

Between Tradition and State Recognition: A Philosophical Inquiry into Muadalah Pesantren Education in Indonesia

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze and reconstruct the concept of Muadalah pesantren education from the perspective of Islamic educational philosophy, focusing on the relationship between scholarly traditions, educational autonomy, and state recognition. Employing a qualitative library research method with a philosophical-hermeneutical approach, the study examines educational regulations, academic books, and scholarly articles through thematic and critical analysis. The findings indicate that Muadalah pesantren education is not merely a formally recognized educational system but also embodies a philosophical foundation rooted in Islamic scholarly traditions. Ontologically, it emphasizes holistic human development encompassing spiritual, intellectual, moral, and social dimensions. Epistemologically, it promotes dialogue among revelation, reason, scholarly traditions, and experience. Axiologically, it prioritizes the cultivation of adab, moral character, and social responsibility. This study proposes a conceptual framework of philosophical integration and responsible epistemic autonomy. The framework suggests that state recognition and pesantren autonomy can be reconciled by strengthening scholarly identity, integrating diverse forms of knowledge, and maintaining value-oriented education without compromising the distinctive traditions of pesantren. These findings contribute to the conceptual development of Islamic educational philosophy in contemporary educational contexts.

Abstrak

Kata Kunci: *pesantren muadalah; filsafat pendidikan islam; otonomi pendidikan; pengakuan negara.*

Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis dan merekonstruksi konsep pendidikan pesantren muadalah dalam perspektif filsafat pendidikan Islam, khususnya hubungan antara tradisi keilmuan, otonomi pendidikan, dan rekognisi negara. Penelitian menggunakan metode kualitatif berbasis studi kepustakaan dengan pendekatan filosofis-hermeneutis. Data diperoleh melalui kajian regulasi, buku, dan artikel ilmiah yang dianalisis secara tematik dan kritis. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pendidikan pesantren muadalah tidak sekadar merupakan sistem pendidikan yang memperoleh pengakuan formal, tetapi memiliki konstruksi filosofis yang berakar pada tradisi keilmuan Islam. Secara ontologis, pendidikan muadalah berorientasi pada pembentukan manusia yang mengintegrasikan dimensi spiritual, intelektual, moral, dan sosial. Secara epistemologis, pendidikan muadalah membuka ruang dialog antara wahyu, akal, tradisi keilmuan, dan pengalaman. Secara aksiologis, pendidikan diarahkan pada pembentukan adab, akhlak, dan tanggung jawab sosial. Penelitian ini menawarkan konstruksi konseptual berupa paradigma integrasi filosofis dan otonomi epistemik yang bertanggung jawab. Konstruksi tersebut menegaskan bahwa rekognisi negara dan otonomi pesantren dapat dipertemukan melalui penguatan identitas keilmuan, integrasi pengetahuan, dan orientasi nilai pendidikan tanpa menghilangkan kekhasan tradisi pesantren.



Introduction

Pesantren is one of the Islamic educational institutions deeply rooted in Indonesia's historical development, with a distinctive intellectual tradition and pedagogical character. Its role extends beyond the transmission of religious knowledge to encompass character formation, the internalization of values, spiritual development, and the reproduction of Islamic scholarly traditions. Isbah explains that the continued existence of pesantren across different historical periods is closely associated with their capacity to adapt to social change and the evolving national education system. This adaptation has taken various forms, including the development of formal schooling systems, the integration of general knowledge, and institutional transformation, while preserving the distinctive scholarly identity of pesantren.¹ From the perspective of the philosophy of education, these dynamics indicate that pesantren are not merely institutions that organize teaching and learning activities, but educational systems founded on particular conceptions of human nature, sources of knowledge, educational aims, and the values to be cultivated in human life. Halstead emphasizes that Islamic education encompasses several interrelated dimensions, including individual development, moral and social formation, and the acquisition of knowledge. Accordingly, understanding pesantren education requires an inquiry that goes beyond institutional structures and curricula to examine the philosophical foundations that shape its educational orientation.²

The development of pesantren education entered a significant phase following the enactment of Law No. 18 of 2019 on Pesantren,³ which formally recognized pesantren within Indonesia's national education system. This recognition was further reinforced by Minister of Religious Affairs Regulation No. 31 of 2020 on Pesantren Education, which includes provisions governing Satuan Pendidikan Muadalah (SPM), or Muadalah Education Units. Under this regulatory framework, muadalah education is classified as a form of formal pesantren education that develops its curriculum based on the distinctive characteristics of Islamic scholarly traditions, either through the study of kitab kuning (classical Islamic texts) within the salafiyah model or through dirasah Islamiah (Islamic studies) within the muallimin educational model. The muadalah curriculum comprises both a pesantren-specific

