

The Role of *Murabbi* in Developing the Intelligence of *Santri*: A Comparative Study of Traditional and Modern *Pesantren*

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Abstract

Keywords:

Murabbi;
santri intelligence;
holistic education;
Islamic humanism;
pesantren culture

Amid rapid socio-technological shifts, Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) face increasing demands to cultivate graduates who are intellectually competent, emotionally resilient, and spiritually grounded. Addressing this need, this study examines the role of the *murabbi* in developing *santri* intelligence through a comparative analysis of traditional and modern *pesantren* in Indonesia. Utilizing a qualitative comparative case study design, data were collected via in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis involving *murabbi*, institutional leaders, and *santri*. Findings reveal that the *murabbi* acts as a central pedagogical agent in fostering holistic intelligence across intellectual, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. In traditional *pesantren*, this role is profoundly relational, prioritizing spiritual mentoring and moral exemplarity to nurture emotional and spiritual growth. Conversely, modern *pesantren* employ structured curricula, academic assessments, and organized character-building programs to systematically integrate all three intelligences. Despite these methodological distinctions, both models share a foundational philosophy anchored in Islamic humanistic values. This research emphasizes the *murabbi*'s pedagogical agency as a critical determinant of holistic *santri* development. Practically, it provides strategic recommendations for *pesantren* leaders to enhance *murabbi* professional development, institutionalize compassionate mentoring practices, and align academic programs with spiritual-emotional formation, thereby strengthening value-based Islamic education in contemporary contexts.

Abstrak

Kata kunci:
murabbi; kecerdasan
santri; pendidikan
holistik; humanisme
Islam; budaya
pesantren

Di tengah perubahan sosio-teknologis yang pesat, institusi pesantren menghadapi tuntutan mendesak untuk mencetak lulusan yang tidak hanya kompeten secara intelektual, tetapi juga tangguh secara emosional dan kokoh secara spiritual. Merespons dinamika tersebut, penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis peran *murabbi* dalam mengembangkan kecerdasan *santri* melalui studi komparatif pada pesantren tradisional dan modern di Indonesia. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus komparatif. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan analisis dokumen yang melibatkan para *murabbi*, pimpinan pesantren, dan *santri*. Temuan mengungkap bahwa *murabbi* berfungsi sebagai agen pedagogis kunci dalam menumbuhkan kecerdasan holistik, meliputi dimensi intelektual, emosional, dan spiritual. Di pesantren tradisional, peran ini diwujudkan melalui hubungan personal yang intensif, bimbingan spiritual, dan keteladanan moral yang kuat. Sementara itu, pesantren modern mengintegrasikan ketiga dimensi kecerdasan secara sistematis lewat kurikulum terstruktur, evaluasi akademik, dan program pembinaan karakter. Kendati terdapat perbedaan pendekatan, kedua model pesantren tetap berlandaskan filosofi pendidikan yang sama, yakni nilai-nilai humanisme Islam. Studi ini menegaskan urgensi penguatan peran *murabbi* sebagai penggerak utama perkembangan *santri* secara utuh. Implikasi praktisnya memberikan arahan bagi pengelola pesantren untuk mengoptimalkan pelatihan *murabbi*, mengintegrasikan mentoring berbasis kasih

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sayang, dan merancang kurikulum yang seimbang antara rigor akademik dan kedalaman spiritual-emosional guna memperkuat pendidikan Islam berbasis nilai di masa kini.

