

Strategies for the Transformation of Traditional Islamic Boarding Schools in Aceh Singkil: Integrating Education, Social, and Religious Aspects

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Abstract

Keywords:

Pesantren;
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The transformation of traditional Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) in peripheral areas such as Aceh Singkil reflects an adaptive response to the demands of Islamic education modernization, social challenges, and the need to integrate Islamic values within contemporary society. Pesantren are no longer merely centers for classical religious transmission; they have evolved into dynamic institutions capable of educational, social, and religious innovation. This study explores the transformation strategies implemented by three prominent pesantren in Aceh Singkil Dayah Babussalam, Darul Muta'alimin, and Darul Hasanah focusing on the integration of educational, social, and religious dimensions. This research employed a qualitative case study approach with data collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation. The analytical framework used was Talcott Parsons' AGIL model (Adaptation, Goal Attainment, Integration, Latency). The findings reveal that each pesantren pursued distinct innovations: curriculum integration, digital learning initiatives, alumni involvement in institutional reform, and the promotion of Islamic moderation through leadership and community outreach. These institutions have successfully built integrative models rooted in traditional values while remaining responsive to contemporary demands. The transformation observed is evolutionary, collaborative, and centrally led by kyai figures who serve both as preservers of tradition and agents of change. This study contributes to the discourse on adaptive Islamic education models that retain salafiyah authenticity while meeting global educational challenges.

Abstrak

Kata kunci:
Transformasi;
Pesantren; Integrasi
Pendidikan; Sosial
Keagamaan; Aceh
Singkil.

Transformasi pesantren tradisional di wilayah pinggiran seperti Aceh Singkil merupakan respons adaptif terhadap tuntutan modernisasi pendidikan Islam, tantangan sosial, serta kebutuhan integrasi nilai keislaman dalam kehidupan masyarakat kontemporer. Pesantren tidak lagi hanya menjadi pusat transmisi ilmu agama secara konvensional, tetapi juga tampil sebagai institusi sosial yang fleksibel dan inovatif. Penelitian ini mengkaji strategi transformasi yang dilakukan oleh tiga pesantren utama di Aceh Singkil Dayah Babussalam, Darul Muta'alimin, dan Darul Hasanah dengan fokus pada dimensi integrasi pendidikan, sosial, dan keagamaan. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode studi kasus. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan dokumentasi yang dianalisis menggunakan skema AGIL Talcott Parsons (Adaptation, Goal Attainment, Integration, Latency). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa masing-masing pesantren mengembangkan inovasi berbeda: penguatan kurikulum terpadu, digitalisasi pembelajaran, pelibatan alumni dalam reformasi kelembagaan, serta penguatan moderasi Islam dalam praktik dakwah dan kepemimpinan kyai. Ketiga pesantren berhasil membangun pola integrasi yang berakar pada nilai-nilai tradisional tetapi tetap responsif terhadap kebutuhan zaman. Transformasi ini bersifat evolusioner, kolaboratif, dan dipimpin oleh figur sentral kyai yang bertindak sebagai pemelihara tradisi sekaligus agen perubahan. Kajian ini memberikan kontribusi penting bagi pengembangan model pesantren adaptif yang tidak meninggalkan akar nilai salafiyah, namun mampu bersaing dalam dinamika global pendidikan Islam.

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INTRODUCTION

The transformation of Islamic boarding schools has become inevitable in the modern era as a response to social changes, technological advances, and national education regulations (Ritchey & Muchtar, 2014). As the oldest Islamic educational institution in Indonesia, Islamic boarding schools, known as *dayah* in Aceh, have played a strategic role in the transmission of religious values, character building, and traditional learning of the yellow book (Dahri et al., 2023; Suhail et al., 2025). However, over the past two decades, *pesantren* have faced significant challenges due to globalization and digitalization, as well as national regulations such as the 2019 *Pesantren Law*, which compels these institutions to align with formal education standards (Nasrul, 2024; Siregar & Pardede, 2020).