¹ Basyari, A. M., Komala, E., & Rohaeni, A. (2026). Implementasi kurikulum pesantren muadalah dalam bingkai Kurikulum Merdeka: Analisis kebijakan dan adaptasi pedagogis. *AL-IBANAH*, 11(2), 157–174. <https://doi.org/10.54801/hbkxyp77>

² Halstead, J. M. (2004). An Islamic concept of education. *Comparative Education*, 40(4), 517–529. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0305006042000284510>

³ Republik Indonesia. (2019). *Undang-Undang Nomor 18 Tahun 2019 tentang Pesantren*. <https://peraturan.go.id/files/uu18-2019bt.pdf>

curriculum and a general education curriculum, while allowing pesantren a degree of flexibility to develop their curricula in accordance with their respective educational characteristics. This development reflects a shift in the status of pesantren education from institutions that evolved primarily through socio-religious authority to educational institutions that enjoy formal state recognition and legitimacy. Zibbat and Hariri demonstrate that such recognition provides pesantren with opportunities to develop their curricula, preserve distinctive teaching methods, and secure formal recognition of their graduates' diplomas.⁴ Nevertheless, formal recognition also raises fundamental philosophical questions concerning the relationship between the state's authority to regulate education and the autonomy of pesantren to determine their own epistemological foundations and educational orientations.

Empirically, the development of muadalah education reflects growing institutional recognition and the expansion of formal education provision within the pesantren system. The Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs reported that, as of February 2025, there were 373 Muadalah Education Units (Satuan Pendidikan Muadalah, or SPM) across Indonesia.⁵ In Aceh, for example, 67 salafiyah SPMs and two muallimin SPMs were granted establishment permits in late 2024, which were subsequently handed over in early 2025.⁶ These developments indicate that muadalah education is gaining an increasingly prominent position within the national education system while preserving the distinctive traditions of pesantren. However, institutional expansion does not, in itself, resolve substantive questions concerning the educational model being developed. State recognition may establish the legal status of educational provision, but it does not fully explain how pesantren conceptualize the nature of knowledge, construct relationships between religious and general knowledge, or determine the aims of human development through their educational systems. Accordingly, the institutional development of muadalah education should be understood not merely as an administrative transformation but also as a process that may have implications for the paradigmatic foundations of Islamic education.

⁴ Isbah, M. F. (2020). Pesantren in the changing Indonesian context: History and current developments. *QIJS (Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies)*, 8(1), 65–106. <https://doi.org/10.21043/qiis.v8i1.5629>

⁵ Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia. (2025). 43 lembaga pendidikan pesantren kantongi izin Kemenag, ini daftarnya. <https://yogyakarta.kemenag.go.id/43-lembaga-pendidikan-pesantren-kantongi-izin-kemenag-ini-daftarnya/>

⁶ Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, Kantor Wilayah Provinsi Aceh. (2025). 123 dayah muadalah dan 19 dayah PDF di Aceh memperoleh izin operasional dari Kemenag RI. <https://aceh.kemenag.go.id/index.php/baca/123-dayah-muadalah-dan-19-dayah-pdf-di-aceh-memperoleh-izin-operasional-dari-kemenag-ri>

At the implementation level, several studies have shown that the development of muadalah education faces challenges related to teaching and learning processes, curriculum structure, and pedagogical adaptation. In their study of Al-Mujtama' Al-Islami Islamic Boarding School in South Lampung, Rusiana, Syafe'i, and Sada found that the implementation of the muadalah curriculum supported instruction in Arabic, Qur'anic memorization (tahfiz al-Qur'an), and Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh). Nevertheless, the implementation process continued to encounter challenges, including limited language proficiency, difficulties in understanding Arabic-language fiqh texts, and students' learning motivation.⁷ Meanwhile, Basyari, Komala, and Rohaeni, in their study of the adaptation of the Merdeka Curriculum within muadalah pesantren, identified pedagogical dilemmas and increased cognitive demands on teachers as they sought to integrate instructional innovations into existing pesantren educational structures.⁸ These findings suggest that the challenges facing muadalah education extend beyond curriculum availability and legal recognition to encompass the ways in which established knowledge traditions are translated into learning processes that remain relevant to contemporary educational developments. Nevertheless, the challenges identified in these studies cannot be generalized to all muadalah pesantren without accounting for differences in scholarly traditions, institutional arrangements, resources, and pedagogical characteristics across individual pesantren.

