

# Curriculum Management and Power Relations: Strategies for Multicultural Character Development of Santri in Traditional Pesantren

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**ABSTRACT.** This study aims to analyze how curriculum is managed and enacted in a traditional pesantren and how these practices function as mechanisms for regulating knowledge, power relations, and the formation of santri character. The study employs a qualitative, ethnographic research design, with data collected through long-term participant observation, in-depth interviews with kiai, ustadz, santri, and pesantren administrators, and the analysis of relevant supporting documents. The findings reveal that the curriculum at PPMH Sidayu is not structured through formal written plans or organizational frameworks. Instead, it operates through informal, everyday learning practices such as pengajian kitab, the bandongan and sorogan methods, oral evaluations, and institutionalized forms of social habituation. The selection and distribution of learning materials, evaluation mechanisms, and managerial coordination occur informally and are accepted as part of the taken-for-granted institutional order. These practices not only transmit religious knowledge but also shape learning dispositions, acceptance of authority, and the social character of santri through affective experiences and social relations. The novel contribution of this study lies in its exploration of the pesantren curriculum as a social practice that operates through symbolic power relations and habituation rather than formal pedagogical structures. This research provides a deeper understanding of curriculum management in traditional Islamic educational institutions, suggesting that it should be seen as a flexible, socially embedded process, influenced more by symbolic authority and informal coordination than formal administrative systems. These findings have significant implications for curriculum studies and Islamic educational management within traditional religious institutions.

**Keywords:** *Curriculum Management, Power Relations, Pesantren, Multicultural Character, Islamic Education.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Traditional pesantrens are among the most influential Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia, shaping diverse forms of religious knowledge. (Ardiansyah & Yanda, 2025; Gusman & Abdullah, 2022), social character (Sutarja et al., 2022), and the collective identity of santri (Kawakip & Sulanam, 2023). In everyday practice, pesantren function not only as spaces for the transmission of classical Islamic sciences but also as social arenas in which values, authority, and interpersonal relations are continuously constructed and reproduced (Hasan et al., 2024; Kasmah et al., 2023; Masuwd et al., 2025). Through the selection of *kitab kuning*, learning methods, and the

regulation of access to knowledge, the pesantren curriculum plays a strategic role in shaping how santri understand themselves, authority, and social relations amid the diversity of their cultural backgrounds and regions of origin (Changiz et al., 2019).

Nevertheless, existing studies on the pesantren curriculum have tended to approach it mainly as a normative, traditional pedagogical structure, focusing descriptively on textual content or instructional methods (Asrin et al., 2024; Isnaeni et al., 2025; Junaidi et al., 2025; Murni et al., 2024; Watson et al., 2007). Such approaches often overlook the managerial and symbolic dimensions of the curriculum, particularly how it is organized, controlled, and interpreted as an instrument for character formation and the regulation of social relations (Muschamp et al., 1992; Syarifah & Buerahen, 2023). In the context of traditional pesantren, decisions regarding which texts are taught, who is granted access to specific materials, and how these materials are delivered cannot be separated from the institutional structures of authority and values that underpin everyday life within the pesantren (Aryasutha et al., 2025; English & Larson, 1996; Minarti et al., 2025).

A body of scholarship has examined the hidden curriculum and the role of education in transmitting social values beyond formal learning objectives. (Apple, 2019; Jackson, 1990). These studies demonstrate that educational institutions contribute to the formation of dispositions, compliance, and patterns of social relations among learners. (Jackson, 1990), for instance, shows that classroom routines implicitly cultivate dispositions of obedience, patience, and acceptance of evaluation, while (Apple, 2019) emphasizes that curricula, including hidden curricula, function to reproduce power relations and dominant ideologies within modern educational systems. However, these works primarily focus on formal schooling and conceptualize the hidden curriculum as an indirect consequence of educational systems. Relatively few studies examine curriculum as a strategy consciously managed by institutional actors to regulate knowledge, authority, and character formation, particularly within traditional Islamic educational institutions such as pesantren (Asrin et al., 2024).

On the other hand, research on multicultural education generally emphasizes integrating values such as tolerance, religious moderation, and respect for difference through dialogical approaches and reflective pedagogy. (J. Banks & Banks, 2016; Nieto & Bode, 2018; Sleeter, 2011, 2017). For example, propose a framework for multicultural education that integrates diverse content into curricula, reduces prejudice, and fosters inclusive school cultures through participatory learning processes. (Nieto & Bode, 2018) position multicultural education as part of education for social justice, highlighting critical reflection, the empowerment of student voices, and the teacher's role as a facilitator of dialogue. Meanwhile, (Sleeter, 2011, 2017) argues that multicultural education operates not only through dialogue and critical reflection but also through institutional practices and hidden curricula that routinely shape students' social dispositions. While these approaches are significant, they pay limited attention to how traditional institutions with strong hierarchical structures, such as pesantren *salafiyah*, manage diversity through non-dialogical mechanisms, including value habituation, symbolic repetition, and social discipline (J. Banks & Banks, 2016).