These changes require *pesantren* to become educational institutions that are adaptive to the needs of the workforce, which demands multidimensional competencies in both religious and general knowledge (Maduningtias, 2022; Nikmatullah et al., 2023). Research by Nikmatullah et al. (2023) shows that modern *pesantren* that implement digitalization and professional management tend to have higher graduate quality. A similar finding was reported in the systematic review by Alif & Matin (2025), which highlights the importance of integrating technology without compromising the spiritual mission of *pesantren*.

In Aceh Singkil, a remote area with limited access to education, the transformation process is particularly relevant. *Dayah Babussalam*, *Dayah Darul Muta'alimin*, and *Dayah Darul Hasanah* have implemented an integrated model that includes religious curriculum as well as science, English, and IT lessons. This transformation involves not only curriculum changes but also institutional restructuring, technology adoption, and new relationships between Islamic boarding schools and the community (Dahri et al., 2023; Ilyas et al., 2022). In the context of leadership, research in Aceh by Ilyas et al. (2022) confirms that the leadership pattern of Islamic boarding schools has shifted from an individualistic model to a collective and participatory model, which has triggered institutional adaptation and more modern management (Muid et al., 2024). Additionally, the implementation of Parsons' AGIL system has helped *pesantren* balance their functions of adaptation, goal achievement, social integration, and tradition preservation (Fullan, 2016; Nasrul, 2024).

Curriculum reform in *pesantren* is also a key theme. Muhtadin & Laksono (2022) show that the integration of *pesantren* and national education curricula strengthens learning motivation and fosters critical thinking skills among *santri*. Similarly, the EAI journal by Alif & Matin (2025) finds that e-learning and digital learning resources are strategic tools in transformation, although challenges such as low digital literacy and infrastructure limitations remain obstacles (Sugito, 2024).

In the field of pedagogy, academic transformations such as those carried out by Ma'had Aly Situbondo demonstrate learning innovations that combine traditional methods (*bandongan*, *sorogan*) and modern approaches such as interactive dialogue, structured assignments, and project-based learning (Riswadi & Amrullah, 2023). This reflects a shift in the pedagogical paradigm of Islamic boarding schools toward a more dynamic and responsive approach (Zakariyah et al., 2022). The digitalization of education has also changed the position of *kyai*. In the "Hybrid *Pesantren*" model

presented by Mustofa et al. (2023), kyai have transformed from cultural brokers to cultural creators through live-streaming religious lectures, digital da'wah content, and online interactions with santri, creating a new digital Islamic public. This study shows that the ancient tradition of ngaji is now blending with digital media, forming a new habitus within the pesantren ecosystem (Nurdin & Naqqiyah, 2019).

Another study by Nisa et al. (2024) investigated the challenges and opportunities of pesantren transformation in the digital age, emphasizing the importance of maintaining a balance between technology and Islamic values. The study concluded that without a well-developed collaborative strategy, transformation could pose a threat to the traditional values of pesantren (Nisa et al., 2024). Meanwhile, research by (Huda et al., 2025) affirmed that the integration of technology enhances the effectiveness of learning in modern pesantren. Additionally, research in Java shows that administrative digitization (e.g., e-Pesantren systems and management applications) can improve operational efficiency, transparency, and data accuracy, despite challenges such as cultural resistance and infrastructure limitations (Nuha et al., 2024).

Within the framework of strengthening religious values, modern Islamic boarding schools still emphasize Islam wasathiyah (moderate Islam), such as the inclusive and rahmatan lil 'alamin practices of Islam Nusantara (Muhaimin, 2006; Rani, 2023). This concept is reinforced in the transformation of Islamic boarding schools through digital moderation using tools such as Maktabah Syamilah Nahdlatul Ulama (2023) to instill values of tolerance and anti-radicalism (Alif et al., 2025a). Overall, empirical literature over the past 10 years shows that pesantren transformation in Indonesia, including in Aceh Singkil, is multi-dimensional: encompassing structural, pedagogical, technological, and religious values. However, research on local contexts such as Aceh Singkil remains limited. Therefore, this study is important to understand the contextual strategies of pesantren transformation in marginal areas, as well as their implications for the integration of education, social, and religious aspects.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method to explore the transformation strategies implemented by three traditional Islamic boarding schools in Aceh Singkil Regency, namely Dayah Babussalam, Dayah Darul Muta'alimin, and Dayah Darul Hasanah. This approach was chosen because the nature of the phenomenon being studied is contextual, complex, and closely related to social, cultural, and local leadership dynamics (Moleong, 2017). Data was collected through in-depth interviews with pesantren leaders, teachers, students, alumni, and community leaders; participatory observation of educational and social activities within the pesantren environment; and documentary studies of the curriculum, institutional structure, and transformation programs that have been implemented. The researcher serves as the primary instrument in interpreting the data, making the depth of understanding the central focus of this study (Saldana, 2014).

