

# Resistance and Adaptation: The Transformation of *Pesantren Salafiyah* in West Sumatra Between Islamic Scholarly Traditions and the Demands of Modernity

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## Abstract

This study aims to analyze the dynamics and dilemmas faced by *Pesantren Salafiyah* in West Sumatra in maintaining traditional Islamic education amidst the currents of modernization and globalization. The research approach used is a descriptive qualitative approach, with data collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. The research subjects included *kiai*, teachers or *ustadz*, *santri*, alumni, and the surrounding community from several *pesantren salafiyah*, namely *Pesantren Ashhabul Yamin Lasi* in Agam Regency, *Pesantren al-Manaar Batuampar* in Lima Puluh Kota, MTI III Kampung Candung, MTI Tengku Tuah in Lima Puluh Kota, Pondok, and MTI Batang Kabung. The study's results indicate that *pesantren salafiyah* play an important role in preserving the treasures of classical Islamic knowledge by teaching "*kitab kuning*" (classical Islamic texts) using traditional methods such as *bandongan*, *sorogan*, and *halaqah*. However, *pesantren* faces complex challenges, including changes in educational policies, limited resources, leadership renewal, and public perceptions of the relevance of *pesantren* graduates in the modern world. Nevertheless, many *pesantren* demonstrate adaptive capabilities through selective integration of modern elements, such as the addition of a general curriculum, strengthened management, and the use of learning technology, without abandoning their scholarly identity. The principle of "*al-muhafazhah 'ala al-qadim al-shalih wa al-akhdz bi al-jadid al-aslah*" (religious guidance, the guidance of the righteous) serves as the basis for maintaining a balance between tradition and innovation. With wise and collaborative management, *pesantren salafiyah* has the potential to become models of relevant and sustainable Islamic education.

**Keywords:** *Pesantren salafiyah*, islamic education, tradition and modernity, educational transformation.

## Introduction

*Pesantren salafiyah* is a traditional *pesantren* that maintains the study of *kitab kuning* as the center of education and upholds strong traditions in the learning process (Hafidh et al., 2022). *Pesantren*, as a traditional Islamic institution, has deep historical roots in Indonesia's development. From the pre-independence period to the reform era, they have significantly shaped Muslims' moral,

spiritual, and intellectual character (Afi'dah & Nisfa, 2025, p. 81). In *pesantren salafiyah*, the *kiai* is a central figure (Qomariyah & Darwis, 2023). In recent decades, *pesantren salafiyah* has faced various challenges due to changing times (Qotrunada et al., 2025). However, while striving to maintain long-standing traditions and educational methodologies, *pesantren* faces the need to adapt to changing times, both through government policies and social dynamics (Qomariyah & Darwis, 2023; Qotrunada et al., 2025).

One of the policies that influenced it was the government regulation that required *pesantren* to include general subjects in the government-regulated curriculum Number: 19/E/MS/2004 and Number: Dj).II/166/2004, regarding the implementation of education equivalent to *pesantren*, which was strengthened by the Joint Agreement of the Ministry of National Education and the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Number: 19/E/MS/2007 and Number 2007 regarding the process of Out-of-School Education activities in Religious Institutions (Depag, 2008: i-ii). This brought a big dilemma for *pesantren salafiyah* that prioritize religious teaching and traditional sciences.

Furthermore, *pesantren* often faces leadership challenges that threaten their sustainability, mainly when leadership depends heavily on charismatic figures, which can undermine long-term stability (Ta'rifin & Halid, 2021). The existence and progress of *pesantren* is inseparable from the role of the *kiai*, who is keys figures within these institutions and serve as intellectuals in the development and movement of *pesantren* in various aspects (Aminuddin & Suklani, 2024), as expressed by Dhofier in (Hafidh et al., 2022). Leadership in *pesantren* whether by the *kiai* plays a crucial role in sustaining both the *santri* and the institution (Aksa & Hakim, 2023, p. 132). The *kiai* usually appoints a senior *santri* as the *lurah pondok* to assist in managing *santri* daily activities. This system aims to build students' independence and strengthen their relationship with the *kiai* and with God (Nashih et al., 2024). The results of this study can provide a different understanding of the dynamics of the dilemmas faced by *pesantren salafiyah* in West Sumatra. The issue of leadership regeneration is one factor hampering the future sustainability of *pesantren*.

