. Then also instilled the spirit of Khidmah, namely devoting themselves to helping create order and sustainability of the Islamic boarding school, such as cleanliness (roan). Thus, a social spirit and care for the surrounding environment are created [14].

B. Cultural Integration with the Living Islamic Education Curriculum

The Living Islamic Religious Education Curriculum is a living, flexible, and contextual curriculum approach. PAI materials are not only taught theoretically but also brought to life in daily practice according to the realities of students, the environment, and the culture of the community. The role of culture in the living PAI curriculum is one of the important dimensions, including:

- Values and traditions, each region has religious traditions and local wisdom that can enrich the understanding of Islamic teachings.
- The contextuality of Islamic teachings, Islamic religious education is not taught solely textually, but is linked to local culture, so that it is more relevant.
- Internalization of values, culture can be a medium for internalizing Islam through art, ritual, language, and social behavior [15].

Table 1 summarizes the forms of cultural integration with the living curriculum of Islamic education. It presents a structured overview of how cultural practices are integrated into the living curriculum of Islamic Education within Islamic boarding schools. The table highlights five major forms of integration: daily activities, boarding school traditions, social environment, arts and cultural expression, and curriculum management. Each form reflects how Islamic Religious Education (PAI) extends beyond formal classroom instruction into lived experiences that shape students' character, spirituality, and social competence.

Integration in daily activities emphasizes habitual religious practices such as congregational prayer, etiquette, and Qur'anic recitation, which cultivate discipline, leadership, and moral conduct. Boarding school traditions, including khataman Qur'an, shalawat, and the

study of classical texts, function as experiential learning that connects students with Islamic history and spirituality. The social environment reinforces values of brotherhood, responsibility, modesty, and deliberation through communal work and collective problem-solving practices. Artistic and cultural expressions, such as hadrah and Islamic theatre, serve as creative pedagogical media to internalize Islamic values and historical narratives. Finally, curriculum management demonstrates how formal and non-formal curricula are harmonized through traditional learning methods and practice-based evaluations.

Table 1. Forms of Cultural Integration within the Living Curriculum

Form of Cultural Integration	Implementation Context	Meaning within the Living Curriculum (30 words)
Integration in daily activities	Congregational prayer, etiquette, and Quran recitation	Daily PAI practices cultivate discipline, togetherness, leadership, etiquette, and Quranic literacy through congregational prayer, greetings, teacher respect, tilawah, and memorization as sustained learning cultures rooted in social worship values consistently.
Integration in Islamic boarding school traditions	Khataman, manaqiban, shalawat, yellow books	Pesantren traditions animate history, spirituality, and prophetic love through khataman, manaqiban, khoul, shalawat, barzanji, and yellow book studies, enabling students to learn classical texts experientially within everyday religious life contexts.
Integration in the social environment	Ro'an, simple living, bahtsul masail	Social cultures foster ukhuwah, responsibility, modesty, and deliberation through ro'an, simple living, qana'ah, zuhud, and bahtsul masail, applying fiqh and moral teachings collaboratively in communal boarding school life settings daily.
Integration in arts and cultural expression	Hadrah, marawis, qosidah, Islamic theatre	Islamic arts function as living media, integrating beauty in Islam through hadrah, marawis, qosidah, and Islamic theatre to teach prophetic stories, companions, and figures via creative, participatory student expression practices.
Integration in curriculum management	Formal–nonformal curriculum, sorogan, evaluation	Integrated curriculum management combines formal and nonformal programs through sorogan, bandongan, and practice-based assessments, fostering discipline, patience, worship leadership, and obedience to teachers aligned with holistic Islamic education goals sustainably.

Overall, the table illustrates that the living curriculum operationalizes Islamic Education holistically, embedding knowledge, values, and practices into the everyday cultural life of the boarding school community.

C. Integrating Modern Technology to Enrich Learning at the Utsmani Islamic Boarding School

The Utsmani Islamic Boarding School, an Islamic educational institution located in Pekalongan Regency, has undertaken strategic initiatives to harness technological advancements in order to enrich students' learning experiences. These efforts are part of a broader institutional commitment to preparing the younger generation to face contemporary challenges shaped by rapid digital transformation and increasing global competition. To

support this vision, the boarding school has progressively upgraded its learning facilities and infrastructure with various forms of modern technology while continuing to uphold the fundamental values of Islamic education.

Table 2 illustrates how the Utsmani Islamic Boarding School integrates modern technology into its educational practices in a balanced and systematic manner. Three primary areas of technological integration are emphasized: computer-based learning facilities, classroom learning support tools, and future-oriented educational objectives. The provision of computer laboratories equipped with updated hardware and software enables students to develop essential digital competencies, including office applications, graphic design, and introductory programming skills. These activities not only strengthen students' technical abilities but also foster important soft skills such as creativity, communication, and critical thinking, which are indispensable in the digital era.

Table 2. Integration of Modern Technology to Enrich Learning

Technology Integration Area	Learning Facilities and Practices	Educational Contribution and Outcomes
Computer facilities for skill development	Computer laboratories equipped with updated hardware and software support office applications, graphic design, programming, and digital literacy activities for students.	These facilities foster both hard skills and soft skills, including communication, creativity, and critical thinking, enabling students to compete in the digital era and global workforce effectively.
Projectors as learning support tools	Projectors are used in classrooms to display presentations, educational videos, and simulations that align with lesson objectives and subject content.	The use of visual media enhances student engagement, improves conceptual understanding, and encourages active participation through interactive discussions and collaborative learning activities.
Technology integration for future readiness	Modern technologies are integrated systematically into learning to balance religious instruction with technological competence and innovation.	This approach prepares students to become an excellent young generation, combining spiritual depth with intellectual and technological excellence to contribute meaningfully to society and national development.

In classroom settings, the use of projectors and multimedia resources supports more interactive and engaging learning processes. Visual presentations, educational videos, and simulations help students better understand complex concepts and encourage active participation in discussions. Overall, the integration of modern technology at the Utsmani Islamic Boarding School demonstrates a forward-looking educational strategy that seeks to cultivate spiritually grounded yet intellectually and technologically competent graduates, capable of contributing meaningfully to societal and national development in an increasingly competitive global context.

The provision of computer laboratories equipped with updated hardware and software enables students to develop essential digital competencies, including office applications, graphic design, and basic programming [16]. Beyond technical abilities, these activities strengthen soft skills such as communication, creativity, and critical thinking, which are increasingly vital in contemporary society [17]. Additionally, the use of projectors as instructional tools enhances classroom dynamics by presenting learning materials through visual and multimedia formats, improving comprehension and student engagement [18], [19].

Overall, the integration of modern technology at the Utsmani Islamic Boarding School demonstrates a commitment to producing graduates who excel both spiritually and intellectually. By combining religious knowledge with technological proficiency, the institution aims to prepare a young generation capable of contributing constructively to societal and national progress [20], [21].

Conclusion

Al Utsmani Kajen Islamic Boarding School has shown significant transformation by integrating spiritual values into the educational curriculum that includes formal and traditional education. This transformation is in line with the principles of the Islamic Religious Education curriculum, which emphasizes the relevance of the local cultural context and the application of Islamic values in the daily lives of students. With routine activities such as congregational prayer, book study, and educational traditions that support the formation of morals, Islamic boarding schools not only equip students with religious knowledge but also equip them with 21st-century skills through modern technology. Facilities such as computer labs and projectors are used to enhance the learning experience, making students not only spiritually superior but also ready to face global challenges. With this approach, the Utsmani Islamic Boarding School is committed to creating a balanced young generation, possessing intellectual and spiritual excellence in an increasingly competitive era.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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