Studies on Islamic educational management have also explored leadership, curriculum planning, and the organization of learning processes. (Bush, 2014; Hallinger, 2011; Nasir & Rijal, 2020). For instance, emphasize the effectiveness of leadership and curriculum management as instruments for improving educational performance, while ((Nasir & Rijal, 2020) Examine the role of the kiai in managing Islamic educational institutions, both as managerial and normative figures. However, these studies generally adopt administrative and instructional perspectives and do not explicitly address how scholarly and symbolic authority, particularly the role of the kiai, operates in curriculum management as a mechanism for subject formation and value stabilization. In other words, the relationship between curriculum management, power structures, and the formation of santri character remains a relatively underexplored area (Bush, 2014) and (Hallinger, 2011).

Addressing this gap, the present study focuses on how curricula in traditional pesantren are managed not only as pedagogical devices but also as managerial instruments imbued with symbolic meaning. Specifically, this study examines the practices of selecting and excluding instructional materials, structuring knowledge transmission, and distributing the curriculum at PPMH Sidayu Gresik, and how these practices contribute to the formation of a multicultural character among santri. Employing a qualitative approach through an ethnographic case study, this research seeks to demonstrate that the cultivation of multicultural character in pesantren does not always occur through critical and dialogical pedagogy (Neliwati et al., 2023). Alternatively, it may also be achieved through normative, hierarchical, and institutionalized value mechanisms. Accordingly, this study contributes to the field of Islamic educational management by offering an understanding of curriculum as an arena of symbolic power relations (Zamroni et al., 2024). This approach is expected to enrich scholarly discourse on curriculum studies, Islamic educational leadership, and multicultural education within the context of traditional educational institutions.

## **METHOD**

This study adopts a qualitative approach with an ethnographic case study design, specifically drawing on (Spradley, 2006). ethnographic method. This approach is well-suited to gain an in-depth understanding of curriculum management, authority relations, and the formation of santri character within the socio-cultural context of a traditional pesantren. The research was conducted at Pondok Pesantren PPMH Sidayu in Gresik Regency, East Java, a pesantren salafiyah known for its traditional curriculum and strong kiai leadership. Informants were selected through purposive sampling, focusing on their roles in curriculum management and their involvement in the instructional process (Creswell & Poth, 2025; Spradley, 2016). To expand the perspectives, snowball sampling was employed following initial interviews, starting with the kiai and ustadz, who recommended further informants, such as senior santri and learning activity coordinators, with in-depth knowledge of the pesantren's curriculum and authority relations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The data collection process employed three primary techniques: participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Participant observation was conducted across various learning practices, including kitab kuning sessions, classroom interactions, and santri dormitory life (Spradley, 2006). Semi-structured interviews with key informants provided insights into curriculum decision-making structures, authority relations, and the formation of multicultural character (Patton, 2015). The interviews were guided by questions concerning the selection and exclusion of kitab kuning, authority dynamics, and instructional practices. Document analysis was conducted on relevant internal documents, including activity schedules, curriculum texts, and records (Mayring, 2000).

Data analysis followed (Spradley, 2006) ethnographic model, which included domain, taxonomic, componential, and thematic analyses. The data analysis process was iterative, conducted alongside data collection, allowing for continuous refinement of the research focus. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, the researcher employed source and method triangulation, member checking, and prolonged field engagement (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 2018), ensuring that interpretations accurately reflected the lived experiences and meanings articulated by the pesantren community.

**Table 1.** Key Informants

| <b>Informant Category</b> | <b>Number</b> | <b>Informants</b> | <b>Role in the Study</b>  |
|---------------------------|---------------|-------------------|---|
| <b>Guard</b>              | 1             | MN                | The Pesantren leader is the primary authority over the curriculum |
| <b>Teacher</b>            | 3             | HZ, LN, HD,       | Curriculum implementers and instructors                           |
| <b>Manager</b>            | 2             | AF, BD            | Managers of learning schedules and                                |

|                       |   |            |  |
|-----------------------|---|------------|--|
|                       |   |            | educational activities   |
| <b>Senior Student</b> | 4 | YV         | Participants in advanced learning and mentors for junior santri    |
| <b>Junior Student</b> | 3 | MS, RF, TF | Participants in basic learning and subjects of character formation |

Source: Data Collection, 2025

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Results

#### Strategies for Selection and Exclusion of Learning Materials at PPMH Sidayu

The findings from observations and interviews reveal that curriculum planning at Pondok Pesantren Miftahul Qulub (PPMH) Sidayu does not follow the formalized structure typically found in modern educational institutions. In contrast to the standard practice of creating written syllabi, standardized learning outcomes, and annual curriculum planning documents, PPMH Sidayu relies on long-established oral traditions for managing learning materials. These practices, transmitted across generations, shape the educational structure of the pesantren. During field observations, it became evident that curriculum management, particularly the selection of learning materials, is deeply embedded in pesantren traditions rather than in formal, written documentation.

