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Pesantren's Knowledge Identity Crisis in the Digital Era

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PESANTREN'S KNOWLEDGE IDENTITY CRISIS IN THE DIGITAL ERA

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Abstract

This article aims to examine the knowledge identity crisis faced by pesantren in Indonesia as a result of developments in the digital era. The research was conducted at three major pesantren: Futuhiyyah Mranggen, Al-Asy'ariyah Wonosobo and Al-Munawir Yogyakarta. Data were collected through participatory observation, interviews with pesantren managers, including Kiai, administrators, and teachers, as well as documentation of relevant materials. The findings reveal that the knowledge identity crisis in pesantren during the digital era manifests in several ways: an excessive learning burden on santri unrelated to the core competencies of pesantren knowledge, a decline in santri's interest in studying traditional pesantren knowledge, and the institutional development of pesantren that has become disoriented from their foundational knowledge identity. To address this crisis, pesantren must refocus their learning programs to align with core competencies, reorient their knowledge systems to be adaptive and responsive to global needs, and restructure their institutions to remain rooted in the core knowledge identity of pesantren.

Keywords: *Identity Crisis; Knowledge Identity; Pesantren's Knowledge; Digital Era.*



A. Introduction

The crisis of *pesantren*'s (Islamic boarding schools) knowledge identity, as a traditional Indonesian indigenous educational institution, has become increasingly apparent in the current digital era (Rokhman et al., 2023). This crisis is evident as *pesantren* are required to conduct self-introspection to prepare graduates who are "literate" in technological and informational advancements (Mu'id, 2019). Additionally, the knowledge crisis is reflected in the metamorphosis of the education system (Badi'ah et al., 2021), encompassing changes in the curriculum (Arifin, 2018; Sutrisno, 2021), class structuring and learning techniques (Munifah, 2019), evaluation methods, and more—all of which point to a degradation in the quality of knowledge.

In the early 1900s, many *pesantren* initiated transformations in their educational curriculum, including *Pesantren Mamba'ul Ulum Surakarta* in 1906 (Mulyanto, 2021), *Pesantren Tebuireng Jombang* in 1916 (Arwani, 2022), *Pesantren Darul Ulum Jombang* in 1927 (Tusyana et al., 2020), and more recently, *Pesantren Gontor Ponorogo* (Zarkasyi, 2020). While these metamorphic changes were intended to respond to the demands of the digital era, they inadvertently led to a crisis, causing *pesantren*'s knowledge identity to decline in both graduation outcomes and graduation standards (Maghfiroh et al., 2024; Tasliyah & Anwar, 2022).

Research on *pesantren* identity has predominantly focused on four dimensions. First, the social identity dimension of *pesantren* and their role in preserving Islamic values (Bruinessen, 2012; Dhofier, 2011; Madjid, 1997; Mas'ud, 2019b; Mu'id, 2019). Second, the knowledge identity dimension and its relationship with cultural development (Badi'ah et al., 2021; Djamil, 1999; Harnadi et al., 2021). Third, the modernity dimension of *pesantren* as it relates to the development of their knowledge identity (Kholifah, 2022; Mansur, 2000; Munifah, 2019). Fourth, the distinction between the knowledge identity of *pesantren* and madrasah (Bawani, 1993; Daulay, 2001; Ismail S.M., 2002).

Despite these studies, the discussion remains fragmented and lacks comprehensiveness, particularly regarding the recent crisis of *pesantren*'s knowledge identity in the digital era. This gap highlights the need for a more

holistic exploration of the challenges facing *pesantren* as they navigate their evolving role in contemporary education.

The crisis of *pesantren's* knowledge identity in the digital era reflects complex and contextual characteristics. Unfortunately, existing studies on this issue predominantly focus on specific dimensions, such as *pesantren's* social identity, its relationship with cultural development, the evolution of *pesantren* knowledge in response to modernity, and the distinction between *pesantren* and madrasah knowledge identities. To address these gaps, this study not only complements the shortcomings of previous research but also specifically examines the knowledge identity crisis faced by *pesantren* in the digital era—a topic that remains underexplored by scholars.

In line with this focus, the research questions addressed in this article are: Why is there a knowledge identity crisis in *pesantren*? And What efforts should *pesantren* undertake to overcome this identity crisis? The answers to these questions aim to provide a comprehensive overview of the challenges faced by *pesantren* in preserving their knowledge identity in the digital era. Additionally, the study proposes efforts to restore the integrity and independence of *pesantren* knowledge.

