

Modern Islamic Boarding Schools as Pillars of Contemporary Islamic Education: A Historical Review and Curriculum at Dayah

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Abstract

As one of the oldest forms of Islamic education in the archipelago, dayah has undergone significant transformations in response to the challenges of the times. This study examines the historical and curricular role of Dayah Modern Darul Ulum YPUI Banda Aceh as a pillar of adaptive and progressive contemporary Islamic education. The research was conducted using a qualitative approach through historical methods and field studies, including interviews, observations, and institutional documentation. The results of the study show that the transformation of the education system in this dayah includes the integration of classical Islamic knowledge (kitab kuning) and the national curriculum, participatory collective leadership, and adaptation to formal education regulations such as Law No. 18 of 2019 and Qanun Aceh No. 9 of 2018. The curriculum is designed holistically with a thematic approach and the instilling of values of adab. The educational process takes place not only in the classroom but also through boarding school care, spiritual activities, and alumni involvement. The important findings of this study confirm that the integrative model applied not only preserves the authenticity of Islamic scholarly traditions, but also strengthens the competitiveness of graduates in facing the demands of the 21st century. The active participation of alumni and legal legitimacy through state policies show that modern dayahs are able to synergize with the national education system without losing their cultural identity.

Abstrak

Sebagai salah satu bentuk pendidikan Islam tertua di Nusantara, dayah mengalami transformasi signifikan dalam menjawab tantangan zaman. Studi ini mengkaji secara historis dan kurikuler peran Dayah Modern Darul Ulum YPUI Banda Aceh sebagai pilar pendidikan Islam kontemporer yang adaptif dan progresif. Penelitian dilakukan dengan pendekatan kualitatif melalui metode historis dan studi lapangan, termasuk wawancara, observasi, serta dokumentasi institusional. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa transformasi sistem pendidikan di dayah ini mencakup integrasi antara ilmu keislaman klasik (kitab kuning) dan kurikulum nasional, kepemimpinan kolektif yang partisipatif, serta adaptasi terhadap regulasi pendidikan formal seperti UU No. 18 Tahun 2019 dan Qanun Aceh No. 9 Tahun 2018. Kurikulum dirancang secara holistik dengan pendekatan tematik dan penanaman nilai-nilai adab. Proses pendidikan berlangsung tidak hanya di kelas, tetapi juga melalui pengasuhan asrama, kegiatan spiritual, dan pelibatan alumni. Temuan penting penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa model integratif yang diterapkan tidak hanya menjaga otentisitas tradisi keilmuan Islam, tetapi juga memperkuat daya saing lulusan dalam menghadapi tuntutan abad ke-21. Partisipasi aktif alumni dan legitimasi hukum melalui kebijakan negara memperlihatkan bahwa dayah modern mampu bersinergi dengan sistem pendidikan nasional tanpa kehilangan identitas kulturalnya. Temuan ini berimplikasi pada penguatan posisi dayah sebagai model pendidikan Islam berkelanjutan yang relevan, inklusif, dan siap menghadapi dinamika global.

Kata kunci:

Dayah Modern,
Pendidikan Islam,
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INTRODUCTION

Aceh is known as one of the oldest centers of Islamic education in the archipelago through its *dayah* institutions, which have played a key role in the transmission of religious knowledge, the creation of scholars, and the formation of a pious character in society since the days of the Islamic kingdom (Mariyati, Arif, & Wardi, 2024; Mildawati & Rama, 2024). In addition to their spiritual contributions, *dayah* institutions have also served as social hubs in the post-conflict reconstruction process and the strengthening of moderate Muslim identity (Munandar & Susanti, 2025; Sahlan, 2023). This makes the transformation of *dayah* a crucial issue because it not only involves changes in the learning model, but also determines the relevance of Islamic education in preparing young generations to face the demands of modern society. The urgency of this study lies in showing how *dayah* can remain rooted in tradition while responding to contemporary challenges through curriculum integration, leadership reform, and cultural adaptation.