At PPMH Sidayu, the selection of the kitab kuning (traditional Islamic texts) taught to the santri is centrally determined by the kiai and ustadz, who uphold a consistent tradition of using specific classical texts in diniyah (religious) education. The core texts used in the curriculum have remained relatively unchanged over the years. These texts include Fath al-Qarib, Hidayatus Shibyan, Tafsir Jalalayn, Mau'idhatul Mu'minin, and Jami' al-Shaghir. Observations of the pesantren's learning schedules confirmed that these texts are consistently taught across different student levels, with no significant introduction of contemporary or thematic texts.

This consistency in learning materials is reinforced by classroom observations, where all santri at the same level use identical versions of the same kitab kuning. The editions and printings are uniform, and students are not provided with alternative reading materials on the same subject. Throughout the observation period, there was no evidence of discussions or deliberations regarding the potential inclusion of alternative sources or the comparison of the prescribed texts with contemporary ones. This reinforces the view that the selection of kitab kuning is determined by long-standing traditions, rather than by an evolving educational strategy.

In addition to the selection of specific kitab kuning, the study also uncovered practices of restricting access to certain materials based on the santri's level and experience. Junior or beginner santri are initially allowed to study only basic texts, while more advanced students are permitted to study larger, more complex kitab kuning. This hierarchical approach to learning is further illustrated by the observation that junior santri do not participate in advanced lessons on tafsir or tasawuf, even though such topics are offered within the pesantren. As ustadzah LN explained:

"The selection of kitab kuning at PPMH follows a long-established schedule and tradition, with core texts such as Fath al-Qarib, Hidayatus Shibyan, Tafsir Jalalayn, Mau'idhatul Mu'minin, and Jami' al-Shaghir being consistently used. As teachers, we follow the kiai's guidance, and there have been no significant changes to the materials over time. New santri are initially taught basic texts, while more advanced books are introduced to those who have been boarding longer, or to adult santri with prior knowledge from other pesantren." (I-K1, I-P2, I-G4)

Document analysis of the pesantren's learning schedules confirmed these findings: basic fiqh texts were assigned to early-stage students, while more specialized tafsir and hadith texts were included only in advanced students' schedules. Notably, no written criteria for level advancement were found, other than the length of time spent boarding (mondok) and assessments made by the ustadz regarding the competence of the santri. This informal, experience-based progression

further underscores the lack of written documentation guiding students through different levels of study.

In summary, the strategies for selecting and excluding learning materials at PPMH Sidayu are primarily driven by long-standing traditions and practices passed down across generations. These strategies are enacted through the designation of specific kitab kuning, the hierarchical division of texts based on the level of the santri, and the continuity of instructional practices. The reliance on oral traditions and the lack of formalized documentation reflect the pesantren's deep commitment to maintaining its educational heritage while preserving its Islamic identity. Discourse Structure and Mechanism of Grade Normalization

### **Curriculum Distribution and Daily Pedagogical Practices**

The curriculum distribution at PPMH Sidayu is not confined to formal classroom activities but extends throughout the santri's daily routines, blending learning with their social and spiritual life. Learning begins early in the morning and continues late into the evening, with little to no clear separation between study time and dormitory life. Santri attend pengajian after the Subuh prayer, participate in diniyah classes in the afternoon, and engage in bandongan pengajian in the evening. These continuous learning activities occupy nearly the entire day, fostering an immersive educational environment that integrates study with daily living.

Beyond formal classes, senior santri play a crucial role in distributing learning materials. These senior students serve as informal instructors to junior santri, particularly in basic lessons such as reading kitab kuning and understanding religious practices. Senior santri help younger students outside of formal class hours, facilitating peer-to-peer teaching. This informal teaching method is common in the pesantren and ensures that learning continues even when formal lessons are not in session.

Curriculum distribution also extends into the santri dormitory, where informal learning takes place. Junior santri frequently approach senior santri for additional explanations on lessons they did not fully understand. These discussions typically occur in the evenings in dormitory rooms or on verandas, creating an environment conducive to further study. These informal interactions are not formally regulated, but they are seen as an essential part of the learning process, demonstrating how deeply education is integrated into the daily routines of the pesantren.

"In our pesantren, the distribution of learning materials is deeply embedded in our daily routines. Senior santri play a vital role in teaching younger santri, especially for basic lessons such as reading *kitab kuning* and understanding religious practices. This informal teaching usually takes place outside the main pengajian hours, where senior santri assist according to their abilities. (I-K1, I-P2)

"These peer-to-peer interactions are not formally regulated but are naturally expected within our community. The pesantren's learning process, therefore, extends beyond formal classes and is embedded in our dormitory life, where santri frequently engage in discussions to clarify lessons with senior santri. This continuous learning environment ensures that the educational process is holistic and deeply integrated into daily practices." (I-G4, I-HZ).