This article argues that the crisis of traditional *pesantren* knowledge stems from three primary factors. First, the increasing burden of non-*pesantren*-related learning has reduced the time allocated for *pesantren* knowledge, thereby compromising the quality and maturity of *pesantren* graduates (Abidin, 2023; Adhitya, 2022; Nurwanda et al., 2020). Second, there is a declining interest among *santri* (students) in pursuing education in traditional *Salaf pesantren* that lack modern educational components (A'malia & Washil, 2024; Basyaruddin & Khoiruddin, 2020). Third, institutional changes within *pesantren* have led to a disorientation away from traditional *pesantren* education (Mainuddin et al., 2024; Raihani, 2012). This paper delves deeper into the knowledge identity crisis triggered by the influence of digital advancements, necessitating a review of the knowledge taught *santri* in *pesantren*.

In a broader context, this article aims to encourage an introspective approach within *pesantren* to preserve the knowledge identity that has long



defined their excellence. This research is also vital for guiding the knowledge and institutional development of *pesantren* in adapting to the challenges of the digital era (Isbah, 2020). The goal is to ensure that *pesantren* retain their identity (Hanafi et al., 2021) while keeping pace with the progress and transformations of disruptive times.

Identity Crisis

A crisis is defined as a critical point in the development of a situation where significant decisions must be made (*Oxford Languages*, 2021). According to Sapriel, a crisis refers to an event, condition, allegation, or set of circumstances that threatens the integrity, reputation or survival of an individual or organisation (Gasa et al., 2022). Additionally, crises can threaten a sense of security or shared societal values (Doni Wino Fajar Utomo & Margaretha Hanita, 2022). Several key characteristics define a crisis: surprise, lack of information, escalation of events, loss of control, panic, and the absence of a rapid, fundamental solution (Al Eid & Arnout, 2020). These attributes illustrates that a crisis is a serious condition requiring immediate and decisive action. Crises typically involve urgency and demand swift resolution.

The concept of identity has long been a fundamental construct for understanding psychological development, particularly during adolescence (Waterman, 1984). While identity is a complex and multi-dimensional concept, it can generally be defined as the way individuals or groups perceive themselves and interact with the world around them (Davis et al., 2019). Stets et al. (Stets et al., 2020) emphasizes that identity theory, introduced over 50 years ago, continues to evolve and expand. Social identity theory, for instance, explores how individuals form their identities within a societal context (Sassenberg & Vliek, 2019).

Davis et al. effectively bridges psychological and sociological perspectives through their application of collective social identity theory. This integrative approach combines key elements from both disciplines, providing a more nuanced and comprehensive framework for understanding the process of identity formation (Davis et al., 2019). The most recent theoretical development in this field is the Funds of Identity theory (Hedges, 2021). This



theory builds on the idea of “funds of knowledge,” emphasizing how all life experiences collectively shape an individual’s identity development.

An identity crisis is understood as a state of uncertainty or confusion experienced by an individual while attempting to understand and define their role in society and the world at large (Erikson, 1968). Identity crises often arise during transitional periods in life, when individuals struggle to comprehend who they are, what values are important to them, and how they wish to be perceived by others. In the context of this article, an identity crisis is interpreted as a condition where a community or society loses its established identity, resulting in a diminished sense of cohesion and self-definition.

Pesantren's Knowledge

Pesantren are institutions that uphold the grand tradition of teaching in Indonesia (Van Bruinessen, 2015). They inherit and sustain the continuity of Islamic traditions developed by scholars over generations (Nasr, 1987). As traditional Islamic educational institutions, *pesantren* are deeply rooted in the teaching of traditional Islamic knowledge (Dhofier, 2011). They are considered indigenous (Madjid, 1997) and represent a uniquely Indonesian educational institution (Mas’ud, 2019).

The core spirit of *pesantren* lies worship based on Islamic teachings, drawing from the Qur’an, Hadith, and the *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) of scholars in various forms (Nafi’, 2007). *Pesantren* encompass five main elements: dormitories, mosques, classical book instruction known as “yellow kitabs”, *santri*, and *kiai* (Islamic scholars) (Dhofier, 2011; Mas’ud, 2019b). The uniqueness of *pesantren* is exemplified by the central role of the *kiai*, who serves as both the spiritual and academic leader of the institution (Mas’ud, 2019a). Additionally, the historical evolution of *pesantren* highlights their multifaceted roles as centers for education, knowledge dissemination, skill training, community empowerment, religious guidance, and cultural preservation (Assa’Idi, 2021). These attributes distinguish *pesantren* from other educational institutions in Indonesia.