The lack of government attention, particularly from the Ministry of Religious Affairs, to the development of *pesantren salafiyah* (Rohmah & Subiyantoro, 2021) and community perceptions that graduates of *kitab kuning*-based education are ill-prepared for the modern workforce, compound this. This perception raises concerns that the curriculum does not provide sufficient

practical skills and technological mastery required in the world of work, further complicating this dilemma.

This research focuses on the dilemmas faced by *pesantren salafiyah* in West Sumatra, a region known for its traditional *pesantren* that still uphold classical Islamic teachings and educational methods. Unlike previous research, which generally focused on the historical development of *pesantren* or the *salafiyah* educational model in general, this study specifically examines the responses of *pesantren salafiyah* in West Sumatra to contemporary social changes, such as technological advances, modernization, and the dynamics of government education policies. This study aims to explore how *pesantren salafiyah* in West Sumatra has responded to these challenges, including declining student numbers, curriculum adaptation, the use of technology, and internal management. The primary dilemma faced is maintaining long-standing traditions within the *pesantren* while also adapting to the demands of the modern world. This research will identify the factors influencing this adaptation process and how the decisions made by *pesantren salafiyah* relate to the social, cultural, and educational policy dynamics within the community and government.

The research method used is a qualitative method to gain a deep understanding of the dynamics and dilemmas faced by *pesantren salafiyah* in West Sumatra. This approach was chosen because it can describe the social reality of *pesantren* that has strong religious traditions but is facing social changes and educational policies. The research subjects included administrators, *kyai*, teachers, *santri*, alumni, and the surrounding community. In contrast, the research objects focused on several *pesantren salafiyah*, namely the *pesantren* Ashhabul Yamin Lasi (Agam), *pesantren* al-Manaar Batuampar (Lima Puluh Kota), MTI III Kampung Candung, MTI Tengku Tuah (Lima Puluh Kota), and the Pondok and MTI Batang Kabung. Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis, including government policies, *pesantren* curricula, and internal documents. Interviews were conducted with *pesantren* leaders (*kiai*), teachers, *santri*, and the community to gather information on educational policies, leadership practices, and perceptions of kitab kuning-based education. Data analysis used source triangulation to ensure the validity of the findings. Through this approach, the research provides a comprehensive picture of the adaptation process and the challenges *pesantren salafiyah* faces amid growing social changes.

## Result and Discussion

### **The contribution of *Pesantren Salafiyah* in West Sumatra is Vital in Preserving Islamic Intellectual Heritage**

*Pesantren salafiyah* in West Sumatra plays a strategic role in preserving Islamic intellectual heritage by teaching the *kitab kuning*, which forms the core of the curriculum (Khasanah et al., 2022). These books cover various disciplines such as *tafsir*, *hadith*, *fiqh*, *tasawwuf*, and *nahwu-sharaf* (the texts of Islamic jurisprudence), which have been passed down by classical scholars and serve as primary references in the Islamic scholarly tradition. This is consistent with research conducted by (Hasan & Anshory, 2024), which shows that *pesantren salafiyah*, particularly in West Sumatra, play a crucial role in preserving Islamic intellectual heritage through the teaching of the *kitab kuning*, which form the core of their curriculum. This is evident in the *pesantren* Ashhabul Yamin Lasi in Agam Regency and the *Pesantren* al-Manaar Batuampar in Lima Puluh Kota, which incorporates the study of the *kitab kuning* into their curriculum. Through the *bandongan* and *sorogan* methods, *pesantren* not only transmits textual knowledge but also instills the values of *adab* (ethnicity), discipline, and respect for teachers (*ta'dzim*), which are integral to the traditional Islamic learning ethos.