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INTRODUCTION

Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) have historically shaped the intellectual, moral, and spiritual competencies of Muslim youth in Indonesia (Mujahid, 2021a). However, rapid socio-technological changes and globalization now demand graduates who are not only academically proficient but also emotionally resilient and spiritually grounded (Azra, 2020). Contemporary educational discourse emphasizes that holistic human development must integrate intellectual (*'aql*), emotional (*nafs*), and spiritual (*ruh*) dimensions to cultivate *insan kamil* (Hadrawi et al., 2025; Muzaki, et al., 2025; Ramayulis, 2019; Sodikin et al., 2026). Yet, the traditional pedagogical authority of the *murabbi* is increasingly marginalized by mechanized curricula and digital tools that reduce teachers to mere knowledge transmitters (Nata, 2018). Given that contemporary learning outcomes heavily depend on emotional adaptability (Goleman, 2017) and spiritual purpose, revitalizing the *murabbi's* value-based role has become an urgent scholarly and practical priority (Achmadin et al., 2024; Mardatillah et al., 2025).

While existing literature extensively maps *pesantren* models, significant empirical gaps persist regarding the *murabbi's* specific agency in multidimensional intelligence development. Studies by Halim et al (2024), Ismail et al (2024), Jahidin (2023), Muali et al (2021), and Triyono & Mediawati (2023) demonstrate that traditional *pesantren* effectively nurture moral and emotional intelligence through intimate mentorship and communal living. Conversely, research by Ibrahim & Mukhsin (2025) and Najib & Khaudli (2025) highlights how modern *pesantren* systematically enhance intellectual competence and global competitiveness through formal curricula and technological integration. Despite these valuable insights, few studies comparatively examine how the *murabbi* strategically integrates intellectual, emotional, and spiritual intelligence across both institutional contexts. Moreover, empirical investigations explicitly linking *murabbi* pedagogical practices to multidimensional development—particularly through value-based approaches like the *Kurikulum Cinta*—remain scarce, underscoring a clear theoretical and methodological gap.

Addressing this gap, this study aims to analyze the role of the *murabbi* in fostering *santri* intelligence within traditional and modern *pesantren* contexts. Employing a qualitative comparative case study design, the research systematically investigates how *murabbi* enact their pedagogical, moral, and spiritual responsibilities to cultivate intellectual, emotional, and spiritual competencies. The study seeks to identify the specific instructional strategies, relational dynamics, and institutional practices that enable *murabbi* to effectively nurture holistic intelligence, while simultaneously mapping the contextual adaptations required to address contemporary educational demands without compromising Islamic foundational values.

This article will demonstrate that the *murabbi* remains the central pedagogical agent in *santri* intelligence development, regardless of whether the *pesantren* operates under traditional or modern frameworks. It will prove that the differences between the two models are primarily methodological and structural rather than philosophical, as both ultimately rely on Islamic humanistic values to achieve balanced cognitive, affective, and spiritual growth. By providing empirical evidence of how daily interactions, moral exemplarity, and structured mentoring converge to shape

multidimensional intelligence, this research will substantiate the argument that curriculum and institutional management are only effective when animated by compassionate, value-oriented pedagogy, thereby offering a validated framework for strengthening *murabbi* competency and informing future policy in Islamic education.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a comparative case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of the role of *murabbi* in the development of *santri* intelligence within traditional and modern Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*). A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to explore meanings, experiences, and educational practices within their natural context (Moleong, 2019). The comparative design enabled a systematic examination of similarities and differences in the educational roles, strategies, and value-oriented practices of *murabbi* across the two *pesantren* models.

Data were collected through three primary techniques. First, in-depth interviews were conducted with *murabbi* and *pesantren* administrators to obtain detailed insights into their perspectives, pedagogical roles, and strategies for fostering intellectual, emotional, and spiritual intelligence among *santri*. Second, participatory observation was carried out to directly examine educational interactions between *murabbi* and *santri*, including learning processes, mentoring patterns, and the cultivation of values such as compassion, empathy, and exemplary conduct in daily *pesantren* life. Third, document analysis was undertaken to review curricula, institutional regulations, *santri* development programs, and other relevant documents that support and contextualize the research focus.

Data analysis was conducted simultaneously with data collection using the interactive analysis model proposed by (Miles et al., 2020). This process consisted of three interconnected stages: data reduction, involving the selection, focusing, and simplification of raw data obtained from the field; data display, presented through narrative descriptions and comparative matrices to facilitate the identification of patterns and thematic relationships; and conclusion drawing and verification, which entailed interpreting the data thematically to ensure analytical rigor and to address the research objectives and questions.