The discussion highlights the role of *pesantren* as knowledge institutions. *Pesantren* serve as transmitters of Islamic knowledge, preservers of Islamic traditions and values, and reproducers of scholars (Azra, 1999). To fulfill this mission, kiai often traveled extensively and stayed for extended periods in Mecca, typically coinciding with the pilgrimage (Bruinessen, 2012). The knowledge framework of *pesantren* is deeply influenced by *bayani* (textual) and *irfani* (intuitive) reasoning (Saihu, 2022), both of which are firmly rooted in *pesantren* traditions. In the transmission of knowledge, *pesantren* uphold the sanad tradition (Suhendra, 2019), which ensures the validity of knowledge through an unbroken chain of transmission that can be traced back to its original author or source (Pečiulis, 2016).

Digital Era

The digital era is characterized by technological advancements that enhance the speed and scope of knowledge circulation within economies and societies (Budiantoro, 2018; Shepherd, 2004). Scholars refer to it by various terms, including the digital revolution era (Papaconstantinou, 2004; Pearson, 2010), information society era (Rogerson, 2004), multiscreen era (Budiantoro, 2018) and flat world era (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Friedman, 2006; Gefen & Carmel, 2008; Hoseini-Ghahfarokhi et al., 2020; Leamer, 2007). Žyngintas Pečiulis outlines several defining characteristics of the digital era: mobility, interactivity, immediacy, mass authorship, reduced physical space, lower costs, hyperlinks, decentralization, free disposal, open access, and diversity (Pečiulis, 2016). This era represents a time of rapid and profound changes driven by technological advancements, reshaping various aspects of life.

The transformative impact of the digital era has led to paradigm shifts (Foucault, 2004) across multiple dimensions of the global ecosystem (Gapsalamov et al., 2020). In the economy, it has created alternative financial markets (Ziegler et al., 2017) previously unimaginable and accelerated economic growth in the individual sector (Solomon & van Klyton, 2020). In psychology, particularly concerning adolescent, the digital era has shown dual effects: while passive users may experience negative impacts, active

users can benefit positively (Dienlin & Johannes, 2020). In education, the digital era plays a crucial role in expanding access to learning opportunities (Gapsalamov et al., 2020). It has transformed teaching systems, learning methodologies, communication practices, and policy-making processes (Battro & Fischer, 2012). As part of the global ecosystem, *pesantren* have also been affected by the digital era, manifesting in a knowledge identity crisis.

B. Method

This study focused on three prominent *pesantren*: Al-Munawwir Krapyak, Al-Asy'ariyyah Kalibeper, and Futuhiyyah Mranggen. These *pesantren* were selected because they have undergone metamorphosis by incorporating modern scientific elements into their education system during the digital era. However, this process of metamorphosis has led to a decline in the quality of knowledge in these *pesantren*. The changes brought about by the digital era have contributed to a knowledge identity crisis in these three major *pesantren*.

The research employed a qualitative method with a descriptive-analytical approach (Creswell, 2019). Qualitative research was deemed most suitable for exploring the complex phenomenon of the *pesantren* knowledge identity crisis (Creswell, 2014). The study provides a detailed description combined with sufficient analysis to clearly illustrate the nature and extent of the knowledge identity crisis affecting these *pesantren*. The descriptive-analytical approach was chosen to effectively convey the nuances and implications of the observed phenomenon.

The primary data for this study were collected using triangulation techniques, including observation, interviews, and document review (Miles et al., 2014). Various learning activities in the *pesantren* were observed through direct participatory observation. The interview method was employed to gather insights from key stakeholders involved in managing the *pesantren*, such as kiai, principals, administrators, teachers, and others. Fifteen key informants were selected for interviews based on their extensive



knowledge of *pesantren* history and their experience in *pesantren* management.

The documents reviewed included the main curricula, supplementary curricula, *santri* registration database, and the *pesantren* development roadmap. To ensure data credibility, source triangulation was applied (Tabrani ZA et al., 2024). The collected data were then subjected to in-depth analysis through processes of data reduction, data display, and conclusions drawing (Miles et al., 2014; Walidin et al., 2023).