Furthermore, *pesantren salafiyah* functions as a center for the transmission of the *sanad* (traditional chain of transmission), which reinforces the trustworthiness of the knowledge. The maintained teacher-student relationship allows for the continuity of scientific and spiritual authority from generation to generation (Mahfudloh, 2023). The existence of this *sanad* provides legitimacy and authenticity to the knowledge taught, while also connecting the *pesantren* community in West Sumatra with a network of *ulama* (Islamic scholars) across the Indonesian archipelago and the Islamic world.

*Pesantren salafiyah* also serves as a forum for preserving the tradition of scholarly discussion, such as *bahtsul masail* (religious discussion), which addresses contemporary issues by referencing classical texts. These activities not only maintain the relevance of Islamic teachings but also encourage the development of critical thinking within a sharia framework. *Pesantren salafiyah* in West Sumatra plays a dual role: preserving the Islamic intellectual heritage derived from the early scholars while adapting its application to the local socio-cultural context. This role ensures that the Islamic intellectual heritage remains alive and develops, fostering a sense of confidence in the ongoing relevance of Islamic scholarship for the community's religious identity.

The dilemma between preserving tradition and meeting the demands of change in *pesantren salafiyah* in West Sumatra arises from the tension between the commitment to maintaining the identity of classical Islamic scholarship and the need to adapt to the times. On the one hand, *pesantren salafiyah* adheres to traditional learning methods such as *bandongan*, *sorogan*, and *halaqah*, with a focus on the study of *kitab kuning*. This tradition is not merely an educational method but also an intellectual and spiritual heritage that shapes *santri* character, instilling values of sincerity, simplicity, and respect for teachers (*ta'dzim*) (Ibrahim & Mukhsin, 2025).

However, technological developments, globalization, and national education policies require *pesantren* to be open to innovations, such as the integration of general subjects, the use of information technology, and the implementation of accreditation standards (Yusuf & Ali, 2025). Challenges arise when these innovations have the potential to shift the focus of *kitab kuning* learning, change patterns of *kiai-santri* interaction, or influence the *pesantren* culture that has traditionally been its hallmark.

This aligns with research by (Qomariyah & Darwis, 2023), which shows that *pesantren salafiyah* in Indonesia faces a dilemma between maintaining tradition and adapting to modernity. Traditional learning methods such as *bandongan* and *sorogan* are still maintained to preserve Islam's intellectual and spiritual heritage, underscoring their ongoing relevance. Furthermore, according to (Qotrunada et al., 2025). *pesantren* must also adapt to the demands of the globalization era, encouraging them to integrate general subjects, information technology, and modern accreditation standards.

Furthermore, some communities are beginning to perceive graduates of traditional *pesantren* as lacking practical skills relevant to the modern job market. This pressure is forcing *pesantren* to consider a more adaptive curriculum, without sacrificing the depth of religious knowledge. The core strategic dilemma facing *pesantren salafiyah* is how to balance the preservation of time-tested scientific traditions and moral values while adapting to change to remain relevant in modern society. This balance is key to the continued role of *pesantren* as bastions of Islamic heritage and agents of social transformation.

### **Common Ground: The Possibility of Integration Without Losing Identity**

The common ground between preserving tradition and meeting the demands of change in *pesantren salafiyah* in West Sumatra can be achieved through a selective and contextual integration strategy, so that incoming

innovations do not erode their scientific and spiritual identity. To ensure effectiveness, establish clear criteria and assessment methods to evaluate the success of these strategies, which can help educators and policymakers gauge progress and make necessary adjustments (Aini et al., 2025).