These issues become even more significant when examined through the lens of Islamic educational philosophy. From an ontological perspective, pesantren education is inseparable from its conception of human beings as possessing intellectual, moral, social, and spiritual potential. Education, therefore, is not directed solely toward producing individuals who possess knowledge, but also toward cultivating persons capable of integrating knowledge, faith, and responsibility in their lives. From an epistemological perspective, the educational traditions of pesantren concern the roles of revelation, scholarly authority, the transmission of knowledge, rational inquiry, and experience as sources and means of acquiring knowledge. From an axiological perspective, education is concerned with values, moral character (akhlaq), ethical conduct (adab), the beneficial application of knowledge, and social responsibility. Sulton demonstrates that the continuity of traditional education at Pesantren Al-Maqbul is associated with an epistemological framework that tends to position textual

⁷ Ni'am, S., & Arafah, N. N. (2024). Transformasi sistem pendidikan formal pesantren. *DIMAR: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 6(1), 69–84. <https://doi.org/10.58577/dimar.v6i1.271>

⁸ Basyari, A. M., Komala, E., & Rohaeni, A. (2026). Implementasi kurikulum pesantren muadalah dalam bingkai Kurikulum Merdeka: Analisis kebijakan dan adaptasi pedagogis. *AL-IBANAH*, 11(2), 157–174. <https://doi.org/10.54801/hbkxyp77>

and religious sources of knowledge as authoritative foundations.⁹ Sulton's subsequent study further highlights the importance of the axiological dimension in sustaining the educational orientation of pesantren,¹⁰ while Sulton and Siddiq emphasize the relationship between ontological foundations and the educational aims pursued by the same institution.¹¹ Taken together, these studies demonstrate that the educational models adopted by pesantren are inseparable from the underlying philosophical perspectives that inform them.

Philosophical studies of pesantren education have also developed through analyses of the relationship between tradition and modernity. Sumadi, Nugroho, and Syah found that educational innovation in pesantren is closely related to the ontological, epistemological, and axiological foundations underlying their educational practices. Drawing on research conducted at two pesantren in Central Java, they explain that the development of pesantren education is not merely a technical process but is also shaped by conceptions of human nature, the integration of scholarly traditions with modern rationality, and educational orientations toward moral development and social responsibility.¹² Similarly, Yuliantoro, Murtiningsih, Trisakti, and Sarhindi argue that pesantren pedagogy has the potential to inform the ethical and epistemological reconstruction of education because it situates knowledge within a close relationship with moral development, discipline, and epistemic responsibility.¹³ These findings demonstrate that pesantren educational traditions offer important conceptual contributions to the development of contemporary educational philosophy. Nevertheless, applying an educational-philosophical perspective to pesantren in general does not automatically explain the distinctive philosophical characteristics of Muadalah Education Units as a form of formal education that receives state recognition while preserving the distinctive curriculum and scholarly traditions of pesantren.

In the context of muadalah education, several studies have examined institutional transformation, curriculum development, and the relationship between educational policy

⁹ Sulton, A. (2022). The educational epistemology of traditional pesantren. *TADRIS: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 17(2), 379–393. <https://doi.org/10.19105/tjpi.v17i2.7044>

¹⁰ Sulton, A. (2023). The educational axiology of Al-Maqbul traditional pesantren. *Analisa: Journal of Social Science and Religion*, 8(1), 118–135. <https://doi.org/10.18784/analisa.v8i1.1843>

¹¹ Sulton, A., & Siddiq, A. (2024). The educational ontology of traditional pesantren: Exploring the essential of education in Pesantren Al-Maqbul. *Edukasia: Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan Islam*, 19(1), 61–78. <https://doi.org/10.21043/edukasia.v19i1.25440>

¹² Sumadi, E., Nugroho, P., & Syah, M. N. S. (2025). The philosophy of pesantren education: A study on the foundations of innovation in pesantren development. *FITRAH: Jurnal Kajian Ilmu-ilmu Keislaman*, 11(2), 257–278. <https://doi.org/10.24952/fitrah.v11i2.17170>

¹³ Yamil, H., Ahyar, & Saparudin. (2026). Recognition of Islamic boarding schools: An analysis of Law No. 18 of 2019. *KASTA: Jurnal Ilmu Sosial, Agama, Budaya dan Terapan*, 6(2), 1181–1197. <https://doi.org/10.58218/kasta.v6i2.3228>

and pesantren. Ni'am and Arafah investigated the transformation of the formal education system in pesantren following the enactment of the Pesantren Law, highlighting the importance of aligning traditional educational systems, formal recognition, and the demands of contemporary education.¹⁴ Rusiana et al. focused primarily on curriculum implementation and learning outcomes,¹⁵ while Basyari et al. examined pedagogical adaptation in relation to curriculum policy.¹⁶ From the perspective of education politics, Yamil, Ahyar, and Saparudin explain that state recognition of pesantren can strengthen institutional legitimacy and access to resources, while also raising concerns regarding bureaucratic standardization and epistemological autonomy.¹⁷ Collectively, these studies demonstrate that muadalah education operates within a dynamic relationship among scholarly traditions, curriculum development, the demands of modernization, and state regulation. However, the studies differ in their analytical orientations, leaving the fundamental relationships among the legitimacy of knowledge, the aims of human development, educational autonomy, and state recognition in need of a more integrated philosophical analysis.