The transformation of *dayah* institutions, especially in the post-tsunami and post-peace era in Aceh, marks a systematic institutional change: from funding models, curricula, to institutional management (Putra, 2021; Razali, Nafis, & Nasir, 2024). Empirical evidence shows that the modernization of these institutions has not eroded the religious climate but rather enriched their role in contemporary Islamic education (Abdullah, 2020; Azra, 2019). Previous studies have discussed the modernization of *dayah* in general, such as curriculum integration (Ilyasin, 2020; Zuhdi, 2014), internalization of Islamic moderation (Samsul Arifin, 2023), and the adoption of digital technology in Aceh's *dayah* (Nasution, Wildan, Anzaikhan, & Faidi, 2024). However, most of these works focus on conceptual discussions or broad policy reviews. What has not been sufficiently addressed is the in-depth analysis of how a specific *dayah*—Darul Ulum YPUI Banda Aceh—transforms through historical, curricular, leadership, and legal perspectives in an integrative manner. This gap becomes the novelty of this research.

In the context of curriculum change, a study by (Samsul Arifin, 2023) emphasizes the importance of internalizing Islamic moderation values in *dayah* learning through formal, extracurricular, and hidden curricula. This internalization not only shapes the character of *santri* to be tolerant and inclusive but also strengthens contextual Islamic identity in a multicultural society. This is similar to the integrative approach that harmonizes religious and general education, as proposed by (Ilyasin, 2020) and (Zuhdi, 2014), who argue that the success of contemporary Islamic education lies in its ability to balance and systematically integrate classical scholarly dimensions with the needs of the modern era.

Dayah Modern Darul Ulum YPUI Banda Aceh serves as a concrete example of the trend toward transforming Islamic boarding schools into a more modern and integrative educational system. Several indicators demonstrate concrete efforts to integrate traditional Islamic texts with general subjects such as mathematics, English, and ICT into a competency-based curriculum, supported by modern educational facilities such as laboratories and entrepreneurship training. Institutional legalization and formal recognition of diplomas also reflect efforts to align with national regulations.

Therefore, the specific purpose of this article is to analyze the historical process, curriculum model, leadership strategies, and cultural as well as legal relevance of the transformation at *Dayah Modern Darul Ulum YPUI Banda Aceh*. Unlike previous studies that only highlighted one aspect (e.g., curriculum, policy, or leadership), this article provides a comprehensive analysis combining historical, curricular, managerial, and socio-cultural dimensions.

This narrative is in line with (Wildan, 2022) findings, which confirm that many dayahs in Aceh have incorporated the general curriculum into the traditional system to create a balance between religious education and modern science. Furthermore, (Nasution et al., 2024) identifies the adaptation of pedagogical methods and technology as key elements in the renewal of dayah learning models in Aceh, which opens up space for santri to develop social, digital, and entrepreneurial skills. A literature review of the national context reinforces that the integration of religious and general education through a balanced curriculum approach is a widely developing strategy in modern Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia. This is in line with the studies by (Kardi, Basri, Suhartini, & Meliani, 2023), (Ilyasin, 2020), and (Rahman & Syahminan, 2024), which all note the importance of competency-based curricula and harmony between religious and general knowledge in shaping santri character and their readiness to face contemporary challenges.

Furthermore, a systematic literature review by (Ibda et al., 2023) identified various ideological networks of Islamic education in Aceh that influence the curriculum and governance of dayah. The approach to values and ideology greatly determines the curriculum model and learning style in Islamic educational institutions. Transformational leadership by *teungku* (religious leaders) is an important factor in the modernization process of dayah. Studies by (Kardi et al., 2023) and (Ilyasin, 2020) show that a proactive collective leadership model enables dayah not only to survive but also to become increasingly relevant in the national education system.

Research on the transformation of the dayah education curriculum confirms that the curriculum in modern dayah is no longer purely transmissional, but has moved towards a transformative approach (Husen & Rusli, 2024). This curriculum is designed to shape the behavior and character of students through direct involvement in a holistic learning process, including 24-hour boarding school life and a competency-based evaluation system. This approach reflects a systematic effort to integrate cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects in a balanced manner within contemporary Islamic education (Khaira, Syamsuddin, Nursanjaya, & Mauludi, 2023). In Aceh, regulations such as Qanun Aceh No. 9 of 2018 and Law No. 18 of 2019 provide structural and legal legitimacy for the formal integration of dayah into the national education system (Nasir, Rizal, Basri, & Pabbajah, 2024). These policies include the recognition of dayah diplomas, institutional accreditation, and the development of an integrative curriculum.

However, this transformation process faces challenges: internal resistance to change, limitations in digitization, the dominance of one-way lecture methodologies, and a lack of synergy between dayahs (Mudiono, 2025; Sutrisno, Hayati, Saputra, Arifin, & Kartiko, 2023). Building on these challenges, this study positions itself to fill a crucial gap in the literature by providing an in-depth case analysis of Dayah Modern Darul Ulum YPUI Banda Aceh. Specifically, the article aims to examine the history of institutional transformation, the implementation of an integrative curriculum, and the leadership strategies that support change, while also identifying the supporting and inhibiting factors encountered. Furthermore, it explores the cultural relevance and legal foundations that legitimize modern dayah within the national education system.