C. Result and Discussion

This section presents the main findings of the research conducted on three major *pesantren*, namely Al-Munawwir Krapyak, Al-Asy'ariyyah Kalibeber, and Futuhiyyah Mranggen. These findings were obtained through a qualitative approach using data triangulation from observations, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. The analysis aims to reveal how the knowledge identity crisis of *pesantren* occurs within the context of the digital era and its implications for the sustainability of *pesantren*'s educational traditions. The main focus of this section includes various aspects that serve as the sources of the problem, ranging from the additional learning burdens, the declining public interest in *salaf pesantren*, to the institutional transformation of *pesantren* leading to identity disorientation. These findings are systematically outlined to provide a comprehensive overview of the complexities surrounding the knowledge identity crisis of *pesantren* in facing the challenges of the digital era.

1. Result

a. Knowledge identity crisis due to additional learning load

As traditional educational institutions, *pesantren* do not traditionally adhere to a standardized curriculum. Learning in *pesantren* generally follows the expertise of the *kiai*, who are central to the continuity of *pesantren* education. *Pesantren* led by *kiai* with expertise in the Qur'an and its memorization often focus their education on Qur'anic memorization and exegesis, as seen in Al Munawwir and Al-Asy'ariyah. Meanwhile, *pesantren*



led by kiai with a background in Arabic studies tend to emphasize linguistic education, as practiced in Futuhiyah. In addition to these primary areas of knowledge, *pesantren* also provide education in Islamic disciplines such as *tawhid* (theology), *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), and *akhlaq* (morals).

With the modernization of *pesantren* in the digital era, marked by the standardization and adaptation of the curricula regulated by the government, *pesantren* have experienced a decline in independence tied to their unique characteristics. *Santri*, who previously focused solely on acquiring traditional *pesantren* knowledge passed down by their kiai, now face the additional burden of studying subjects unrelated to traditional competences, such as English, Mathematics, Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, Computers, and others. This shift has divided the focus of *santri* in their learning pursuits. While they are still expected to master traditional *pesantren* knowledge, they are simultaneously required to excel in subjects mandated by the government curriculum.

In addition to the burden of learning other subjects, *santri* are also required to develop knowledge and skills through programs designed by the *pesantren*. The *pesantren's* life skills program further add to the learning load that students must undertake. These skills encompass a wide range of areas, such as language, artistic, carpentry, and more.

Table 1. Additional skills in pesantren

Additional Skills	Number of Students	Percentage
Islamic Preaching	6.830	46,2
Arabic Language	6.039	40,8
Calligraphy	5.036	34
Computer	3.347	22,6
English Language	3.325	22,5
Handyman	2.554	17,3

The table above outlines the various life skills activities organized by *pesantren* to equip *santri* with practical abilities. The most commonly programmed skills include Islamic preaching and Arabic communication. Other skills, such as calligraphy, computer proficiency, English language ability, and handyman or mechanical skills, follow in importance. These additional activities significantly burden *santri*, diverting their focus from



mastering the traditional knowledge taught in *pesantren*. Balancing the demands of these programs with their primary learning responsibilities presents a considerable challenge for students.

This situation creates a double burden of learning for *santri*. The dual demands of learning tasks have led to a crisis in the *pesantren's* knowledge identity. *Santri* are less able to achieve depth in their understanding of traditional *pesantren* knowledge, which is their core focus, while also grappling with general science required by the government curriculum. This dual focus dilutes the emphasis on the traditional knowledge that defines *pesantren*.

In this context, leaders from Futuhiyah, Al-Asy'ariyah, and Al-Munawwir *pesantren* expressed the following.

In Futuhiyah pesantren, santri must memorize Alfiyah Ibn Malik to graduate from the pesantren, in addition to learning other subjects mandated by the government for graduation assessments and official diplomas, such as Mathematics, Indonesian, English, and others (KH. Faidurrahman Hanif, personal communication, 2022).

At Al-Munawwir, in addition to memorizing the Quran and understanding tafsir and qira'at, santri must also study the curriculum determined by the government to graduate (KH. Ihsanudin, personal communication, 2022).

Santri at Al-Asy'ariyah must memorize the Quran and understand its interpretation. They must also pass all school subjects and additional tutorials at the pesantren to graduate from Al-Asy'ariyah (KH. Badruzzaman, personal communication, 2022).