RESEARCH RESULTS DAN DISCUSSION

Results

The Role of Murabbi in the Holistic Development of Santri Intelligence

Field data collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis confirm that the *murabbi* occupies a central and strategic position in fostering *santri* intelligence across intellectual, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. Observations conducted between January–March 2024 at both traditional and modern *pesantren* revealed that *murabbi* are consistently present beyond formal classroom settings—accompanying *santri* during dawn prayers, communal meals, and evening reflection sessions. As MTR1 (Traditional *Pesantren*) stated during an interview on February 12, 2024: "Education here does not stop when the lesson ends; our behavior outside the class is part of the lesson itself." This finding is corroborated by institutional guideline documents from both *pesantren*, which explicitly define *murabbi* responsibilities as encompassing intellectual guidance (*ta'dib*), emotional supervision (*tarbiyah nafsiyyah*), and spiritual mentoring (*tazkiyat al-ruh*).

Document analysis further reveals contextual differences in how these roles are formalized. In the modern *pesantren*, program handbooks describe the *murabbi* using a tripartite designation – *murabbi–mu'allim–musyrif*— reflecting an institutionalized multi-layered role (see Figure 1). In contrast, the traditional *pesantren* relies on culturally internalized expectations rather than written protocols, as confirmed by administrative interview MTA1: "We do not write it down because it is already in the heart of every teacher here." This suggests that institutional culture significantly shapes how *murabbi* roles are enacted and evaluated.

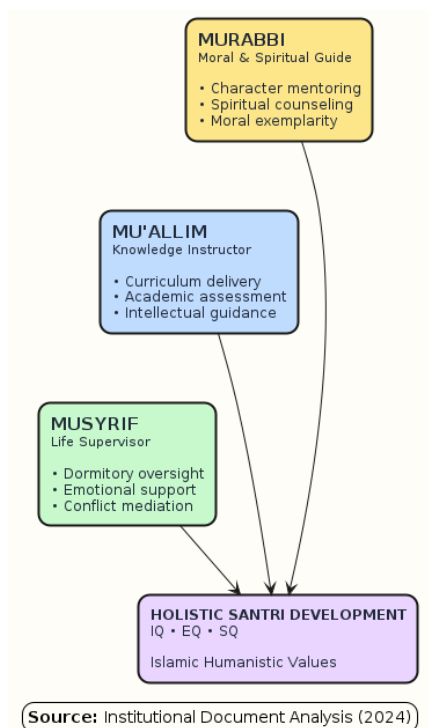


Figure 1. Modern Pesantren Murabbi Framework

Murabbi and the Development of Intellectual Intelligence (IQ)

Intellectual Guidance through Teaching Practices

Observational data from classroom sessions (February 18–22, 2024) indicate that *murabbi* actively design learning situations that encourage critical thinking rather than rote memorization. In the traditional *pesantren*, intellectual development occurs through *halaqah* and *sorogan* methods, where *santri* engage directly with classical texts under close *murabbi* supervision. During a *bandongan* session observed on February 20, 2024, STR2 remarked: "When I do not understand a phrase, Murabbi does not just give the answer; he asks me to find the meaning in other books first." This pedagogical approach aligns with Vygotsky's zone of proximal development, wherein learning is scaffolded through guided inquiry.

In the modern *pesantren*, intellectual development is structured through formal curricula combined with discussion-based learning. MSR2 explained during an interview on March 5, 2024: "Our task is not only to finish the syllabus but to ensure that *santri* understand how to think, not just what to memorize." Lesson plans and assessment rubrics reviewed during document analysis (see Figure 2) confirm an explicit emphasis on analytical skills and problem-solving competencies.