Accordingly, this study seeks to test the argument that the transformation of dayah is not a departure from tradition but rather a form of contextual adaptation that strengthens their relevance in both the national and global educational landscapes. By analyzing Darul Ulum YPUI Banda Aceh, this article demonstrates that modern dayah can operate as adaptive educational institutions—integrating classical Islamic scholarship, contemporary competencies, participatory leadership, and legal

legitimacy – while simultaneously preserving their religious values and Acehese cultural identity.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a historical method to trace the dynamics of the transformation of the education system at Dayah Modern Darul Ulum YPUI Banda Aceh. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore the process of change chronologically and contextually based on narrative experiences and institutional documents (Creswell, 2019; Moleong, 2017). Data was collected through in-depth, purposive interviews with eight key informants, including the dayah leadership (*teungku*), senior teachers, alumni, and policymakers. Additionally, data was gathered through direct observation at the dayah location and a review of curriculum documents, institutional profile books, activity archives, and other academic documents. This approach was chosen to reconstruct the entire process of educational transformation, including institutional structure, curriculum models, and managerial strategies.

Data analysis techniques use (Miles & Huberman, 1994) interactive model, which consists of three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification. This model is considered appropriate in qualitative research because it is able to capture social complexity and the meaning behind institutional change. To maintain the validity and reliability of the data, this study applies source and method triangulation techniques, which involve comparing the results of interviews, documents, and observations to ensure the consistency and reliability of the findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Patton, 2002). With this approach, the study is expected to provide a comprehensive picture of how Dayah Darul Ulum positions itself as a modern Islamic educational institution that remains rooted in Islamic values and local Acehese traditions.

RESULTS

History and Process of Educational Transformation

The transformation of Dayah Modern Darul Ulum YPUI Banda Aceh began in 2006 with the establishment of *Madrasah Aliyah Keagamaan (MAK)* under the Ministry of Religious Affairs. A founder explained, “*Kami mendirikan MAK agar santri tidak hanya belajar kitab kuning, tetapi juga memiliki ijazah formal untuk melanjutkan kuliah dan bersaing di dunia modern*” (Interview, Founder, July 2025). This marked the transition from a purely traditional system based on *halaqah* and classical texts to one that incorporated formal certification. Institutional documentation such as the profile book confirmed this change, noting that “the introduction of MAK in 2006 marked the formalization of the dayah system” (Institutional Profile, 2025). Gradual consolidation took place internally, with teacher training and structural adjustments to ensure that the integration could run smoothly. Observations revealed physical evidence of this change, including dedicated classrooms, structured timetables, and academic information boards – features typically absent from traditional dayah but common in formal madrasahs.

These findings highlight that the transformation did not happen abruptly but evolved through continuous adaptation. Teachers were gradually trained, curricula were aligned with both national standards and Islamic scholarly traditions, and students began to receive dual exposure to religious and general education. Field notes from observations in August 2025 described how lessons shifted between classical text recitations in the evening and structured school subjects during the day. Such evidence

demonstrates that the transformation of Dayah Darul Ulum is both systemic and cultural, reshaping the daily rhythm of education while maintaining its spiritual foundation.

Integrative Curriculum Model

The curriculum at Dayah Darul Ulum reflects an integrative model that merges Islamic sciences with modern general subjects. The head of the madrasah stated, “*Santri harus menguasai Fiqih, Tafsir, dan Hadis, tetapi juga wajib bisa matematika, bahasa Inggris, dan komputer. Kami ingin mereka siap menghadapi abad 21*” (Interview, Head of Madrasah, August 2025). Classroom observations on August 3, 2025, illustrated this dual system, where students studied mathematics in the morning before reciting *Tafsir Jalalain* in the evening. This integrative approach is supported by curriculum documentation that introduces thematic (*maudu’i*) topics, such as environmental stewardship framed with Qur’anic values, ensuring that religious and general education are interwoven rather than taught separately. Evaluations take multiple forms – oral, written, and practical – reflecting the holistic nature of learning expected in the dayah.