Based on these facts, the additional load learning has initiated the knowledge crisis in *pesantren*. *Santri* are burdened with an excessive number of subjects, often unrelated to the traditional scientific characteristics developed by the *pesantren*, due to curriculum demands imposed by government policies. Consequently, the mastery of *pesantren* knowledge among *santri* becomes inadequate, while the additional general knowledge required by the government's curriculum is also not fully absorbed. As a result, the *santri's* education becomes a disorganized mix of

incomplete competencies, leading to a decline in the quality and integrity of their *pesantren* knowledge. This dual burden ultimately weakens the core educational mission of the *pesantren*.

b. Crisis due to decreased public interest in *salaf pesantren* education

In the digital era, the modernization of education, including *pesantren*, has negatively impacted public interest in enrolling children in *salaf pesantren*. The community's reluctance to choose *salaf pesantren* stems from a shift in societal perspectives. Parents now recognize that modernity requires education not only to foster individual piety but also to equip children with life skills and the ability to engage with contemporary challenges. This shift in awareness has made *salaf pesantren* less attractive, leading to a gradual erosion of their knowledge heritage.

Table 2. Typology of pesantren

<i>Pesantren</i> Typology	Number of Students	Percentage
<i>Salafiyah</i>	3.184	21,5
Ashriyah	4.582	31
Combination of <i>Salafiyah</i> and Ashriyah	7.032	47,5

The table above shows the institutional distribution of *pesantren* in Indonesia. *Salaf pesantren* represent the smallest proportion, accounting only 21.5% of the total, while *pesantren* modern ashriyah is 31%. The largest share, 47.5%, comprises *pesantren* that combine traditional *salafiyah* and modern ashriyah approaches. This data indicates a gradual decline in the prevalence of *salaf pesantren* institutions. While modern ashriyah *pesantren* maintain a moderate presence, the combined typology has become the most dominant, reflecting the shifting educational preferences of society in adapting to contemporary demands.

In addition to the relatively small number of *salaf pesantren* institutions, the knowledge crisis in *pesantren* is further exacerbated by the decreasing number of *santri* focusing solely on *salaf* education. Instead, many *santri* engage in a combination of learning and recitation activities, blending Quranic studies



with other educational pursuits. This trend indicates a waning interest among *santri* in dedicating themselves exclusively to Qur'anic recitation.

Table 3. *Santri's learning activities in pesantren*

Santri's Learning Activities	Number of Students	Percentage
Formal Study and Recitation	2.058.459	59,4
Recitation only	1.405.875	40,6

The statistics above indicate that 40.6% of *santri* focus solely on Quranic recitation, while 59.4% combine Quranic studies with formal education. This 19% difference underscores the evolving priorities of *santri*, with many opting for a more diverse educational experience that aligns with contemporary societal expectations. This shift has also been a concern for *pesantren* managers, as expressed in their statements.

There are very few students who only board at Futuhiyah today. In fact, what makes the pesantren grow is the students who also attend formal schools at MTs and MA Futuhiyah (Hanif, personal communication, 2022).

Asyariyah can develop as it is now because the students are registered at the formal school such as SMP, SMA, and college. The pure salaf students can be counted on the fingers (Badruzzaman, personal communication, 2022)

c. Institutional transformation of disoriented *pesantren*

Globalization and the digital era have significantly impacted the institutional transformation of *salaf pesantren*. In response to modern challenges, *pesantren* have felt the need to prepare their students with skills that enable them to adapt to contemporary demands while securing their futures. One prominent approach is institutional transformation. *Pesantren* that initially focused solely on religious sciences have begun incorporating other disciplines into their curricula. This shift has resulted in *pesantren* transitioning from purely *salaf* institutions to adopting more modern management practices. The most notable trend is the combination of *salaf* and modern *pesantren* models, creating hybrid institutions.



Table 4. Orientation of pesantren institutional typology

Pesantren Typology	Number of Pesantren	Percentage
<i>Salafiyah</i>	3.184	21,5
Ashriyah	4.582	31
Combination of <i>Salafiyah</i> and Ashriyah	7.032	47,5

The data above shows that 47.5% of *pesantren* in Indonesia are a combination of *salaf* and modern *pesantren*. *Pesantren* modern ashriyah account for 31%, while only 21.5% remain purely *salafiyah*. This distribution highlights the extensive institutional transformation taking place within the *pesantren* system.