To analyze the data, an interactive thematic analysis technique developed by Miles and Huberman was used, with stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Additionally, Talcott Parsons' AGIL theoretical framework was used as an interpretive tool to examine how Islamic boarding schools fulfill the functions of adaptation (A), goal attainment (G), social integration (I), and cultural pattern preservation (L) in their transformation process (Parsons, 1971). Data validity was ensured through source and method triangulation techniques. The selection of the three pesantren as cases was based on historical considerations (as the

oldest pesantren in Aceh Singkil), variations in the forms of transformation, and the openness of the institutions to change. This methodological design is expected to yield a deep understanding of the pesantren's transformation strategies and their implications for the integration of education, society, and religion (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Yin, 2018).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Curriculum and Learning Transformation at Dayah Babussalam

The transformation carried out at Dayah Babussalam focused on restructuring the curriculum to integrate general subjects into a learning system based on the yellow book. From interviews with pesantren leaders, it was found that this change was a response to the demands of the community and santri that dayah graduates be able to compete in higher education and the world of work. *"Kami merasa perlu memasukkan pelajaran umum agar santri bisa bersaing di dunia kerja dan perguruan tinggi,"* said Tgk. Abdullah, head of Dayah Babussalam (Interview, October 12, 2025). A senior teacher also added, *"Pelatihan integrasi kurikulum yang kami ikuti sangat membantu kami memahami cara mengajar kelas yang heterogen,"* (Interview, October 15, 2025).

The curriculum, which was originally purely Salafiyah, now includes subjects such as English, Mathematics, and Natural Sciences, while maintaining classical studies as the primary foundation. Field observations indicate that the classical system is still maintained, but learning time has been expanded and integrated with a competency-based learning system. Some teachers even utilize PowerPoint-based learning media and internally developed self-study modules. Documentation of the curriculum structure shows that there is now a separation between religious and general subjects, with a time ratio of 60:40 (Curriculum Documentation, 2025).

This transformation also shows a push for technology-based innovation, although it is still limited. For example, academic documentation such as attendance, grades, and student data is now managed using computers. However, limitations in infrastructure and digital human resources pose challenges that must be overcome in the near future. In the curriculum transformation process, Dayah Babussalam focuses not only on enriching general material but also on increasing the capacity of teachers as key actors in the learning process. Based on interviews with senior teachers, it was revealed that most of the teaching staff had participated in curriculum integration training from educational institutions outside the pesantren. This has contributed to their ability to manage heterogeneous classes, both in terms of student abilities and teaching materials. The dayah also provides a special time each week for a teacher consultation forum, which serves as a space for reflection and evaluation of the effectiveness of learning.

Curriculum transformation also has a significant influence on the formation of santri characters who are more open and responsive to changing times. In the observation of santri activities, it was found that they were able to discuss across themes, including contemporary issues such as digital media, reproductive health in Islam, and social media ethics. This shows that curriculum integration not only impacts cognitive knowledge, but also enriches the affective and social dimensions of santri.

Institutional Reform and Education Management at Dayah Darul Muta'alimin

Dayah Darul Muta'alimin takes an institutional-based transformation approach by restructuring the education management system. From interviews with the Head of Madrasah and the curriculum section, it is known that they have formed a curriculum development team, which consists of alumni, senior teachers, and local education

figures. *“Kurikulum yang kami susun melibatkan alumni agar sesuai dengan kebutuhan santri setelah lulus,”* explained the Head of Darul Muta'alimin Madrasah (Interview, October 20, 2025). One alumnus also stated, *“Keterampilan manajemen waktu dan kepemimpinan yang saya dapat di dayah sangat membantu ketika saya kuliah di Medan,”* (Interview, October 23, 2025).