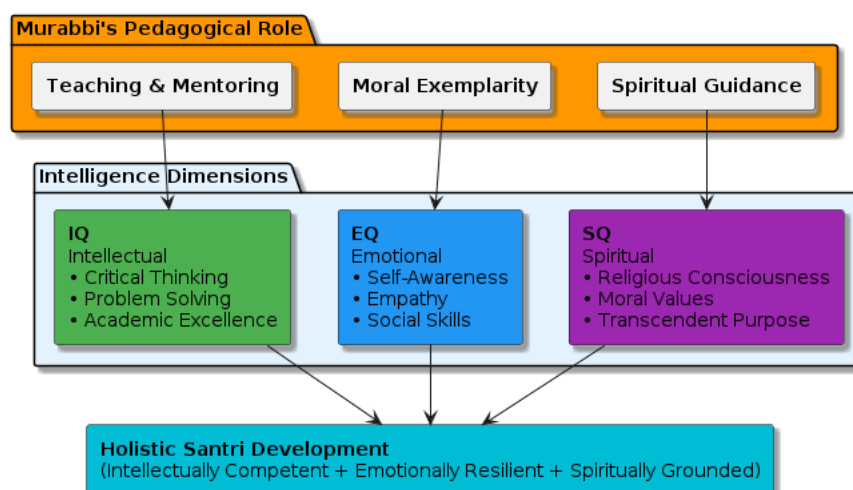


Figure 2. Integrated Intelligence Development Model in Pesantren

Building an Intellectual Ethos

Beyond instructional strategies, *murabbi* cultivate a lifelong learning orientation among *santri*. Interviews with *santri* consistently highlighted how *murabbi* model intellectual discipline through personal habits. STR4 noted on February 25, 2024: "Our teacher always reminds us that seeking knowledge does not end at graduation; it is a lifelong responsibility." Observational records further show that *murabbi* in both settings engage in regular reading and scholarly discussion during non-teaching hours, reinforcing the value of intellectual seriousness through lived example.

Murabbi and the Development of Emotional Intelligence (EQ)

Interpersonal Relationships and Emotional Guidance

Emotional intelligence development is deeply rooted in the quality of interpersonal relationships between *murabbi* and *santri*. In the traditional *pesantren*, emotional bonds are particularly strong due to continuous daily interaction. During participatory observation on February 14, 2024, MTR3 was seen mediating a conflict between two *santri* through reflective dialogue rather than punitive measures. When interviewed afterward, MTR3 stated: "If a *santri*'s heart is troubled, knowledge will not enter easily." This perspective is echoed in *santri* interviews: STR1 shared on February 16, 2024, "When I feel overwhelmed, I go to my *murabbi* before anyone else."

In the modern *pesantren*, emotional guidance is implemented through structured mentoring systems, including scheduled counseling sessions and homeroom supervision. MSR1 explained on March 3, 2024: "We have a weekly check-in system where each *murabbi* meets with 10–15 *santri* to discuss academic and personal challenges." Document analysis of the modern *pesantren*'s Student Support Handbook (2023) confirms the institutionalization of these practices, indicating a systematic approach to emotional development.

Compassion-Based Discipline

Disciplinary practices observed in both settings emphasize restoration over coercion. Field notes from March 10, 2024, record an instance where MTR2 guided a *santri* who had violated dormitory rules through a reflective conversation about community responsibility. When asked about this approach, MTR2 responded: "Punishment without understanding only creates fear, not awareness." *Santri* interviews

corroborate that this approach fosters emotional maturity: SMR3 stated on March 12, 2024, "Even when corrected, I feel respected and valued."

Murabbi and the Development of Spiritual Intelligence (SQ)

Cultivating Spiritual Awareness

Spiritual intelligence development constitutes the core of *pesantren* education. Observational data confirm that *murabbi* actively cultivate spiritual awareness through continuous religious guidance. During dawn prayer observations on February 10, 2024, MTR1 was seen reminding *santri* to connect daily activities with spiritual intention (*niyyah*). As MTR1 stated in a follow-up interview: "Spiritual education is not taught; it is lived." This finding is supported by institutional schedule documents showing structured spiritual programs—*dzikir*, *qiyamullail*, and *muhasabah*—designed to internalize religious values through consistent practice.