The significant institutional transformation within *pesantren* is evident in the establishment of formal schools. To achieve progress, *pesantren* must maintain and develop these formal schools. As part of this effort, many *pesantren* have established kindergarten and primary schools. Some have also extended their reach to secondary, tertiary, and higher education institutions, including universities. The scope and level of educational institutions established by *pesantren* depend largely on their ability to manage and fund these endeavors.

Table 5. Participation of santri in formal education

Formal Education	Number of Students	Percentage
Islamic College	50.207	3,23
Islamic Senior High School	241.953	15,56
Islamic Junior High School	592.738	38,12
Islamic Elementary School	453.895	29,19
Pre Elementary School	216.015	13,89

From the table above, it is evident that most *pesantren* prioritize the establishment of junior high schools as part of their institutional transformation. This is followed by elementary and senior high schools. The establishment of kindergarten and college-level institutions ranks lower in comparison.

However, the institutional transformation of *pesantren* has come at a cost to its distinctive educational characteristics, which have traditionally



defined its identity. The dynamics of this transformation have often been constrained by the formalization of school institutions. Moreover, the integration of school education into the government-mandated curriculum has further diluted the unique aspects of *pesantren* education. As a result, this transformation has led to disorientation in the educational mission of *pesantren*, eroding its original identity. This phenomenon contributes to an ongoing crisis in the preservation of *pesantren*'s knowledge identity, which should be safeguarded and maintained as a vital cultural and educational heritage.

2. Discussion

a. Refocusing of *pesantren* learning materials

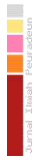
The issue of learning overload in *pesantren* arises from their ambition to provide added value to their graduates. While the intent is to prepare students to meet the demands of the modern digital era (Huda et al., 2020; Saadah & Asy'ari, 2022), this approach often leads to an imbalance. *Pesantren* offer additional learning materials outside the traditional curriculum, as illustrated in Table 1. These include skills aligned with *pesantren* objectives, such as preaching and Arabic language proficiency, as well as skills outside the traditional framework, such as English language, artistic talents, and vocational training. The intention is for these added skills to enhance the value of *pesantren* graduates.

However, this effort to provide added value has inadvertently created challenges. Instead of allowing *santri* (students) to deeply explore the core religious knowledge central to *pesantren* education, the focus on supplementary materials dilutes their primary competence (Hariadi et al., 2025). Graduates often lack depth in religious knowledge, their supposed area of expertise. Furthermore, rather than enhancing their learning experience, the additional materials impose burdensome demands, often unrelated to the *santri*'s interests or aspirations. Consequently, the educational outcomes of *pesantren* graduates become unfocused, blending religious and general knowledge without clear mastery in either domain (Huda et al., 2020).

This lack of depth is exacerbated by the expansion of the *pesantren* curriculum, which forces *santri* to navigate an increasingly diverse array of subjects without clear prioritization of the core competencies *pesantren* aim to cultivate (Rohmadiyah et al., 2024; Sutrisno, 2021). The excessive learning demands reduce the time available for in-depth study of traditional *pesantren* materials, which are inherently complex and require sustained focus. This situation contributes to a broader crisis in the knowledge identity of *pesantren* graduates, threatening the foundational purpose of *pesantren* education (Zaini et al., 2023).

To restore the spirit of knowledge in *pesantren*, it is crucial to refocus the learning materials, both core and supplementary. This refocusing is essential because *pesantren* have struggled to government-mandated curricula. In doing so, they risk neglecting the foundational values that define *pesantren* education. Since its inception, *pesantren* primarily focused on the study of the Qur'an. To realign with this focus, learning should emphasize Qur'anic studies, including *tahfiz* (memorization), *tafsir* (interpretation), *qira'ah* (recitation styles), *tajweed* (pronunciation rules), *tartil* (measured recitation), and related disciplines. *Pesantren* that have traditionally emphasized Islamic law must similarly refocus on core materials such as *fiqh* (jurisprudence), *maqasid al-sharia* (objectives of Islamic law), *fiqh* rules, *ushul fiqh* (principles of jurisprudence), ensuring that additional competencies align with this focus.

Likewise, *pesantren* specializing in Arabic language studies should prioritize foundational disciplines such as *nahwu* (grammar), *sharaf* (morphology), and *balaghah* (rhetoric), ensuring that supplementary skills also support this expertise. By systematically refocusing on both primary and value-added learning materials, *pesantren* can gradually address their knowledge crisis. This approach will not only preserve their unique educational identity but also enhance their ability to produce graduates who are deeply grounded in their specialized fields while equipped with relevant additional competencies.