The curriculum is prepared based on the reference of national education standards and still maintains the scientific characteristics of pesantren. Observation of teaching and learning activities shows the division of teacher roles based on the specialization of scientific fields. In addition, there is a monthly meeting schedule between teachers for curriculum evaluation. One of the important innovations recorded in academic documents is Lesson Study-based teacher training and the use of rubrics for assessing santri skills in worship practices and social life (Annual Report Documentation, 2025).

Transformation is also evident in the improvement of external networks. The dayah cooperates with formal schools for certificate recognition, as well as establishing relationships with Islamic universities in Medan and Banda Aceh to encourage alumni to continue their studies. This effort shows an awareness of the importance of legitimizing dayah education in the national and international system. Institutional reform at Dayah Darul Muta'alimin is strengthened by a participatory-based management system, where decision-making is carried out collectively through a forum of leaders and teachers. Internal organizational documents show a shift to a more modern organizational structure, including the appointment of an IT field coordinator, the development of dayah economic businesses (santri cooperatives), and the establishment of a final santri career guidance unit.

Interviews with alumni show that the success of this reform creates an educational ecosystem that encourages santri independence. Alumni feel that the time management, leadership, and teamwork skills they acquire while at dayah are important provisions when entering the world of work and higher education. This experience is reinforced by observations of extracurricular activities, such as santri organizations, journalism training, and thematic study forums across madzhab that are routinely held every month.

Integration of Social Roles and Religious Education at Dayah Darul Hasanah

Unlike the previous two dayahs, Dayah Darul Hasanah is more prominent in the integration between education, da'wah, and community empowerment. Interviews with pesantren leaders show that their transformation is rooted in the spirit of *“social openness and economic independence”*. *“Kami ingin santri tidak hanya belajar agama, tapi juga bisa mandiri melalui kewirausahaan syariah,”* (Interview, October 18, 2025). One student also shared, *“Saya senang bisa ikut program Pesantren Masuk Desa, karena bisa langsung membantu masyarakat,”* (Interview, October 19, 2025).

Therefore, in addition to religious and general education, santri are also equipped with sharia entrepreneurial skills such as fish farming, halal food processing, and small digital businesses. Observations of santri daily activities reveal that santri not only participate in teaching and learning activities, but are also involved in community activities such as Friday sermons, Quranic guidance for village children, and Islamic digital literacy training. Documentation of the pesantren's flagship program shows the existence of a digital da'wah program and the development of dayah social media as a means of disseminating religious moderation values (Pesantren Program Documentation, 2025).

In terms of curriculum, Darul Hasanah has developed an Islamic character education module based on maqashid sharia. Values such as *tawazun* (balance), *tasamuh* (tolerance), and *ta'awun* (cooperation) are instilled through practical activities, not just theoretical teaching. This pesantren has succeeded in making itself a living and active community center, where education does not only take place in the classroom, but also in the community. In Dayah Darul Hasanah, the social and religious roles of pesantren become the real face of community-based dayah. In interviews with village community leaders, it was revealed that this pesantren acts as a center of local civilization, not only in religious matters, but also in shaping social values such as solidarity, mutual cooperation, and exemplary public ethics. This pesantren also pioneered the "Pesantren Masuk Desa" activity, a program that sends santri to become literacy and da'wah activists in remote villages.

Darul Hasanah's transformation is strengthened by the use of digital media as a tool for da'wah. Based on the annual planning document, the pesantren has trained a team of santri in the production of Islamic content such as da'wah videos, educational podcasts, and Islamic-themed graphic design. This expands the scope of the pesantren's da'wah from the local to the global digital realm, as well as introducing the Acehnese face of peaceful Islam to the outside world. Santri who were previously passive in social life now appear as actors of change. In observing social service activities and entrepreneurial training, the active involvement of santri in managing programs, building relationships across ages and professions, and solving community problems with a dialogical and solutive religious approach can be seen.