Habituation and Inner Reflection

Spiritual intelligence is further developed through habituation of worship and reflective practices. SMR2 reflected during an interview on March 8, 2024: "Before, I prayed because it was required; now I understand why I pray." Observational records indicate that *murabbi* frequently accompany *santri* during night prayers and reflection sessions, strengthening spiritual discipline through relational presence. Document analysis of the traditional *pesantren*'s *Kitab Adab al-'Alim wa al-Muta'allim* usage guidelines (2022) confirms that spiritual practices are framed as transformative rather than ritualistic.

Comparative Analysis: Traditional vs. Modern Pesantren

Table 1. synthesizes key comparative findings regarding *murabbi* roles across institutional contexts:

Table 1. Murabbi Roles Across Institutional Contexts

Dimension	Traditional Pesantren	Modern Pesantren
Intellectual Development	<i>Halaqah</i> , <i>sorogan</i> , text-based inquiry; emphasis on classical scholarship	Formal curricula, discussion-based learning, academic assessments; emphasis on critical thinking
Emotional Development	Organic mentorship through communal living; conflict mediation through dialogue	Structured counseling systems, scheduled check-ins, peer support programs
Spiritual Development	Spiritual practices embedded in daily rhythm; emphasis on <i>tazkiyat al-nafs</i>	Scheduled spiritual programs integrated with academic calendar; emphasis on reflective practice
Role Formalization	Culturally internalized expectations; minimal written documentation	Institutionalized job descriptions; formal evaluation mechanisms
Murabbi-Santri Interaction	Continuous, relationally intensive	Structured, scheduled, professionally bounded

Despite these methodological differences, interviews with institutional leaders from both settings confirm a shared philosophical foundation. MTA1 (Traditional) and MMA1 (Modern) both emphasized during interviews on March 15, 2024, that "the ultimate goal is to produce *santri* who are intellectually capable, emotionally mature, and spiritually grounded." This convergence suggests that differences between models are primarily structural rather than philosophical.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

Field data identify several factors influencing the effectiveness of *murabbi* in developing *santri* intelligence. Table 2 presents a synthesis of supporting and inhibiting factors across three intelligence dimensions:

Table 2. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

Dimension	Supporting Factors	Inhibiting Factors
Intellectual	Integrated curriculum; discussion-based <i>halaqah</i> ; writing/debate projects; <i>murabbi</i> modeling of scholarly habits	Limited instructional time; restricted access to learning resources; overreliance on memorization in some contexts
Emotional	Close <i>murabbi-santri</i> relationships; supportive peer environment; daily moral guidance (<i>tarbiyah akhlaqiyyah</i>)	Absence of structured counseling in traditional settings; academic pressure in modern settings; varying emotional sensitivity among <i>murabbi</i>
Spiritual	Collective worship routines; <i>qiyamullail</i> ; routine <i>muhasabah</i> ; spiritual modeling by <i>murabbi</i>	Risk of ritual fatigue; uneven spiritual awareness among <i>santri</i> ; limited time for deep reflection in structured schedules

Interview data further reveal that leadership quality and stakeholder coordination significantly moderate these factors. As MMA2 noted on March 18, 2024: "Without strong leadership from the *kyai*, *murabbi* efforts would not be synchronized." Document analysis of institutional meeting minutes (2023–2024) confirms regular coordination forums involving *kyai*, *murabbi*, *santri* representatives, and parents, suggesting that participatory governance strengthens program sustainability.