From the above explanation, it is evident that the restoration of *pesantren's* knowledge identity requires a systematic and thoughtful approach to learning material selection and institutional orientation. As Huda et al. highlight, the balance between traditional values and modern competencies is critical for sustaining *pesantren's* relevance in the digital age (Huda et al., 2020). This refocusing is not merely a response to external pressures but a reaffirmation of the *pesantren's* inherent mission, as articulated by Nasr, which emphasizes the importance of preserving Islamic traditions while navigating contemporary challenges (Nasr, 1987).

Moreover, Dhofier and Bruinessen emphasize the centrality of kiai in maintaining the *pesantren's* educational and spiritual integrity. The deep reliance on the kiai underscores the importance of aligning all supplementary educational programs with the *pesantren's* primary focus, ensuring that modern competencies do not overshadow core religious education (Bruinessen, 2012; Dhofier, 2011). Such alignment is critical for upholding the *pesantren's* traditional identity, as emphasized by Nafi', who advocates for a pedagogical approach that integrates both bayani (textual) and irfani (intuitive) reasoning (Nafi', 2007).

Furthermore, the institutional rebuilding and reorientation must be adaptive yet rooted in the *pesantren's* core values. The philosophy of "*al-muhafazah ala al-qadim al-shalih wa al-akhzu bi al-jadid al-aslah*" (preserving the good from the past while adopting the best of the present), as reiterated by Nafi', offers a guiding framework for this transformation (Nafi', 2007). This approach is echoed in Wicaksono et al., who suggest that *pesantren* must develop clear, structured curricula that integrate religious teachings with measurable outcomes aligned with contemporary needs (Wicaksono et al., 2024).

In conclusion, restoring the spirit of knowledge in *pesantren* is not merely about curriculum adjustments but involves a comprehensive reevaluation of institutional goals, educational methodologies, and societal engagement strategies. By prioritizing foundational Islamic disciplines and integrating relevant modern competencies, *pesantren* can address their knowledge identity crisis and emerge as robust educational institutions equipped to navigate the challenges of the digital era.

b. Reorientation of *pesantren* education to respond to global needs

The low interest of the community in entrusting their children's education to *salaf pesantren* requires serious attention from *pesantren* education organizers. As shown in Table 2, *salaf pesantren* are perceived as less responsive to community needs compared to modern *pesantren* or those combining *salaf* and modern elements. Consequently, the number of students in *salaf pesantren* is significantly lower than those in modern or hybrid *pesantren*, as seen in Table 3. Parents tend to prefer educational institutions that they believe can secure their children's future. Unfortunately, *salaf pesantren* are not perceived to provide that guarantee, unlike modern and hybrid *pesantren*. If *salaf pesantren* wish to receive a positive response from the community, managers must rethink the orientation of ideal *pesantren* education.

The community perceives education in *salaf pesantren* as being insufficiently responsive to the demands of globalization (Husaini Zuhri & Huda, 2024; Munifah, 2019). *Salaf pesantren* are seen as maintaining a modest educational system with minimal institutional management. Their traditional approach often relies on the kiai (Islamic scholar) as the sole authority of knowledge (Haidar et al., 2023; Harnadi et al., 2021), making the system appear rigid and immune to critique. Learning facilities are basic, lacking modern media that could make lessons more engaging. Additionally, there is often no evaluation system to monitor the progress of *santri* (students), further reinforcing public assumptions about the limitations of *salaf pesantren* (Kholifah, 2022). As a result, *salaf pesantren* are increasingly marginalized within the national education system (Nurtawab, 2019).

To address the low level of public trust in *pesantren* institutions, particularly *salaf pesantren*, it is essential to reorient *pesantren* education to be more responsive to modernity and globalization. This reorientation is crucial for *pesantren* to gain proper community recognition and appreciation (Neliwati et al., 2023; Rofifah et al., 2021). Moreover, it will play a decisive role in shaping the future of *pesantren*, enabling them to compete with other educational institutions. The first step in this process is raising awareness among *pesantren* managers about the importance of modernization and



globalization. This requires them to be consistently creative, innovative, and responsive to change. Following this awareness, concrete steps in responsive *pesantren* management should be taken. These include improving the physical environment by arranging an aesthetic and comfortable layout to enhance the learning experience for students (Wahidmurni et al., 2024). Additionally, the curriculum must be structured with clear leveling to provide a measurable guarantee of learning outcomes (Wicaksono et al., 2024). *Pesantren* should also embrace the practice of conducting regular learning evaluations to monitor the progress and effectiveness of their educational programs continuously. By adopting these measures, *pesantren* can rebuild public trust and increase the community's interest in choosing them as a preferred educational option for their children.