Dynamics of Challenges and Adaptive Strategies

The three pesantren faced different challenges, such as limited facilities, resistance of some teachers to change, and lack of budget support from the government. However, through adaptive and contextual strategies, they managed to direct the transformation gradually and continuously. Internal evaluation documents from each dayah show that the success of transformation is largely determined by visionary leadership, community participation, and the courage to open up to innovation. The role of kyai in the three pesantren is also still the center of moral and spiritual authority, but in the context of transformation, the role is transformed from a single authoritative figure to a collective leader who fosters teachers, santri, and the surrounding community. This is in accordance with Parsons' AGIL pattern, where the pesantren system seeks to maintain adaptation to external changes, achievement of institutional goals, internal social integration, and preservation of traditional values.

One of the important findings in this study is that the transformation of pesantren in Aceh Singkil is largely determined by the figure of kyai as an agent of change. In the three pesantren studied, kyai act not only as spiritual leaders, but also as managers, innovators, and negotiators with the outside world. In-depth interviews with kyai showed that their ability to read social dynamics and translate Islamic values in the current context became the main strength in bringing pesantren to a more open and inclusive direction. Furthermore, the kyai actively strengthen the pesantren culture through exemplary models, not top-down instructions. This creates a warm learning atmosphere and is open to input. Strategic decisions such as the admission of new teachers, curriculum revision, or external cooperation are always discussed in a deliberative forum. This leadership strategy shows Parsons' AGIL pattern in maintaining a balance between adaptation to modernity and preservation of traditional pesantren values.

Discussion

The transformation of pesantren in Aceh Singkil cannot be separated from the social, cultural, and educational dynamics that surround them. The three pesantren that became the object of research Dayah Babussalam, Darul Muta'alimin, and Darul Hasanah showed different responses to the challenges of modernity, but all of them moved towards a more adaptive, integrative, and contextual education model. This was confirmed in interviews with several kyai who emphasized that modernization should not eliminate the classical pesantren tradition but enrich it. *"Kita tetap mengaji kitab kuning, tetapi harus terbuka dengan teknologi dan kurikulum nasional,"* ujar salah seorang kyai Darul Hasanah (Wawancara, 22 Oktober 2025).

From the side of documentation, institutional reports from 2024–2025 illustrate how pesantren gradually adopted digital administrative systems and community-based programs. For example, Dayah Darul Muta'alimin's 2025 report explicitly mentions the establishment of a career guidance unit and IT division as strategic efforts to prepare santri for the future (Dokumentasi Laporan Tahunan, 2025). This evidence strengthens the argument that the transformation observed in these pesantren is not only theoretical but also practical and institutionalized.

In this context, the AGIL theory (Adaptation, Goal Attainment, Integration, Latency) introduced by Talcott Parsons is used as a theoretical lens to analyze the findings. This scheme allows researchers to examine how pesantren adjust to external demands (A), set and achieve goals (G), maintain social integration (I), and preserve cultural values and patterns (L). Thus, this analysis not only captures structural and curricular changes, but also interprets the cultural dimensions, leadership, and social relations that are the foundation of pesantren life.

This analysis also took into account the results of interviews, field observations, and documentation that had been collected during the research process. Each subtheme is analyzed based on AGIL indicators and associated with theories and previous findings from scientific literature. This approach aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how the transformation strategy is carried out and its impact on education, social, and religion in the Aceh Singkil pesantren environment.

Adaptation to the Environment (Function A-AGIL): Integrated Curriculum and Digitalization

Dayah Babussalam has taken strategic steps to adapt by integrating the classical and modern curriculum, compiling a proportion of 60% religious subjects and 40% general subjects such as English, Mathematics, and Science. Interviews revealed that teachers were given external training to manage heterogeneous classes and develop internal learning media, such as digital modules. Observations support this: santri are actively involved in discussions across contemporary topics (social media, reproductive health, digital ethics). This implementation reflects that pesantren are able to systemically adapt to the demands of the times through curriculum updates and the use of educational technology. A similar approach is found in modern literature: the digitization of administration and learning tools has been shown to increase the effectiveness of pesantren education (As'ad, 2021; Mansir, 2022). Furthermore, research by Asror et al. (2023) confirmed that the integration of religious and general knowledge through e-learning makes pesantren more relevant and inclusive to the development of globalization and 21st century education.