In practice, integration can be realized by maintaining the yellow books as the core of the curriculum, while adding supporting materials relevant to the needs of the times (Marwiji et al., 2024). Traditional methods such as *bandongan* and *sorogan* are maintained. However, they can be enriched with technology, for example, during the learning process, using projectors for presentations or video displays, as is done by teachers at the *Pesantren* al-Manaar Batuampar in Lima Puluh Kota.

This is consistent with research conducted by (Musa, 2025), which highlighted the integration of traditional Islamic education with modern approaches in Indonesian *pesantren*. While maintaining the core curriculum of *kitab kuning* (classical Islamic texts), *pesantren* incorporate other materials appropriate to the needs of the times to make learning more contextually relevant to *santri* and provide digital books or online learning platforms to expand *santri* access to reference sources.

In institutional management, *pesantren* can adopt more professional governance practices, such as modern administrative systems, transparent financial reporting, and human resource development strategies, without altering the central role of the *kiai* (Islamic scholars) as holders of moral and scholarly authority (Noor et al., 2023). This is the case for several *pesantren salafiyah* in West Sumatra, including *Pesantren* Ashhabul Yamin Lasi in Agam Regency and *Pesantren* al-Manaar Batuampar in Lima Puluh Kota. This is consistent with research by Muis (Muis, 2020), which found that traditional *pesantren* is adopting more professional management practices, including modern administrative systems, transparent financial reporting, and human resource development strategies.

*Pesantren salafiyah* does not need to choose between tradition and modernity. Instead, they can position themselves as institutions that are loyal to their scholarly roots while simultaneously adapting to change. This integration can foster pride and confidence in the audience, showing that *pesantren* can preserve their heritage while thriving in the modern era.

### **Conflict: When Modernization is Perceived to Erode Spirituality**

A conflict arises when the process of modernization in the *pesantren salafiyah* is perceived as eroding the spirituality that has long underpinned their

education. Modernization, whether through the integration of general curricula, the use of technology, or the implementation of formal educational standards, is often viewed by some as a threat to the purity of tradition (Shulhan, 2021). This concern stems from the view that a focus on technical skills or general knowledge can divert students' time and attention from deepening their religious knowledge, practicing worship, and developing morals (Najmudin et al., 2020). However, several *pesantren* in West Sumatra have found ways to maintain *salaf* traditions while selectively embracing aspects of modernization, such as the *Pesantren Ashhabul Yamin Lasi* and the *al-Manaar Batuampar*.

Changes in the pattern of *kiai-santri* interaction are also a source of concern. In the *salafiyah* tradition, this relationship is personal, intense, and steeped in spiritual values. Modernization, which brings formal administrative systems, classroom-based learning, or the use of digital media, has the potential to diminish this emotional and spiritual closeness (Ali & Kawakip, 2025). For example, the use of electronic devices for learning can accelerate access to information. However, there are also concerns that it will diminish the value of *ta'dzim* (religious devotion), the etiquette of listening to, and learning directly from teachers.

Furthermore, an educational orientation that is too focused on academic achievement or job market competency can lead to a paradigm shift, from education as a process of *tazkiyatun nafs* (purification of the soul) to merely an instrument of social mobility (Duryat, 2021; Nur, 2022; Zubairi, 2023). In the view of some *pesantren* administrators, this shift threatens the very spirit of *pesantren* as centers of moral and spiritual development based on sincerity, simplicity, and devotion. Thus, this point of conflict is rooted in the tension between the core values of *pesantren*, which prioritize spirituality, and the demands of modernization, which have the potential to marginalize this dimension. Without wise management, modernization can generate internal resistance and weaken the *pesantren*'s role as guardians of Islam's spiritual heritage.