Additionally, the pesantren's regulations highlight a holistic approach to discipline, where academic expectations are seamlessly intertwined with behavioral norms. These regulations govern not only attendance at pengajian but also the observance of religious practices and the santri's attitudes towards their ustadz and kiai. There is no distinction between academic and behavioral rules, reflecting the pesantren's belief in the integral relationship between learning and discipline. Field notes also reveal that learning is not always a strictly formal process. Occasionally, the kiai integrates light humor or everyday anecdotes into his lessons, creating a more relaxed atmosphere while still maintaining a structured learning environment. This informal aspect of learning helps create a sense of community and makes the educational experience more relatable for the santri.

Overall, curriculum distribution at PPMH Sidayu is characterized by a holistic, continuous learning process that extends beyond the formal classroom. The integration of academic lessons with daily routines, the pedagogical roles of senior santri, and the informal interactions in the dormitory all contribute to a comprehensive learning environment. This approach ensures that learning at PPMH is not limited to textbooks but is woven into the fabric of daily life, fostering a dynamic and immersive educational experience for the santri.

### **Managerial Practices and Everyday Coordination**

At PPMH Sidayu, learning activity management occurs through informal, day-to-day coordination rather than a formalized administrative structure. Observations indicate that decisions on curriculum, schedules, and learning activities are typically made through direct communication among the kiai, ustadz, and pesantren administrators. The kiai plays a central role in determining the overall direction of activities, including the selection of kitab kuning and the schedule for pengajian. These decisions are often conveyed orally during brief meetings or directly through messages, without formal documentation. Changes in the pengajian schedule, for example, are often announced informally and implemented quickly. This flexible approach reflects the pesantren's ability to adapt to the community's needs in real time, ensuring that learning activities are integrated into daily life.

In addition to the formal teaching activities, senior santri play a vital role in distributing learning materials. These senior students, who are more advanced in their studies, assist junior santri with basic lessons, especially in reading kitab kuning. This peer-to-peer learning typically occurs outside regular class hours, further enriching the educational experience. Junior santri often approach senior santri for clarification on lessons they haven't fully understood, and these informal study sessions are commonly held in the dormitory rooms or on the verandas. This approach to learning emphasizes community-based education, where teaching and learning are interwoven with daily activities. While this peer-led teaching is not formally regulated, it is an expected and natural practice within the pesantren's culture.

"At PPMH Sidayu, the management of learning activities is informal and flexible, with responsibilities clearly understood by all involved. Tasks and activities are conveyed directly by the kiai or core administrators, without formal meetings or written records. Senior santri assist junior santri outside regular class hours, helping with basic lessons such as reading the *kitab kuning*. (I-K1, I-P2).

The management of time and space also follows an informal system. Dormitories and other spaces are used for a variety of activities, including pengajian and worship. Once one activity concludes, the space is quickly repurposed for the next event, according to the schedule. This system of space management operates on a rotational basis without a formal reservation system, ensuring that the needs of the pesantren are met flexibly and efficiently. The ease with which the space is used for multiple purposes reflects the pesantren's adaptive nature, where flexibility is key to maintaining smooth operations without bureaucratic constraints.

"This practice is expected and does not require formal regulation, reflecting the pesantren's tradition of peer-led learning. Changes to the *pengajian* schedule are typically announced informally, and adjustments are made in accordance with the kiai's instructions or other unforeseen circumstances. Formal written documentation for these activities is rare, and instead, everyone relies on habitual understanding and direct communication." (I-G4, I-HZ, I-AF).

Document analysis further supports these findings, revealing that the pesantren's management practices are largely informal and flexible. Although weekly schedules are available, they often reflect last-minute changes made at the kiai's direction or due to other circumstances. These changes are typically communicated verbally, with no written documentation. Moreover, the document analysis of the pesantren's operational guidelines reveals a distinct absence of formal rules for managing learning activities or overseeing the santri's duties. Instead, task distribution is

guided by shared understanding and experience. Administrators, ustadz, and senior santri all know their roles and responsibilities, which are communicated informally and carried out with little need for official paperwork.

In conclusion, the management of learning activities at PPMH Sidayu is defined by informality and flexibility. Decisions are made through direct communication, and roles are understood based on shared experience rather than formal documentation. This management style, integrated with daily routines and supported by informal task distribution, allows the pesantren to adapt quickly to changes and maintain a cohesive educational environment. The absence of formal records or structured systems does not hinder the effectiveness of the pesantren; instead, it fosters an adaptable, community-driven approach to governance and learning. These practices reflect a pesantren model that prioritizes personal relationships, flexible coordination, and an organic approach to managing educational activities within a dynamic, ever-changing environment.