Discussion

The findings of this study affirm that the development of *santri* intelligence in *pesantren* cannot be separated from the central role of the *murabbi* as a value-oriented educator who operates across intellectual, emotional, and spiritual domains. This supports the holistic conception of Islamic education, which views learners as integrated beings whose cognitive abilities must be nurtured alongside moral sensitivity and spiritual awareness (Jenuri et al., 2025; Saada, 2023). The empirical data demonstrate that *murabbi* function not merely as transmitters of knowledge but as moral exemplars (*uswah hasanah*) and emotional mentors, confirming earlier arguments that Islamic pedagogy emphasizes *tarbiyah* (holistic nurturing) rather than instruction alone (Islam et al., 2026; Muzaki, et al., 2025). Thus, the role of the *murabbi* aligns closely with the ideal of *insan kamil*, wherein education aims at the balanced formation of intellect, character, and faith (Muzaki, et al., 2025). This finding challenges the reductionist view of teachers as mere curriculum implementers, particularly in contexts where technological and standardized educational paradigms dominate (Nata, 2018). Instead, it reinforces the position that authentic Islamic education requires a relational, value-embedded pedagogical agent who can translate abstract theological and ethical principles into lived daily practices (Ahwan & Karfida, 2025; Aulia et al., 2025; Hidayatullah, 2024; Muksin & Mudlofir, 2024; Tsani & Ali, 2024; Wafa et al., 2024). The data consistently show that when *murabbi* embody intellectual curiosity, emotional stability, and spiritual sincerity, *santri* internalize these traits through observational learning and relational trust, a

process that resonates strongly with Bandura's social learning theory and Rogers' humanistic emphasis on congruence in educational relationships.

In traditional *pesantren*, the findings reveal a strong emphasis on spiritual and emotional intelligence developed through close personal relationships between *murabbi*, *kiai*, and *santri*. This pattern corroborates assertions by Firmansyah et al (2024); Firmansyah & Abidin (2024), Kusumawardani et al., 2024; Mujahid, 2021b; and Muttaqin et al., 2024) that the strength of traditional *pesantren* lies in their affective and spiritual depth, sustained by daily interaction, moral modeling, and shared religious practices. The dominance of methods such as *sorogan* and *bandongan* reinforces learning as a relational and ethical process rather than a purely academic one. From the perspective of spiritual intelligence theory, this supports Hassan et al (2022) and Kabir et al (2025), who argue that spiritual awareness provides the deepest motivational foundation for human behavior, giving meaning and direction to intellectual pursuits. Conversely, modern *pesantren* demonstrate a more structured and systematic integration of intellectual, emotional, and spiritual intelligence through formal curricula, academic evaluation, and organized character-building programs. This finding resonates with studies highlighting the adaptive capacity of modern *pesantren* in responding to globalization and educational modernization (Azra, 2020; Najib & Khaudli, 2025b). The *murabbi* in modern *pesantren* simultaneously function as *mu'allim* (knowledge instructor), *murabbi* (moral guide), and *musyrif* (life supervisor), indicating an institutional expansion of educational roles. However, this study also reveals a potential tension: while systematization enhances academic outcomes and scalability, it may risk weakening the depth of personal bonds if not balanced with emotional proximity and spiritual exemplarity, echoing Freire's (2020) critique of overly mechanistic education that prioritizes efficiency over humanization. The comparative data suggest that methodological divergence does not equate to philosophical separation; rather, both models operate on a shared epistemological foundation that views intelligence as multidimensional and inherently value-laden.

The findings further highlight emotional intelligence as a critical bridge between intellectual learning and spiritual internalization. The *murabbi*'s empathetic communication, conflict mediation, and compassion-based discipline practices align with Alhamuddin (2025), Khikam et al., 2025, and Toprak et al (2023), who assert that emotional intelligence is essential for effective learning, moral development, and educational leadership. In traditional *pesantren*, emotional intelligence is cultivated organically through communal living and intimate mentorship, whereas in modern *pesantren* it is reinforced through counseling systems, extracurricular leadership programs, and structured guidance. This dual pattern suggests that emotional intelligence flourishes most effectively when institutional structures are complemented by authentic human relationships, supporting Rogers' humanistic emphasis on empathy, unconditional positive regard, and congruence in education. The data indicate that *santri* who experience consistent emotional validation from *murabbi* demonstrate higher resilience, better peer conflict resolution, and greater willingness to engage in critical academic discourse. This aligns with contemporary educational psychology literature, which positions emotional regulation as a prerequisite for higher-order cognitive functioning and moral reasoning (Pinto et al., 2024). Consequently, the *murabbi*'s role transcends behavioral management; it becomes a foundational pedagogical strategy that prepares *santri* to internalize knowledge meaningfully rather than mechanically. When emotional safety is established, cognitive load decreases, allowing *santri* to engage more deeply with complex theological and academic material,