The implementation of this curriculum illustrates how the institution seeks to balance intellectual and spiritual growth. Observations revealed that beyond cognitive development, learning in Dayah Darul Ulum emphasized moral values and contextual understanding of social issues. Internal documents noted curriculum themes that explicitly connected modern challenges – such as technology use and environmental care – to Islamic ethics. This indicates that the integrative curriculum is not merely a combination of subject matter but a deliberate framework that unites affective, cognitive, and psychomotor learning into a coherent whole, preparing santri with both religious integrity and contemporary competence.

Transformational Leadership Strategy

The transformation at Dayah Darul Ulum was also sustained by a participatory and collective leadership style. A senior teacher explained, “*Setiap keputusan kurikulum dan pembangunan fasilitas selalu dimusyawarahkan. Tidak ada yang diputuskan sepihak oleh pimpinan dayah*” (Interview, Senior Teacher, August 2025). Leaders consistently sought consensus with teachers, alumni, and senior students, ensuring inclusivity and shared ownership of institutional direction. Alumni participation further reinforced this process. One alumnus testified, “*Kami kembali ke dayah untuk mengajar dan melatih santri di bidang teknologi dan kewirausahaan*” (Interview, Alumnus, July 2025). Archival records of alumni activities documented their role in entrepreneurship training, ICT workshops, and Arabic-English language reinforcement programs.

This participatory approach not only strengthened institutional legitimacy but also broadened the resources available for transformation. Alumni donations supported infrastructure upgrades, while their expertise helped modernize teaching methods. Observations during alumni-led sessions highlighted active mentorship in areas such as digital literacy and small-business management, confirming their role as agents of change. These practices show that transformational leadership at Dayah Darul Ulum is not centered on a single figure but emerges from a collective synergy between leaders, teachers, and alumni, ensuring sustainability of innovation and adaptation.

Factors Supporting and Hindering Transformation

The transformation of the institution has been driven by strong internal and external support systems. Administrative staff noted that “*Sejak MAK berdiri, jumlah pendaftar meningkat setiap tahun, itu tanda masyarakat percaya dengan kualitas dayah ini*” (Interview, Administrative Staff, August 2025). Institutional records support this, showing a steady growth in student admissions over the past two decades, reflecting expanding community trust. Interviews also revealed that visionary leadership and alumni support were critical in maintaining momentum. Alumni networks provided financial and intellectual capital, while the community reinforced legitimacy through consistent enrollment demand.

Despite these strengths, obstacles remain significant. The head of facilities admitted, “*Laboratorium kami sangat terbatas, komputer hanya beberapa unit, ini belum memadai untuk pembelajaran berbasis IT*” (Interview, Head of Facilities, August 2025). Older teachers trained in the traditional system also struggled with competency-based methods. One teacher confessed, “*Kami terbiasa mengajar dengan metode ceramah, sulit beralih ke pendekatan saintifik*” (Interview, Teacher, August 2025). Observations confirmed the persistence of lecture-dominated classrooms in certain subjects. These findings indicate that while institutional transformation has been broadly successful, infrastructural limitations and human resource readiness remain critical challenges that require long-term investment.

Cultural and Legal Relevance

Field observations revealed that local traditions remain deeply woven into daily life at the dayah. Students frequently conversed in Acehnese and Arabic, while practices such as hand-kissing teachers after class exemplified respect and continuity of *adab*. A teacher emphasized, “*Ilmu bukan hanya kognitif, tetapi juga adab. Santri belajar sopan santun melalui contoh langsung*” (Interview, Teacher of Religious Education, August 2025). These practices demonstrate that spiritual and moral transmission continues to complement formal education, ensuring that modernization does not erode the cultural essence of the dayah.

At the same time, the institution enjoys strong legal legitimacy. Official documents confirmed its recognition by the Ministry of Religion through an operational decree and accreditation. The curriculum also aligns with regulatory frameworks such as Qanun Aceh No. 9 of 2018 and Law No. 18 of 2019 on Islamic Boarding Schools, which legally embed dayah within the national education system. This dual recognition—cultural authenticity and legal formality—positions Dayah Darul Ulum as a hybrid model: firmly rooted in tradition while simultaneously integrated into the national framework. These findings highlight that transformation in Aceh’s modern dayah is not a zero-sum game between tradition and modernity, but rather a synthesis where both coexist and reinforce one another.