**Table 2.** Summary of Research Findings

| Result   | Description   | Validation  |
|--|---|---|
| Strategies for the Selection and Exclusion of Learning Materials | The instructional kitab kuning is determined by the pesantren leadership ( <i>pengasub/keiai</i> ) and used continuously over time without a written curriculum or formal evaluation of learning materials. | <i>Observation:</i> Consistent use of the selected kitab kuning over the years without any alternative reading materials being discussed.<br><i>Interview:</i> Kiai and ustadz indicate that the selection of the kitab follows longstanding traditions and that no written curriculum exists.<br><i>Document:</i> No formal documents regarding curriculum planning were found.  |
| Discourse Structure and Mechanisms of Grade Normalization        | Learning takes place through <i>bandongan</i> and <i>sorogan</i> , with repeated oral assessments and no written examinations.  | <i>Observation:</i> Students engage in <i>bandongan</i> and <i>sorogan</i> learning methods, with oral assessments taking place in class.<br><i>Interview:</i> Ustadz confirmed that oral assessments are a key part of learning, and written exams are not used.<br><i>Document:</i> No written examinations or grading structures were found in the pesantren's records.  |
| Curriculum Distribution and Daily Pedagogical Practices          | Access to learning materials is differentiated based on length of residence ( <i>lama mondok</i> ), with learning embedded throughout the daily routines of pesantren life.                                 | <i>Observation:</i> Junior santri have restricted access to advanced kitab, while senior santri participate in more complex studies. Learning is integrated into daily routines, such as prayers and dormitory life.<br><i>Interview:</i> Senior santri are responsible for teaching junior santri outside class hours, reinforcing the embedded learning approach.<br><i>Document:</i> Daily schedules show no formal differentiation but emphasize integration with daily routines. |
| Managerial Practices and Everyday Coordination                   | Learning activities are managed through oral coordination and habitual role distribution, without written administrative procedures.  | <i>Observation:</i> No formal meetings or written records for coordinating learning activities; everything is done informally and verbally.<br><i>Interview:</i> Administrators and ustadz confirm that roles are based on habit, with tasks assigned orally.<br><i>Document:</i> No written organizational structure or official documentation outlining managerial procedures was found.  |

Source: Data Collection, 2025

## Discussion

### Curriculum as Lived Practice in Pesantren

The findings of this study demonstrate that the curriculum at PPMH Sidayu does not operate as a formally documented administrative apparatus but rather as a lived practice continuously enacted and reproduced through the everyday activities of the pesantren. The curriculum manifests in routine *pengajian*, oral evaluations, the habituation of learning discipline, and informal coordination among actors, processes that recur regularly and remain relatively stable over time. Accordingly, the curriculum cannot be understood merely as a set of instructional plans, but as a pattern of social practices that shape santri learning experiences daily (Foucault, 1995, 2008).

These findings resonate with the view that educational practices not only transmit knowledge but also shape ways of thinking and acting through habituation. (Bourdieu, 1990, 2013; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). However, instead of engaging with the concept of habitus at an abstract level, this study empirically demonstrates how such habituation unfolds in practice: santri learn when to be present, how to comport themselves during *pengajian*, how to receive correction, and how to interpret learning progress as something determined through oral recognition by teachers. All of this occurs without a written pedagogical contract, and precisely for that reason, these practices become effective and are rarely questioned (Foucault, 1995, 2008).

Understanding curriculum as lived practice also opens space for re-examining the fundamental differences between pesantren and modern formal educational institutions (Foucault, 1995, 2008). In much of mainstream curriculum scholarship, curriculum is positioned as a planning instrument that is rationally designed, documented, and auditable through administrative indicators. (Apple, 2019; Young, 2013). Within this framework, curriculum effectiveness is often measured by the alignment between planning, implementation, and evaluation. (Selvakumar et al., 2025). The findings of this study indicate that such logic is not fully applicable to traditional pesantren such as PPMH Sidayu.

In pesantren, curriculum stability does not depend on formal documentation, but on the continuity of practices and the consistency of social relations. The *kitab kuning* taught, the methods employed, and the patterns of evaluation are sustained through collective memory and recognized scholarly authority (Annisa & Jumari, 2024; Arif et al., 2025; Bruinessen, 1995). Thus, the curriculum is preserved not through bureaucratic procedures, but through the continuous reproduction of practice. This finding reinforces the argument that curriculum should be understood as a contextual and institutional phenomenon, rather than merely as a product of educational policy (Priestley et al., 2015).

Within this perspective, the authority of the kiai and ustadz plays a central role –not as curriculum managers in a technocratic sense, but as custodians of pedagogical continuity. Their authority is not expressed through written regulations but through everyday decisions accepted as extensions of tradition. This helps explain why santri rarely question existing learning structures: the curriculum is lived as “*naturally so*,” rather than as a system requiring formal rational justification. This approach also avoids reductive interpretations that portray pesantren as “*less modern*” or “*poorly managed*.” Instead, the study demonstrates that pesantren operate according to a different managerial rationality, in which flexibility, oral communication, and situational adjustment constitute sources of institutional stability. In this context, the absence of formal documentation is not a deficiency, but part of an institutional logic grounded in trust, shared experience, and moral legitimacy. (Scott, 2020).