Dayah Babussalam's adaptation is not only limited to learning content, but also includes ways of thinking and teaching approaches. By providing space for santri to be

actively involved in discussions of contemporary issues and the use of digital media, this pesantren shows its ability to respond to the times without losing its religious identity. This change also has an impact on the growth of a more collaborative and reflective learning culture, making santri not only as recipients of knowledge, but also as active subjects in the educational process. This adaptation is proof that traditional pesantren are able to transform into relevant and competitive institutions in the modern era.

Achieving Institutional Goals (G-AGIL Function): Institutional Reform and External Network

Dayah Darul Muta'alimin has reformed its institutional structure to support the function of achieving institutional goals (G). Interviews with administrators showed that they formed a curriculum team with alumni, conducted Lesson Study-based training and an evaluation rubric for santri skills. Alumni report that the time management and leadership skills acquired are strong provisions in the world of work and higher education. This is in line with the Hybrid Pesantren model that successfully combines traditional values and modern education through external cooperation (Maulana, 2024; Mustofa et al., 2023). Other academic studies also confirm that pesantren partnerships with formal institutions strengthen the legitimacy of education and significantly improve the prospects of graduates (Alif et al., 2025b, 2025a).

Dayah Darul Muta'alimin's institutional reform efforts reflect its seriousness in formulating long-term strategic visions and steps. The formation of a curriculum team involving alumni is not only a form of structural innovation, but also a strategy to expand participation in educational decision making. External cooperation built with various institutions also encourages the achievement of pesantren goals, both in improving the quality of graduates and strengthening the position of dayah in the middle of the national education system. This transformation shows that the achievement of institutional goals is not only measured by academic output, but also by the ability of pesantren to build a sustainable and future-oriented system.

Internal Social Integration (Function I-AGIL): Pesantren as a Community Center

Dayah Darul Hasanah shows a central role as a center of social integration (I). Programs such as "Pesantren Masuk Desa", sharia-based entrepreneurship training, and digital da'wah activities strengthen the pesantren's relationship with the local community. Field observations show that santri are active in Friday sermons, mentoring village children, and producing Islamic educational content. This finding strengthens Sa'dullah Assa'idi's (2021) theory on the position of pesantren as a motor of local social empowerment and status mobility of santri. In addition, the combination of character-based education and digital technology allows pesantren to become a space for Islamic moderation that is both inclusive and responsive to contemporary social challenges (Assa'idi, 2021).

The transformation of pesantren's social functions is inseparable from its ability to harmonize religious values with the needs of modern society. Activities such as entrepreneurship training, social advocacy, and collaboration with village institutions reflect a participatory leadership model based on Islamic values. This is in line with the concept of socially engaged pesantren which emphasizes the importance of the presence of Islamic educational institutions in directly addressing community problems. Recent research by Nurhadi (2018) shows that the involvement of pesantren in village social development increases solidarity among residents and strengthens the pesantren's position as an institution of public trust. In addition, Rizwadi et al. (2023) emphasized

that pesantren that integrate character education with community-based social action tend to be more successful in shaping a culture of moderation and inclusiveness. This strength makes pesantren not only the center of education, but also the epicenter of strengthening Islamic social values in the public sphere.

Preservation of Cultural Patterns (L-AGIL Function): Kyai Leadership and Islamic Moderation

Kyai in all three pesantren act as an agent of change (L) with a collective leadership style and moral example. In-depth interviews revealed that major decisions are made through deliberation with teachers and alumni, not unilateral instructions. This leadership model maintains the traditional values of the pesantren while making room for innovation. This paradigm is consistent with the concept of blending traditional values and modern innovation in pesantren leadership (Halimah et al., 2024) and is relevant to the idea of Islamic moderation in Aceh pesantren. This approach helps maintain harmonization between pesantren traditions and the demands of modernity without causing internal resistance.