a dynamic that mirrors Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development wherein relational scaffolding enables advanced intellectual growth.

Spiritual intelligence development constitutes the core differentiator of *pesantren* education compared to secular or conventional religious schooling. Findings show that *murabbi* actively cultivate spiritual awareness through continuous religious guidance, habituation of worship, and *tazkiyat al-nafs* (purification of the soul). Observations confirm that *murabbi* consistently remind *santri* to connect daily activities with spiritual intention (*niyyah*), fostering a sense of divine presence in everyday life. This practice aligns with Vasconcelos (2020) and Williams (2024), who emphasize that spiritual intelligence is not merely doctrinal knowledge but a lived consciousness that shapes ethical decision-making and existential purpose. In both traditional and modern contexts, *murabbi* employ reflective practices such as *muhasabah* (self-evaluation) and collective *dhikr* to deepen *santri's* inner awareness. These methods resonate with Islamic psychological frameworks that view the *nafs* (soul/self) as a dynamic entity requiring continuous cultivation through discipline, remembrance, and moral vigilance (Halim et al., 2024). The study's data further reveal that *santri* who regularly engage in guided spiritual reflection demonstrate greater emotional stability during academic stress and a stronger sense of vocational calling. This supports recent scholarship on spiritual intelligence in educational settings, which argues that transcendent meaning-making enhances long-term motivation, reduces burnout, and fosters prosocial behavior (Kabir et al., 2025; Pinto et al., 2024). Therefore, the *murabbi's* spiritual mentoring functions as both a preventive and transformative mechanism, ensuring that intellectual and emotional development remain anchored in ethical and theological foundations rather than drifting toward utilitarian or performance-driven paradigms.

The effectiveness of the *murabbi's* role is significantly moderated by institutional culture and leadership dynamics. Comparative findings indicate that traditional *pesantren* rely heavily on the charismatic and spiritual authority of the *kiai*, who sets the ethical tone and ensures value consistency across *murabbi* practices. Modern *pesantren*, conversely, distribute leadership through administrative structures, program coordinators, and standardized evaluation metrics. Despite these structural differences, both models recognize *murabbi* competence as the primary determinant of educational success. Interviews with administrators confirm that without synchronized vision and participatory governance involving *kyai*, *murabbi*, *santri* representatives, parents, and community members, educational programs risk becoming fragmented or ritualistic. This aligns with Maryam et al (2024) who emphasize that sustainable *pesantren* development requires collaborative leadership ecosystems rather than top-down mandates. Furthermore, the supporting and inhibiting factors identified in this study – such as integrated curricula, emotional proximity, collective worship routines, versus limited instructional time, academic pressure, and ritual fatigue – highlight the delicate balance required in *pesantren* management. When institutional policies prioritize holistic development over mere academic output, *murabbi* are empowered to exercise pedagogical creativity and relational depth (Aisah et al., 2025; Asweni et al., 2024; Maa'uun et al., 2025; Pusvitasari & Zarkasyi, 2024; Turrohma et al., 2025). Conversely, when systemic pressures emphasize standardized testing or rigid scheduling, the *murabbi's* capacity to provide individualized spiritual and emotional mentoring becomes constrained, a finding that echoes broader critiques of metric-driven education in contemporary Islamic schooling (Achmadin et al., 2024).