Furthermore, conceptualizing curriculum as lived practice allows for a more sensitive analysis of santri experiences as learning subjects (Selvakumar et al., 2025). Santri do not merely receive instructional content; they also learn how to position themselves within pedagogical structures, how to read signs of learning adequacy, and how to interpret teachers' corrections and recognition. (Foucault, 1995, 2008). Accordingly, the principal contribution of this study lies in deepening empirical understanding of how the curriculum operates within traditional Islamic

education. The study demonstrates that theoretical frameworks on curriculum, practice, and learning must be read contextually to avoid overlooking forms of educational governance that operate outside the logic of modern administrative systems (Bourdieu, 1990, 2013; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

### **Discursive Ordering of Knowledge and Learning Trajectories**

The findings of this study indicate that the selection and exclusion of learning materials at PPMH Sidayu do not occur as a technical process designed through formal curriculum planning, but rather as practices institutionalized within tradition and enacted continuously over time. Certain *kitab kuning* are taught consistently across generations, while other sources never enter the learning horizon of santri, without any formal evaluation forum or explicit justification (Zamroni et al., 2024). This pattern suggests that curriculum selection is not understood as a contingent institutional decision, but as the continuation of established practices that are collectively accepted.

This practice can be understood as a form of discursive regulation of knowledge, in which the legitimacy of learning materials is determined not by formal pedagogical considerations or contemporary relevance, but by the authority of tradition and recognized scholarly figures. Following Foucault, discourse not only defines what can be said, but also what is deemed teachable and who is authorized to teach it (Foucault, 1980, 2013). In the pesantren context, when a *kitab kuning* is described as having been “*determined long ago*,” the selection of knowledge ceases to be an object of critical reflection. Instead, it becomes a habit reproduced through everyday practice (Neliwati et al., 2023; Selvakumar et al., 2025).

Importantly, this discursive regulation does not operate through explicit prohibitions or written regulations. Instead, it functions through the absence of articulated alternatives. *Kitab kuning* that are not taught are never openly declared “*forbidden*,” but remain absent from pedagogical practice (Young, 2013). Such a mechanism renders curricular boundaries invisible yet highly effective, because neither santri nor ustadz regard the selection of materials as requiring debate or justification (Neliwati et al., 2023). The findings show that access to particular forms of knowledge is differentiated by length of residence (*mondok*) and by the recognition of santri readiness by teaching authorities. Junior and senior santri are distinguished not only by levels of technical mastery but also by symbolic legitimacy to access certain kinds of knowledge (English & Larson, 1996).

These findings deepen discussions of the hidden curriculum by demonstrating that, in the pesantren context, what is “*hidden*” is not primarily the implicit values embedded behind formal instruction, as commonly discussed in studies of modern schooling. (Apple, 2019; Jackson, 1990). Instead, what remains hidden is the very mechanism of knowledge regulation itself how curricular boundaries are formed, maintained, and accepted without ever being articulated as rules. The curriculum operates as a discursive boundary that determines what is worth knowing, when knowledge may be accessed, and by whom, without requiring institutionalization in the form of written policy (Apple, 2019).

Accordingly, the contribution of this study lies in its empirical elucidation of how the regulation of knowledge and learning trajectories can operate stably outside the logic of modern curriculum planning (Evans et al., 2017). Rather than viewing the absence of syllabi and formal examinations as deficiencies, this research demonstrates that pesantren possess a distinct mode of curricular regulation grounded in tradition, scholarly authority, and the habituation of practice. This perspective enables a more contextualized reading of curriculum in traditional Islamic educational institutions, without reducing it to the managerial standards of modern education (J. Banks & Banks, 2016; Nieto & Bode, 2018).

## **Pedagogical Discourse, Evaluation, and Subject Formation**

The findings of this study indicate that pedagogical practices at PPMH Sidayu operate through highly structured and asymmetrical patterns of communication, particularly through the *bandongan* and *sorogan* methods. In *bandongan*, the *kiai* or *ustadz* functions as the central producer of meaning, while *santri* serve as attentive listeners who take notes and internalize explanations without interruption (Halimah et al., 2024). This one-way communicative structure is not merely a methodological choice; it constitutes a pedagogical horizon in which knowledge is understood as something transmitted from authority to learner rather than negotiated dialogically. In this sense, pedagogical discourse regulates not only what is learned, but also how *santri* position themselves within learning relations (Haq et al., 2022).