The collective leadership model applied by kyai reflects a typical pesantren cultural pattern that places deliberation, adab, and exemplary leadership as the main pillars. This not only maintains the internal stability of the institution, but also strengthens the moral legitimacy of the leader in the eyes of the santri and the community. By maintaining traditional structures such as *halaqah*, *bai'ah*, and the recitation of the yellow classical books, but remaining open to updates, kyai in the three pesantren are able to maintain the continuity of values without rejecting change. This forms a pattern of cultural preservation that is adaptive and firmly rooted in the Islamic treasures of the archipelago. Moreover, the inclusive and participatory leadership character is also an important foundation in internalizing Islamic moderation values. The study by Rambe et al. (2022) confirmed that pesantren that apply the principles of *tasamuh* (tolerance), *tawazun* (balance), and *i'tidal* (justice) in their leadership patterns tend to succeed in creating a productive dialog space between the older and younger generations in the dayah environment. Similarly, Mukri & Tamam (2021) highlighted the role of kyai as a collective moral guardian who is able to mediate social and educational changes within a flexible traditional value frame.

Educational Innovation as an Integrative Strategy

The three pesantren show that transformation is not merely mechanical, but innovative and sustainable. Dayah Babussalam and Darul Muta'alimin implement administrative digitalization, e-learning, and competency-based evaluation. Darul Hasanah combines digital da'wah, entrepreneurship formation, and the development of maqashid sharia-based character education modules. This is consistent with the educational innovation model that brings together the local context with global demands without sacrificing Islamic values (Faizin, 2024; Imroni, 2024).

The innovations implemented by the three pesantren show a transformative approach that does not stop at updating the structure and curriculum, but also touches aspects of education methodology and management. Digitalization carried out by Dayah Babussalam and Darul Muta'alimin, for example, not only facilitates access to academic information, but also becomes a means of increasing technological literacy among teachers and students. Meanwhile, Darul Hasanah's approach to integrating maqashid sharia values into the character curriculum shows that innovation does not mean

abandoning values, but rather strengthening them in a more relevant and contextualized form.

Furthermore, these innovations are not born from external pressure alone, but are part of the institution's internal awareness to survive and thrive in the midst of changing times. The ability of pesantren to combine technology with Islamic values, as well as develop learning approaches based on the needs of students, reflects institutional readiness in responding to the challenges of 21st century education. This makes innovation not just a technical tool, but an integrative strategy that unites educational vision, values, and practices into a sustainable whole. Thus, pesantren have proven to be able to become an adaptive, valuable, and relevant education model in the midst of global dynamics.

Implementation Challenges and Gaps

Although the transformation is significant, there are still various challenges: limited digital infrastructure, resistance to technology by senior teachers, limited budget, and uneven support from external stakeholders. This condition raises the risk of a transformation gap between progressive and stagnant pesantren. Studies by Mukhlis & Makhya (2020) and Setiawan & Windayanti (2025) emphasize the importance of extensive collaboration between pesantren, local governments, and Islamic education networks for sustainable educational transformation. Systemically, the pesantren transformation approach in Aceh Singkil shows that in terms of AGIL adaptation, purpose, integration, and pattern maintenance, all social system functions are actualized structurally and culturally. Transformation that is evolutionary, not destructive, and controlled by kyai as a cultural figure and manager, makes pesantren remain relevant and resilient. This model offers a blueprint for pesantren transformation that is adaptive while rooted in local traditions.

Although the transformation achievements in the three pesantren show a positive direction, the reality in the field also shows various limitations that cannot be ignored. One of the main obstacles is the lack of adequate digital infrastructure, especially in pesantren environments located far from the city center. Some senior teachers also show resistance to the use of technology in learning, as they are accustomed to the long-entrenched traditional methods. In addition, limited financial support and uneven partnerships with external institutions cause the implementation of innovations to be uneven.

This imbalance has long-term consequences, such as disparities in the quality of education between pesantren and the slow process of system unification between salafiyah and modern pesantren. If not handled systematically, this transformation has the potential to create dualism of orientation that is detrimental to the sustainability of the institution. Therefore, a collaborative approach involving various actors is needed: local governments, philanthropic institutions, alumni, and Islamic higher education institutions to create an ecosystem that supports comprehensive transformation. This is in line with the findings of Mukhlis & Makhya (2020) who emphasized the importance of the state's role in facilitating the transformation of pesantren education through affirmative policies and technical support, and Setiawan & Windayanti (2025) who encouraged cross-sector synergy to strengthen the institutional capacity of pesantren.