### **The Relevance of the Resistance and Adaptation Theory and Theoretical Perspectives in *Pesantren Salafiyah***

The resistance and adaptation theory proposed by Robert W. Hefner is highly relevant in explaining the dynamics of *pesantren salafiyah* in West Sumatra in the face of modernization. This theory views traditional institutions, including religious ones, as neither completely rejecting nor embracing change (Hefner,

2021). Instead, they exhibit a dual response pattern: resistance to elements perceived as threatening to their identity, and adaptation to aspects deemed beneficial. In *pesantren*, resistance is evident in the commitment to upholding the *kitab kuning*, the *bandongan-sorogan* method, and spiritual values such as *ta'dzim* (religious devotion), simplicity, and sincerity. Adaptation is evident in the integration of parts of the general curriculum, the use of information technology, and improvements in institutional management to meet accreditation standards.

In the modernization of Islamic education in Indonesia, various empirical studies show that the modernization process in *pesantren* does not occur uniformly. Each *pesantren* selectively adapts to its local needs and conditions. One example is research by (Hasna et al., 2025), which shows that several *pesantren* has begun integrating digital training for students and educators, as well as updating their management and learning systems to remain relevant to the demands of the Society 5.0 era. Field findings support this, indicating that several *pesantren* in West Sumatra actively incorporate digital media into their learning processes, including Ashhabul Yamin Lasi (Agam), al-Manaar Batuampar (Lima Puluh Kota), and MTI Batang Kabung (Padang Pariaman). Nevertheless, the *salafiyah* identity is maintained through a commitment to the classical curriculum and deep-rooted scientific traditions. These findings reinforce Hefner's thinking regarding the pattern of 'adaptive resistance,' namely, the strategy of traditional institutions to maintain the continuity of values while still responding to the needs and challenges of the times.

However, although various *pesantren* has made adaptation efforts, many still face serious challenges in meeting formal accreditation requirements, particularly when their management and institutional structures are still based on traditional patterns. This finding aligns with studies on the resilience of *Pesantren salafiyah* education, which emphasize that integration between traditional education and modern systems is a crucial prerequisite for maintaining relevance and sustainability. The accreditation process emerges as a significant challenge for *pesantren salafiyah*. Accreditation by the National School/*Madrasah* Accreditation Board (BAN-S/M) and the National Professional Certification Board (BNSP) requires meeting quality indicators, including educator qualifications, curriculum, facilities, infrastructure, and institutional governance (Dedik et al., 2025). Many *pesantren salafiyah* has not been able to fully meet these standards because traditional management patterns do not always align with the formal administrative approach used in the national



accreditation system (Hamdani & Baharuddin, 2025). The inability to meet administrative standards often leads to the stagnation or even closure of some *pesantren*, particularly in areas with limited resources (Humaidi et al., 2024; Malik et al., 2024). A similar situation can be found in West Sumatra, where several Pesantren Salafiyah struggled to survive and eventually ceased operations, such as MTI III Kampung Candung and MTI Tengku Tuah.

In addition to these challenges, some *pesantren salafiyah* has chosen a compromise approach by pursuing accreditation for their formal units, while maintaining a traditional educational system that does not fully meet formal parameters. This choice demonstrates an effort to balance administrative demands with the preservation of the *pesantren's* scholarly traditions. This process requires technical assistance and affirmative policies to ensure the *pesantren* can meet national standards without losing its distinctive character. This is especially important for *pesantren* that maintain traditional curricula such as the *kitab kuning*, grammar, and the *balaqah* system. Several *pesantren salafiyah* in West Sumatra has taken this step, such as *Pesantren Ashhabul Yamin Lasi* and *Al-Manaar Batuhampar*, both of which have successfully achieved B-grade accreditation. This success demonstrates that a compromise between tradition and formal standards allows *pesantren* to continue to exist without abandoning their Salafiyah identity.