The *sorogan* practice reinforces this pattern through mechanisms of individual, immediate, and situational evaluation. *Santri* are assessed orally based on actual performance reading fluency, accuracy of meaning, and readiness to proceed to subsequent material- without written rubrics or formally documented standards. However, the absence of formal evaluative instruments does not imply the absence of standards (Ali & Bagley, 2015). On the contrary, evaluative criteria are internalized through repeated practice and the collective experience of *santri* in observing who is deemed “*fluent*,” “*adequate*,” or “*not yet ready*.” Evaluation, in this context, functions as a subtle regulatory mechanism in which the legitimacy of learning progression depends entirely on recognition from pedagogical authority (Selvakumar et al., 2025).

Theoretically, these findings suggest that pedagogical evaluation in the *pesantren* does not function as an administrative measurement tool, but rather as a practice of subject formation. *Santri* do not merely learn to meet academic criteria; they learn to read signals of authority, attune themselves to the rhythm of learning, and regulate their own readiness before appearing before an *ustadz* or *kiai*. This process resonates with Foucault’s notion of discipline as operating through normalization and micro-surveillance embedded in everyday practices, rather than through formal punishment or written regulation. (Foucault, 1982, 1995). Notably, the empirical findings demonstrate that these mechanisms operate in culturally specific forms, embedded in the ethos of *pesantren* life, rather than as explicitly designed technologies of power.

The affective dimensions accompanying evaluative practices such as nervousness before *sorogan* or relief after being declared correct constitute a crucial aspect of the process of subject formation. These emotional responses are not merely by-products of evaluation, but integral components of a pedagogy that operates through embodied experience and social relations. Through repeated affective experiences, *santri* learn to internalize learning standards and to monitor themselves even before being monitored by others. In this sense, disciplinary learning is not imposed externally, but develops as a form of self-regulation perceived as natural and necessary within *pesantren* life. These findings deepen understanding of how traditional pedagogies shape learning dispositions through affective and social experiences, rather than solely through cognitive transmission. This process aligns with Bourdieu’s concept of habitus, in which learning unfolds through habituation, embodied experience, and repeated social participation. (Bourdieu, 1990, 2013). It also resonates with perspectives that conceptualize learning as a situated social practice embedded in participation and community relations. (Lave & Wenger, 2016), which regulate ways of feeling, speaking, and acting (Bernstein, 2000).

Within the context of shaping the social dispositions of *santri*, these findings also open a dialogue with prior studies on multicultural education. Much of the literature emphasizes the importance of dialogical approaches, reflective pedagogy, and the explicit articulation of values such as tolerance within learning processes (J. Banks & Banks, 2016; Nieto & Bode, 2018). Such approaches generally assume that recognition of difference and the cultivation of multicultural dispositions emerge through open discussion and critical reflection. However, this finding expands the multicultural framework by demonstrating that, within traditional religious educational institutions, social values can be effectively transmitted through non-dialogical mechanisms institutionalized in everyday practice.

### **Everyday Governance and Institutional Stability**

The findings of this study demonstrate that the continuity of learning at PPMH Sidayu is sustained not by a formally documented governance system but by everyday managerial practices that are relational, situational, and habit-based (Apple, 2012). The coordination of learning activities, including the scheduling of pengajian, the allocation of teaching roles, and the adjustment of activities, is carried out through oral communication and shared understanding among institutional actors, without standardized written procedures. However, the absence of formal administrative instruments does not indicate weak institutional governance. Instead, it points to a form of everyday governance that operates effectively through social relations and recognized authority (Apple, 2019).

This informal mode of management enables the pesantren to respond rapidly and adaptively to change. When schedule adjustments, additional activities, or urgent needs arise, decisions can be made directly by the kiai or communicated through internal networks without multilayered bureaucratic processes (J. Banks & Banks, 2016). Institutional actors do not interpret such changes as violations of rules, but as inherent to the dynamics of pesantren life. Flexibility, therefore, is not perceived as uncertainty but as a mode of operation that ensures the continuity of learning activities (J. A. Banks, 2011). These findings suggest that institutional stability does not necessarily depend on procedural standardization or formal regulation. In the context of PPMH Sidayu, stability is produced through the reproduction of habitual practices and implicit shared understandings continuously enacted by institutional actors.

This observation aligns with perspectives that conceptualize traditional educational organizations as social systems governed by norms, symbols, and relations of trust rather than solely by administrative structures. (Scott, 2020). However, this study goes further by demonstrating how such informal governance operates at the micro level of everyday practice. Pesantren stability does not emerge from procedural consistency, but from relational consistency, who speaks, how decisions are conveyed, and how other actors adjust without requiring formal clarification. In this context, practice-based governance functions as a regulatory mechanism that is not always visible but highly effective. Coordination practices grounded in shared experience and institutional loyalty enable the pesantren to sustain pedagogical continuity over the long term (Amin et al., 2021; Halimah et al., 2024).