DISCUSSION

The analysis of this research aims to interpret empirical data obtained through interviews, observations, and documentation on the transformation of the education system at Dayah Modern Darul Ulum YPUI Banda Aceh, with reference to the theoretical framework of contemporary Islamic education. This analysis is conducted to explain the dynamics occurring in the process of reforming traditional Islamic educational institutions, particularly in responding to the challenges of modernity, educational legality, and increasingly complex societal demands. Field findings indicate

that the transformation at this dayah is not merely administrative or curricular in nature but also reflects a paradigm shift in perspectives toward knowledge, leadership roles, and community participation. The dayah is no longer merely a traditional place for studying classical texts but has transformed into a modern educational institution that integrates Islamic values with contemporary academic needs. In this context, the dayah does not lose its religious identity but expands the scope of its role and functions as an adaptive and relevant pillar of Islamic education.

To that end, this section presents five main areas of analysis: transformation of the education system, integrative curriculum models, leadership and participation, supporting and inhibiting factors, and cultural and legal relevance. Each aspect is analyzed in depth by discussing empirical data and literature reviews, in order to map the significant contributions of Dayah Darul Ulum in the development of the contemporary Islamic education system in Aceh and Indonesia in general.

Transformation of the Dayah Education System

The transformation of the education system at Dayah Modern Darul Ulum YPUI Banda Aceh shows a paradigmatic shift from a traditional system based on classical recitation to a more systematic educational structure that is accommodative to the needs of the times. This change is not only managerial but also philosophical, in that religious knowledge is no longer positioned dichotomously against general knowledge but is integrated into a single, comprehensive learning ecosystem.

This transformation is a manifestation of the adaptation process of traditional Islamic institutions to the modern social context, as emphasized by (Azra, 2019) that Islamic education in Indonesia has a tendency to continue to engage in dialogue with social change without losing its historical identity. In this context, the transformation of dayah is not a form of ideological compromise, but an expression of institutional *ijtihad* that recognizes the urgency of the institution's relevance in the national education system (Abdullah, 2020). Furthermore, the changes made by Dayah Darul Ulum also show that modernization in the context of Islamic education does not necessarily mean secularization, but rather the recontextualization of Islamic values within a dynamic social framework (Ridwan & Restu, 2023).

This transformation took place gradually and involved various institutional aspects, ranging from vision and mission planning, leadership structure, to curriculum renewal and learning strategies. Interviews with dayah leaders revealed that this change began with an internal awareness of the importance of graduate competitiveness and the demands of the times, which require additional competencies beyond mastery of classical Islamic knowledge. Thus, the renewal is not merely a reaction to external policies, but stems from critical reflection on the real needs of *santri* and society. Concrete evidence of this transformation is seen in the implementation of a national curriculum-based learning system integrated with the teaching of classical Islamic texts, the use of technology in learning, and the development of character education rooted in Islamic values. Field observations also note that students engage in learning processes not only in the classroom but through intensive mentoring in dormitories, evening discussion forums, and religious activities that strengthen their spiritual and social dimensions.

This transformation of the education system also proves that Islamic boarding schools or dayahs have the structural and cultural flexibility to continue to develop without losing their identity. As (Hefner, 2008) said, the main strength of traditional Islamic education lies in its ability to remain contextual with social realities without

having to abandon the core values that have been passed down from generation to generation. In the context of Dayah Darul Ulum, this is manifested in the harmony between institutional modernization and the preservation of scholarly traditions based on sanad and adab.

Integrative Curriculum and Holistic Educational Approach

The integrative curriculum model implemented at Dayah Darul Ulum brings together two poles of knowledge: Islamic tradition based on classical texts and modern knowledge based on the national curriculum. This approach reflects an educational model that not only transfers knowledge but also shapes character and internalizes spiritual, intellectual, and social values comprehensively. As explained by (Al-Attas, 1991), ideal Islamic education is one that can create civilized human beings (*insan adabi*) through the integration of knowledge and values. This integrative approach is also in line with (Zuhdi, 2014) view, which emphasizes that Islamic education must free students from the epistemological dichotomy that has long hindered the formation of a complete Muslim personality. The model applied in this Islamic boarding school demonstrates that Islamic education can be designed as an integrated education system, where affective, cognitive, and psychomotor dimensions proceed in tandem. Meanwhile, (Ilyasin, 2020) research shows that students who follow an integrative education system have a higher tendency to think critically, be flexible in facing challenges, and be able to respond to contemporary issues argumentatively. This is evidence that the integration of religious and general education is not only possible but also strategic in responding to educational challenges in the global era.