Finally, this study contributes to existing literature by shifting analytical focus from the symbolic authority of the *kiai* to the everyday pedagogical agency of the *murabbi*. While previous studies have emphasized leadership, institutional culture, and curriculum reform (Ruhdiyanto et al., 2024), this research demonstrates that the success of *santri* intelligence development ultimately depends on the quality of daily educational interactions. The findings suggest that curriculum, management, and infrastructure function effectively only when animated by a compassionate pedagogical ethos grounded in *mahabbah* (love), *rahmah* (compassion), and *uswah* (exemplary conduct). Therefore, the development of *santri* intelligence should be understood not merely as a programmatic outcome but as a lived educational culture sustained by *murabbi-santri* relationships. This perspective challenges conventional educational metrics that separate cognitive achievement from character formation, proposing instead an integrative framework where intellectual, emotional, and spiritual dimensions are mutually reinforcing (Fajri et al., 2025; Sarbini et al., 2025; Zamroni et al., 2025, 2025). Practically, these findings call for targeted professional development programs that equip *murabbi* with contemporary pedagogical strategies while preserving their traditional mentoring roles. Policy recommendations should include institutional support for reflective practice, emotional literacy training, and spiritual mentoring frameworks that can be adapted across both traditional and modern *pesantren* contexts.

While this study provides robust qualitative insights into the *murabbi's* role across two distinct *pesantren* models, it is subject to certain limitations. The comparative case study design focuses on specific traditional and modern *pesantren* in Indonesia, which may not fully capture the regional, cultural, and socio-economic diversity of *pesantren* nationwide (Abas et al., 2025; Fatah et al., 2025; Humaidi et al., 2024; Masuwd et al., 2025; Miftahuddin et al., 2024; Sintasari et al., 2026). Additionally, the study relies on self-reported data from *murabbi* and *santri*, which, while rich in experiential depth, may be influenced by social desirability bias. Future research should employ longitudinal designs to track the long-term impact of *murabbi* mentoring on *santri's* academic, professional, and spiritual trajectories. Mixed-methods approaches could also quantify the relationship between specific *murabbi* practices and multidimensional intelligence outcomes. Furthermore, comparative studies involving *pesantren* in other Muslim-majority countries would help contextualize these findings within broader Islamic educational paradigms. Despite these limitations, the study reaffirms that the *murabbi* remains an indispensable pedagogical agent whose holistic, value-centered approach continues to shape the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual formation of *santri* in an increasingly complex educational landscape.

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that the pedagogical agency of the *murabbi* in fostering *santri* intelligence across intellectual, emotional, and spiritual dimensions exerts a significantly greater impact than previously anticipated, challenging the longstanding assumption that institutional modernization and technological integration inherently diminish the necessity of traditional mentorship. Rather than being displaced by structured curricula, the *murabbi's* role emerges as the critical catalyst that animates academic and character development, thereby opening new scholarly discussions on how value-based relational pedagogy can sustain educational authenticity in rapidly modernizing Islamic contexts. Scientifically, this research strengthens prior findings on the centrality of Islamic humanistic values in *pesantren* education while challenging the validity of studies that treat intellectual, emotional, and spiritual intelligence as separate developmental

domains. It introduces the conceptual framework of the *murabbi* as a tripartite integrator—simultaneously functioning as moral guide (*murabbi*), knowledge instructor (*mu'allim*), and life supervisor (*musyrif*)—which offers a refined theoretical lens for understanding how multidimensional intelligence is cultivated through daily pedagogical interactions. Nevertheless, this study is limited by its focus on a small sample and two specific *pesantren* cases, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. Additional contextual variables, including demographic diversity, regional differences, gender dynamics, and age-related variations in *santri* development, were not fully accounted for. Future research employing larger, more heterogeneous samples, mixed-methods designs, or longitudinal approaches is necessary to validate these findings and provide a more comprehensive understanding of *murabbi* pedagogical practices across diverse Islamic educational settings.

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