c. Rebuilding an orientative and adaptive institution with *pesantren* education

The disparity of the number of *salaf pesantren* compared to modern *pesantren* and the combination of the two, as shown in Table 4, indicates the significant institutional transformation *pesantren* have undergone to address the challenges of modernization and globalization. *Pesantren* recognize that globalization is an inevitable reality (*Sunatullah*) of contemporary development. Accompanying this awareness, *pesantren* adhere to the well-known adage, "*al-muhafazah ala al-qadim al-shalih wa al-akhzu bi al-jadid al-aslah*" (preserving what is good from the past while adopting what is better from the present), as a guiding principle for continuous improvement (Nafi', 2007). Guided by this philosophy, *pesantren* engage in institutional transformation by reorienting their educational approaches to align with the demands of modernization while maintaining their foundational values.

As a concrete step of institutional transformation, many *pesantren* have established a range of formal schools, as shown in Table 5. These educational services vary widely, spanning from kindergarden to university level, and encompass both general sciences and religious studies. The establishment of diverse formal schools within *pesantren* represents a

deliberate effort to enhance their role as comprehensive and progressive educational institutions.

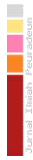
Unfortunately, the transformations undertaken have resulted in a disorientation of *pesantren's* core knowledge. Instead of reinforcing the primary knowledge base of, these changes have caused a shift in focus. *Pesantren* are now more concentrated on developing new institutions with curricula that are insufficiently aligned with their traditional knowledge framework (Kholifah, 2022; Munifah, 2019; Thohir, 2020). This issue is evident in the institutional curricula, which adhere to government regulations based on the level and type of formal school services established. Consequently, *pesantren* risk losing their original identity. The distinctiveness of *pesantren* as an indigenous Indonesian educational institution (Madjid, 1997) has become increasingly blurred, if not entirely diminished.

to restore the integrity of *pesantren's* knowledge, institutional rebuilding that aligns with and adapts to the character of *pesantren* education is essential. The rebuilding process ensures that *pesantren* maintain their primary scientific orientation without being entirely driven by market-oriented educational trends, which could undermine their authority (Sutrisno, 2021). According to Salahuddin Wahid, the cornerstone of *Pesantren* education lies in the Mu'allimin Madrasa (religious specialists), as he argued that Islamic boarding schools without the Mu'allimin Madrasa cannot truly be called *pesantren*, but are merely boarding schools (Arif et al., 2024; Huda et al., 2020).

This institutional rebuilding must account for the unique characteristics of each *pesantren*, preventing institutional overlap that could erode the distinctiveness long established by their founders. By preserving these unique features and fostering continuous regeneration, *pesantren* institutions can sustain their identity and thrive in a rapidly changing educational landscape.

D. Conclusion

The research highlights that the digital era has significantly contributed to the decline of *pesantren* through the erosion of their distinctive knowledge identity. This knowledge identity crisis arises from excessive



learning loads imposed on students, limited quality of *santri* resources, and the disoriented institutional development of *pesantren*. To overcome this crisis, *pesantren* need to take several managerial measures, including refocusing their learning materials, reorienting *pesantren* education to align with global needs, and rebuilding institutions that are both orientative and adaptive to *pesantren* education.

The findings of this study are limited to three large *pesantren* in Central Java and Yogyakarta: *Pesantren Futuhiyyah*, Mranggen, Demak; *Pesantren Al-Asy'ariyah* Wonosobo; and *Pesantren Al-Munawir*, Krapyak, Yogyakarta. Future research should extend to other regions, particularly East Java, which serves as the main hub of *pesantren* in Indonesia. Historically, *pesantren* knowledge centers have referred to large institutions in East Java, such as *Pesantren Ploso* in Kediri, *Pesantren Rejoso*, and *Pesantren Tebuireng* in Jombang. These *pesantren* exhibit a more established knowledge identity, ensuring that modernization does not compromise their core educational and cultural essence.

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