The integrative curriculum at Dayah Modern Darul Ulum is not only present in the form of combining religious and general subject matter, but also in the perspective and educational philosophy that animates it. Interviews with curriculum teachers reveal that every general subject, such as mathematics, Indonesian language, and science, is always contextualized within the framework of Islamic values. Teachers are required not only to convey cognitive content but also to connect instructional materials with ethical, moral, and spiritual aspects. For example, science education is always linked to the concept of tawhid and the grandeur of Allah's creation, while language lessons emphasize the development of polite and etiquette-based communication.

Field observations also show that the educational process takes place not only in the classroom, but also through boarding school programs, evening religious gatherings, communal worship practices, and santri outreach programs to the community (Iskamar, A'la, & Damanhuri, 2025; Jasminto & Rofi'ah, 2025; Mutammam et al., 2024). All of these activities complement each other in shaping santri who are not only intellectually intelligent, but also spiritually and socially mature. This affirms the Islamic education model based on ta'dib, where the ultimate goal of education is not merely knowledge but also moral character (Syamsul Arifin, Utama, Aryani, Prayitno, & Waston, 2023; Kuncorowati, Handayani, & Subekti, 2025; Srinio, Muslihun, & Usman, 2025; Srinio, Sholihah, & Sebgag, 2025; Turmuzi, Pahmi, Suryani, & Mazani, 2024). Furthermore, the integrated curriculum at this Islamic boarding school also employs a thematic (*maudu'i*) approach in organizing learning. In this case, major themes such as the environment, social justice, or leadership are raised as the main framework connecting various disciplines. This model allows students to think across disciplines and develop sensitivity to current issues from an Islamic perspective. An interview with the head of the curriculum department mentioned that this approach is designed to foster critical

and solution-oriented thinking from an early age, without separating religious and worldly knowledge.

Thus, the integrative curriculum and holistic approach implemented by Dayah Darul Ulum YPUI Banda Aceh is an innovation that grounds Islamic values in a relevant, applicable, and visionary education system. This proves that Islamic boarding schools or dayahs have the capacity to design modern Islamic education without being detached from their traditional scholarly roots.

Collective Leadership and Community Involvement

The transformation of the education system at Dayah Darul Ulum is also inseparable from an open, participatory, and sustainability-oriented leadership style. The dayah leadership does not position itself as the sole source of authority, but rather opens up inclusive consultation spaces with teachers, senior students, and alumni. This is an important indicator that transformative leadership is not always charismatic, but rather about the ability to build consensus, set an example, and make change a collective agenda (Bass & Riggio, 2006). The presence of alumni as part of strengthening institutional transformation also emphasizes the importance of social networks in building adaptive Islamic educational institutions. Alumni play a role in curriculum development, extracurricular activities, and infrastructure funding. This phenomenon aligns with the concept of network-based education governance as proposed by (Hart & Rodgers, 2024), where the success of an educational institution is not only determined by internal strength but also by its external connections.

Collective leadership at Dayah Darul Ulum YPUI Banda Aceh is demonstrated through a structure that is not rigidly hierarchical, but rather collaborative and deliberative. Interviews with dayah leaders revealed that every important policy, whether in curriculum management or institutional governance, is always discussed in the teachers' council and alumni deliberative forums. These forums serve as participatory spaces where input from various stakeholders forms the basis for collective decision-making. This model aligns with the concept of transformational leadership, which focuses on long-term vision, collective empowerment, and cultural change (Heriyono, 2024; Malokani et al., 2024). In practice, dayah leaders also give senior students and teachers ample space to lead certain units such as dormitory supervision, student organizations, and tahfidz training. This builds a sense of responsibility, independence, and internal leadership that is hierarchical and continuous.

Meanwhile, alumni involvement is not merely symbolic, but an active element in the institutional strengthening strategy. Alumni contribute in various areas: accompanying santri activities, mentoring entrepreneurship skills, and assisting in external cooperation networks with government agencies or other educational institutions. Field observations indicate that alumni who have achieved success in various sectors – academia, bureaucracy, and business – continue to maintain close ties with the dayah and frequently participate in development programs. Synergy between internal and external leadership through the alumni network strengthens the dayah's social legitimacy while enhancing its adaptability to change. This demonstrates that institutional transformation does not rely solely on formal structural strength but also on social capital built on trust and loyalty across generations. From an Islamic education management perspective, such patterns reflect the principles of *syura* and *ukhuwah* as the foundation of sustainable collective management.