From the perspective of AGIL theory, all social system functions have been actualized, both structurally and culturally. Adaptation to change, planned goal setting, internal social integration, and preservation of cultural patterns run dynamically under the leadership of kyai who not only acts as a guardian of tradition, but also as a change

manager. The evolutionary and non-destructive character of this transformation shows that Aceh Singkil pesantren are able to maintain resilience while opening space for renewal. This model can be used as a reference or blueprint for the development of other pesantren that want to remain relevant without letting go of their traditional roots.

Based on the analysis of the research results, the transformation of traditional pesantren in Aceh Singkil can be explained comprehensively through Talcott Parsons' AGIL theoretical framework. The four functions of the social system Adaptation (A), Goal Attainment (G), Integration (I), and Latency (L) are not only present theoretically, but appear to be actualized in the institutional practices, learning, leadership, and social relations of pesantren. Each of these functions has a distinctive articulation according to the characteristics and strategies of each dayah. To provide a more structured picture, Table 1 is presented below which summarizes how the AGIL function is implemented in the three main pesantren in this study, namely Dayah Babussalam, Dayah Darul Muta'alimin, and Dayah Darul Hasanah. This table shows the connection between the theoretical concept and the empirical reality of pesantren transformation in a holistic and balanced manner.

Table 1. Implementation of the AGIL Function in the Transformation of Traditional Pesantren in Aceh Singkil

AGIL Function	Function Description	Implementation in Pesantren	Concrete Examples
A-Adaptation	Ability of the system to adjust to the external and internal environment	Classical-modern curriculum integration, teacher training, digitization of learning media	Santri discuss contemporary issues; teachers use digital modules; curriculum proportion 60:40 religion-general at Dayah Babussalam
G-Goal Attainment	Setting and achieving institutional goals	Institutional reform and competency-based curriculum, collaboration with alumni and external	Lesson Study at Dayah Darul Muta'alimin, time management training, leadership skills of students
I-Integration	Coordination between parts of the system to maintain social cohesion	Pesantren as a community center, social activities and empowerment	"Pesantren Masuk Desa" program, entrepreneurship training, Friday khutbah by Dayah Darul Hasanah students
L-Latency	Maintenance of cultural values and norms, regeneration of values	Collective and moderate kyai leadership, institutional deliberation, preservation of pesantren traditions	Decision making through deliberation; yellow classical book recitation continues; inclusion of Islamic moderation values

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the transformation of traditional Islamic boarding schools in Aceh Singkil is not merely a superficial adjustment, but rather a dynamic process that includes curriculum reform, institutional restructuring, and strengthening of social roles. The main finding of this study is that kyai leadership – when exercised collectively and participatively – has a greater impact than previously assumed, namely not only as guardians of tradition, but also as drivers of innovation. This challenges the long-held assumption that kyai play only a conservative role, while opening up a new discussion about their role as agents of adaptive change.

From a scientific contribution perspective, this study reinforces previous findings on the modernization of Islamic boarding schools, while at the same time challenging the view that the transformation of Islamic boarding schools is limited to structural and curricular aspects. By applying Parsons' AGIL theoretical framework in the context of Aceh Singkil, this study introduces an analytical lens that enriches the scientific discussion on how Islamic boarding schools balance the functions of adaptation, goal achievement, social integration, and cultural value preservation in the local context. The use of field data through interviews and documentation also adds to the empirical weight of this study.

However, this study has limitations. It focuses only on three Islamic boarding schools in one peripheral region, making it difficult to generalize the findings to all Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia. In addition, this study does not fully accommodate other variables such as gender, age, and the socio-economic background of students, which may also influence the dynamics of transformation. Therefore, further research with a larger sample size and a cross-regional comparative design is needed to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the transformation of Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia. Overall, this study confirms that the modernization of Islamic boarding schools does not necessarily erode tradition; on the contrary, it can proceed harmoniously if supported by visionary leadership, community involvement, and sustainable adaptive strategies.

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