Meanwhile, from an institutional transformation perspective, the adaptations undertaken by *pesantren* not only affect the curriculum and learning methods but also encompass updates to their institutional structures, social functions, and roles within society. Research shows that modern *pesantren* strive to incorporate general and vocational subjects, improve teaching methodologies, and expand their functions so that they are no longer limited to religious institutions but also serve as educational institutions and socio-economic empowerment institutions for the surrounding community (Basyit, 2017; Humaidi et al., 2024). Thus, these structural adaptations are part of the *pesantren* strategy to remain relevant in a changing social context.

When viewed through the lens of modernization theory, the process of change in *pesantren* reflects an effort to adapt to the demands of modern society, which prioritizes efficiency, academic competence, and practical skills. Recognizing these internal dynamics helps the audience appreciate *pesantren's* resilience in managing change without losing their core values, fostering respect for their strategic adaptation (Faizin, 2020).

From the perspective of religious conservatism, *pesantren* resistance to modernization is not an absolute rejection of progress, but rather a nuanced strategy to preserve the purity of sacred teachings and traditions. This approach aims to foster respect for their careful filtering of innovations, which helps the audience understand their balanced stance on maintaining identity while engaging with change.

Meanwhile, cultural adaptation theory emphasizes that *pesantren* not only select modern incoming elements but also process them to maintain harmony with Islamic values and local culture (Azizah, 2021; Husen & Husni, 2025). This adaptation process is creative, as the adopted innovations do not weaken, but rather strengthen, the *pesantren's* identity. The findings of this study indicate that *pesantren salafiyah* in West Sumatra developed an adaptation model rooted in tradition yet open to modernization. This pattern demonstrates a combination of resistance and adaptation that gave birth to a distinctive form of education typical of *pesantren*. The commitment to maintaining the *kitab kuning*, the *bandongan-sorogan* method, and spiritual values such as *ta'dzim*, simplicity, and sincerity reflect this aspect of resistance (Baidawi, 2025). Meanwhile, the acceptance of parts of the general curriculum, the use of information technology, and improvements in institutional management illustrate the *pesantren's* adaptation strategies.

*Pesantren* cannot be viewed as passive entities, but rather as active cultural actors negotiating modernity to remain relevant without losing their identity. The novelty of this research lies in the assertion that *pesantren* is not merely an object of modernization but also a subject actively shaping innovations in accordance with traditional values. Therefore, this study enriches Hefner's theory by offering a new adaptation model rooted in the local context of Indonesian *pesantren*.

The findings of this study reinforce the view that *pesantren salafiyah* cannot be positioned as a passive entity in the face of modernization. Instead, they act as cultural actors actively negotiating modernity, maintaining the core of Islamic tradition while adopting innovations deemed relevant to their context. Thus, this study expands Hefner's perspective by demonstrating that institutional adaptation in Indonesian *pesantren* can take a hybrid form, combining the preservation of traditional values with structural transformations in management, curriculum, and social functions. This hybrid model demonstrates how *pesantren salafiyah* can survive and remain relevant amidst the demands of modernization without sacrificing its distinctive identity and character.

## Conclusion

This research shows that *pesantren salafiyah* in West Sumatra has a strategic role in preserving the tradition of classical Islamic scholarship through the teaching of *kitab kuning* and traditional learning methods such as *bandongan*, *sorogan*, and *halaqah*. Kiai act as scientific authorities and moral figures, strengthening students' character and the relationship between the boarding school and the community. Nevertheless, *pesantren salafiyah* faces challenges related to modernization, particularly in meeting accreditation requirements, integrating the national curriculum, and addressing limited resources and a leadership regeneration crisis. These challenges are exacerbated by the perception of some communities that *pesantren* graduates are less competitive in the modern world. However, many *pesantren* has begun to make selective adaptations by strengthening management, adding general subjects, and utilizing technology without losing their traditional identity. Adhering to the principle of *al-muhafazhah 'ala al-qadim al-shalih wa al-akhdz bi al-jadid al-ashlah*, *pesantren salafiyah* has the potential to become a model of relevant and sustainable Islamic education in the contemporary era.

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