Supporting and Hindering Factors

The success of the educational system transformation at Dayah Darul Ulum is reinforced by a number of internal factors such as visionary leadership, alumni support, and a santri culture that is open to change. Externally, government regulations such as the Law on Islamic Boarding Schools and the Aceh Education Regulation serve as the legal framework underpinning the legality and legitimacy of these changes. However, challenges remain, particularly regarding human resource readiness. Some teachers with traditional backgrounds face difficulties adapting to competency-based curriculum approaches. Additionally, limitations in facilities and infrastructure pose their own challenges, especially in the development of technology-based learning and exact sciences (Enes, Asha, & Wanto, 2024; Rohmadi, Rahmat, & Ardianto, 2024). These constraints indicate that educational transformation is not sufficient at the conceptual level alone but requires systemic support in terms of funding, training, and institutional management (Fawzi, Kadarsyah, & Sutarsih, 2024).

The transformation of education at Dayah Darul Ulum YPUI Banda Aceh is the result of a complex interaction between internal forces and external pressures that support each other. Among the most dominant internal factors are visionary leadership that fosters collective participation, as well as strong support from the alumni network. Interviews with the dayah leadership reveal that strategic decisions, including curriculum changes, teacher training, and facility improvements, always begin with collective deliberation involving both internal and external stakeholders. This pattern reflects the character of transformational leadership, as described by (Northouse, 2014), namely a leadership style that is able to inspire change, build trust, and strengthen collective spirit in educational organizations.

In addition, the presence of alumni spread across various sectors is an important driver in providing financial resources and opening up external networks. As shown by (Mutammam et al., 2024; Yamin, Basri, Suhartini, & Meliani, 2023; Yanto, Meliana, Rosodor, Saifullah, & Etikoh, 2025; Yasin, Yaqin, & Pramuja, 2025), pesantren alumni have high loyalty to their original institutions and tend to be actively involved in institutional development, whether through funding, training, or policy advocacy. Observations at Dayah Darul Ulum also show that the construction of laboratories and multimedia rooms was an initiative of alumni who recognized the need for modern facilities to support the learning process. From a regulatory perspective, the existence of Law No. 18 of 2019 on Pesantren and Aceh Qanun No. 9 of 2018 on the Implementation of Education serves as a legal framework that strengthens the legitimacy of modern dayah to innovate their curricula and obtain state recognition. This underscores the importance of policy in supporting institutional transformation, as (Salamah, 2025) argues that sustainable educational reform is only possible if supported by policy governance that is responsive to local dynamics.

However, several obstacles still loom over this transformation process. One of the main obstacles is the limited competence of teachers in mastering competency-based learning approaches. Based on interviews with several older teachers who are graduates of traditional Islamic boarding schools, it was found that they experience difficulties in designing syllabi, managing formative assessments, and applying scientific approaches in learning. This condition is in line with the findings of (Kusumawati & Nurfuadi, 2024), who stated that the transition from a traditional to a modern system requires significant investment in ongoing teacher training.

Another limitation lies in infrastructure and technology. Although some facilities have been updated, most classrooms have not been integrated with digital technology. This hinders the implementation of digital media-based learning and laboratory practices in line with national curriculum requirements. In this context, institutional capacity theory, as explained by (Wang, Chen, & Li, 2024), emphasizes the importance of infrastructure support as a vital element in the success of educational transformation. Furthermore, changes to the curriculum and evaluation system also face cultural resistance from some groups who still adhere to traditional teaching models. Some teachers and guardians still view the integration of general subjects as a compromise with the secular system. However, as explained by (Jamil, 2021), the process of modernizing Islamic education does not mean eliminating the substance of tradition, but rather transforming it into a contextual and relevant form.

Overall, the challenges faced by Dayah Darul Ulum emphasize that educational transformation requires a holistic approach. It is not enough to simply change policies or curricula; it must also be accompanied by strengthening human resource capacity, ensuring infrastructure availability, and consolidating cultural cohesion within the Islamic educational community. Sustainable transformation requires a change management strategy that simultaneously addresses structural, cognitive, and ideological dimensions.

Cultural Relevance and Legal Aspects

Amidst structural and curricular transformations, Dayah Darul Ulum continues to uphold Aceh's cultural identity as the foundation of its institutional values. Traditions such as paying respects to teachers, using Arabic and Acehnese in communication, and strengthening moral values through exemplary behavior represent cultural continuity within an increasingly modern system. This affirms (Hefner, 2008) view that local Islamic education persists due to its ability to adapt without losing the core values passed down through generations. The legality of this dayah education is also administratively guaranteed through madrasah accreditation and recognition from the Ministry of Religion. Referring to Aceh Qanun No. 9 of 2018 and Law No. 18 of 2019, the education system being implemented has a strong legal foundation and solidifies its position within the national education landscape. This indicates that Islamic education reform is not only possible but can also gain state recognition as long as it maintains its authenticity and institutional quality (Mustofa, 2020).