This analysis enriches discussions on Islamic educational management by demonstrating that managerial effectiveness is not always proportional to the degree of administrative formalization (Nuryana & Sirojuddin, 2025). In the pesantren context, it is precisely institutionalized informal practices embedded in habit, personal authority, and collective understanding that allow the institution to endure and function consistently. By foregrounding these mechanisms, the study shifts analytical attention from narratives of “*system absence*” toward an understanding of alternative systems that operate through everyday practice (Shofiyyah et al., 2023).

These findings also contribute to broader discussions on Islamic educational management, which have primarily focused on leadership, curriculum planning, and the organization of learning within administrative and instructional frameworks (Bush, 2014; Hallinger, 2011; Nasir & Rijal, 2020). While this literature provides valuable insights into formal managerial structures and systematic planning mechanisms, the practices at PPMH Sidayu demonstrate that curriculum and learning management can operate effectively through informal coordination, oral communication, and the symbolic legitimacy of the kiai, without reliance on written administrative apparatuses. Accordingly, this study does not reject existing managerial approaches (Apple, 2019; Nugroho & Munawwaroh, 2024).

**Table 3.** Summary of Theoretical Analysis

| Findings   | Theory Analysis  | Novelty   |
|--|--|---|
| Pesantren Curriculum as Social Practice                                    | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The curriculum in pesantren operates as a social practice internalized in the daily life of the santri, rather than as an administrative document or a formal pedagogical system.</li> <li>2. This implies that power relations in pesantren are shaped by practices that unfold routinely and openly within social life, without relying on formal structures.</li> </ol> <p>Foucault (1995, 2008) ; Bourdieu (1990, 2013).</p>                   | Curriculum as a social practice that integrates Foucault's theory of power into the educational practices of pesantren. It shows that the pesantren curriculum functions in the social space as a mechanism of knowledge regulation through internalized power relations.                   |
| Regulation of Knowledge through Symbolic Power                             | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Knowledge taught in pesantren is controlled by the pesantren authorities (kiai and ustadz) through symbolic power, rather than based on contemporary relevance or formal pedagogical considerations.</li> <li>2. The pesantren curriculum, including the selection of traditional Islamic texts (kitab kuning), is part of the relational power that is not recorded in formal documents.</li> </ol> <p>Foucault (1980, 2013); Bourdieu (1990)</p> | Regulation of knowledge through symbolic power, where the authority of the kiai becomes the primary source in selecting instructional materials. It demonstrates hidden power in curriculum management, regulating what can be taught and who has the right to learn it.                    |
| Managerial Practices Based on Personal Authority and Informal Coordination | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Curriculum management and learning activities in pesantren are carried out through informal coordination and direct communication between kiai and ustadz, without using formal administrative structures.</li> <li>2. Decisions regarding the curriculum and schedule are made in a very flexible manner, emphasizing relational power among individuals.</li> </ol> <p>Foucault (1995, 2008); Mintzberg (1979)</p>                               | Curriculum management based on personal authority and flexible coordination, demonstrating how relational power regulates not only teaching but also decision-making in managerial processes accepted within the pesantren culture, without formal documentation.                           |
| Education Integrated into Daily Life                                       | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Learning does not only take place in formal classrooms but is also integrated into the daily social life of santri through peer-to-peer interactions between senior and junior santri.</li> <li>2. This learning is conducted without time constraints, blending social life with the educational process.</li> </ol> <p>Lave &amp; Wenger (1991); Foucault (1995, 2008); Bandura (1977)</p>   | Integration of curriculum with social life, highlighting how curriculum management in pesantren is influenced by social relationships and power inseparable from daily activities, and showing how pesantren education is managed through social interactions outside the formal classroom. |

Source: Data Collection, 2025

## CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that the curriculum at Pesantren PPMH Sidayu is not a formalized, written system but rather a lived social practice that is continuously enacted through the daily routines of santri. The research reveals that the curriculum operates through symbolic power and relational authority, where decisions about what to teach, who has access to specific knowledge, and how learning progresses are determined by the kiai and ustadz, rooted in long-established traditions. Unlike in modern formal education systems, knowledge transmission in this pesantren is regulated not by written syllabi or standardized assessments, but through habitual practices and social norms embedded in everyday life. Moreover, the formation of multicultural character in santri occurs not through critical dialogue but through the institutionalization of values such as tolerance and respect for diversity, which are instilled through normative habituation and social discipline.

However, this research has certain limitations that should be addressed in future studies. First, the study focuses solely on Pesantren PPMH Sidayu, limiting the generalizability of the findings to other pesantren or traditional educational institutions with different organizational structures. Further research could expand this study to include multiple pesantren from various regions, allowing for a broader comparison of how curriculum management and power relations function across different cultural and social contexts. Future studies could also explore how modernization and digitalization are influencing traditional educational institutions such as pesantren, particularly in balancing the preservation of traditional practices with the adoption of new educational technologies. Lastly, examining the perspectives of the santri themselves on how they perceive and experience these power dynamics could offer a more comprehensive understanding of how authority and knowledge are internalized in these settings.

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