The educational transformation taking place at Dayah Darul Ulum YPUI Banda Aceh does not necessarily eliminate the local characteristics that have been the identity of the institution since its inception. Rather, in the context of this change, local cultural values—especially those derived from Aceh's unique Islamic traditions—are preserved as the moral and spiritual foundation of the institution. Observations reveal that daily practices such as paying respects to teachers, using Arabic and Acehnese languages in the learning process and daily communication, and instilling moral values through teachers' exemplary behavior remain crucial pillars that are consistently upheld. This aligns with (Fiftyansyah & Ali, 2024; Hefner, 2008) perspective, which emphasizes that traditional Islamic educational institutions in Southeast Asia have survived due to their ability to adaptively adjust without abandoning the cultural and religious values that have deep roots.

This cultural relevance is also evident in the dayah's efforts to maintain a hierarchical yet respectful social structure. The relationship between students and teachers is not only instructional but also has spiritual and emotional dimensions. In an

interview with one of the senior teachers, it was emphasized that “we can learn science, but moral conduct towards teachers is the key to the blessings of knowledge.” This value reinforces the function of Islamic education as a vehicle for the transmission of values, not merely an instrument for the transfer of knowledge (Fajri, Ardianto, & Sholihah, 2025; Kurniawan, Hidayah, & Sugiyat, 2023; Sumadi, 2022). This cultural relevance has even become a collective identity that distinguishes dayah from other formal educational institutions that are more secular and bureaucratic. From a legal standpoint, the educational system implemented by Dayah Darul Ulum has received formal recognition from the government through accreditation and integration with the national system. Referring to Law Number 18 of 2019 on Pesantren and Aceh Qanun Number 9 of 2018 on the Implementation of Education, the position of dayah has become stronger as an entity that is not only socially recognized but also administratively legitimate. In an interview with the curriculum committee, it was mentioned that “this legal status is important for accessing state assistance and recognizing students' diplomas so they can proceed to the next level.”

This strengthening of legality is proof that the transformation of Islamic education can go hand in hand with the consolidation of state law. (Selvia, 2024) states that state recognition of Islamic boarding schools not only creates new opportunities for Islamic institutions to participate in the national education system, but also opens up space for synergy between religious values and public policy. In the context of Aceh, the existence of the education qanun provides local legitimacy that strengthens the position of dayah as pillars of education and culture. This approach also reflects the importance of synergy between local authenticity and national standards, as explained in (Robertson, 1992) theory of “glocalization,” which is an adaptive strategy in education that allows local values to be aligned with global dynamics without causing identity conflicts. Thus, Dayah Darul Ulum is not only a center for religious learning but also a model of Islamic education that is culturally relevant, legally robust, and open to global changes.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the transformation of the education system at Dayah Modern Darul Ulum YPUI Banda Aceh is not a departure from tradition, but rather a contextual adaptation that actually strengthens the relevance of dayah in the national and global education landscape. This finding is important because it challenges the previous assumption that the modernization of Islamic boarding schools or dayahs is synonymous with the loss of traditional authority. On the contrary, the results of this study show that the integration of the classical curriculum with the national curriculum, participatory collective leadership, and the strengthening of legal legitimacy can go hand in hand with the preservation of Islamic values and local Acehnese culture.

In terms of scientific contribution, this study confirms previous findings on the importance of integrating the pesantren curriculum with the general curriculum, while also providing new evidence in the form of actual practices at Dayah Darul Ulum that demonstrate the synergy between historical, curricular, leadership, and regulatory dimensions. Thus, this study enriches the perspective on how pesantren modernization cannot only be viewed from the curriculum aspect but must also be understood as a holistic institutional transformation process.

However, this study has limitations. It focuses only on one specific case in Banda Aceh and therefore does not represent the full range of Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia. The limited number of informants and the homogeneity of the sample in terms of level, age, and background also limit the generalizability of the findings. In

addition, the descriptive qualitative approach means that this study is not yet able to test causal relationships more broadly. Therefore, further research with a more diverse range of locations, a larger number of respondents, and a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods is needed to produce a more comprehensive understanding. This will support the development of Islamic education policies that are more appropriate and adaptive to the dynamics of the times.

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