Based on this literature review, the research gap lies in the need to explain the interconnections between the philosophical dimensions of education and the institutional status of muadalah education. Previous studies have examined the philosophy of pesantren education through ontological, epistemological, and axiological perspectives, whereas research on muadalah education has focused more extensively on curriculum implementation, pedagogical adaptation, and policy recognition. The relevant gap, therefore, does not lie in the absence of philosophical studies on pesantren, but rather in the need to explain how ontological, epistemological, and axiological foundations interact to shape the distinctive character of muadalah education within the relationship between pesantren autonomy and state legitimacy. At a more fundamental level, this issue raises the question of whether formal recognition of muadalah education merely changes the administrative status of these institutions or also influences how pesantren conceptualize epistemic authority, structure relationships among different fields of knowledge, and formulate their educational aims. This question warrants critical examination because the inclusion of religious and

¹⁴ Ni'am, S., & Arafah, N. N. (2024). Transformasi sistem pendidikan formal pesantren. *DIMAR: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 6(1), 69–84

¹⁵ Rusiana, R. T., Syafe'i, I., & Sada, H. J. (2025). Implementing the Muadalah curriculum at Pondok Pesantren Al-Mujtama' Al-Islami Lampung Selatan: Challenges and achievements in Arabic, tahfizh, and fiqh education. *Pendas: Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Dasar*, 10(2).

¹⁶ Basyari, A. M., Komala, E., & Rohaeni, A. (2026). Implementasi kurikulum pesantren muadalah dalam bingkai Kurikulum Merdeka: Analisis kebijakan dan adaptasi pedagogis. *AL-IBANAH*, 11(2), 157–174.

¹⁷ Yamil, H., Ahyar, & Saparudin. (2026). Recognition of Islamic boarding schools: An analysis of Law No. 18 of 2019. *KASTA: Jurnal Ilmu Sosial, Agama, Budaya dan Terapan*, 6(2), 1181–1197.

general knowledge within a single curricular structure does not, in itself, guarantee the establishment of coherent epistemological integration.

The research gap can also be understood through the relationship between the normative ideals and the practical realization of education. Normatively, pesantren educational traditions emphasize character formation, the in-depth study of Islamic religious knowledge, spiritual development, and social service as central educational objectives. However, realizing these objectives requires the organization of curricula, teaching methods, educator–student relationships, and everyday pesantren practices to remain consistent with the values they uphold. In muadalah education, this issue becomes more complex because it involves the relationship between the scholarly authority of pesantren, general education curricula, formal institutional regulations, and students' competency requirements. Accordingly, the philosophical issue is not simply whether to preserve tradition or embrace modernity, but how both can be justified and coherently integrated within a conception of Islamic education. This inquiry is important to ensure that educational integration is not understood merely as the addition of subjects or administrative adjustments, but as a fundamental question concerning the unity of knowledge, human development, and the values that constitute the ultimate aims of education.

Building on this research gap, the distinctive contribution of this study lies in positioning Muadalah Education Units as the object of inquiry through an Islamic educational philosophy framework that connects three fundamental dimensions of education with the issues of scholarly autonomy and state recognition. Unlike studies that examine the philosophy of pesantren education in general or focus on the operational implementation of muadalah curricula, this study seeks to explain the conceptual foundations that shape the structure and orientation of muadalah education. The ontological dimension is employed to examine conceptions of human beings, reality, and the purpose of education; the epistemological dimension investigates the sources, authority, methods, and relationships among different forms of knowledge; while the axiological dimension elucidates the values that guide education and the contribution of knowledge to the development of students. These three dimensions are not treated as separate categories but are analyzed in relation to institutional transformation and the requirements associated with formal recognition within the national education system. Through this approach, the study seeks to bridge philosophical questions concerning education with the realities of educational provision in muadalah pesantren.

The proposed novelty of this study lies in the conceptual reconstruction of the relationship among the philosophical foundations of muadalah pesantren education, epistemological autonomy, and state recognition. This reconstruction is based on the premise that the identity of muadalah education cannot be adequately explained through curriculum structures or its equivalency status within the national education system alone. Rather, it must also be examined through how pesantren conceptualize the human beings they seek to cultivate, the forms of knowledge they consider legitimate and valuable, and the moral and social purposes of their educational processes. Examining these relationships can clarify how Islamic scholarly traditions are preserved, reinterpreted, or developed in response to contemporary educational needs and state regulatory frameworks. Accordingly, the study's novelty is directed toward developing an analytical framework that integrates scholarly identity, educational objectives, pedagogical practices, and institutional legitimacy within a unified philosophical construct. This framework is expected to enrich scholarly discourse on Islamic educational philosophy while providing a conceptual foundation for understanding muadalah education as a distinctive educational system.

Based on the foregoing discussion, this study aims to analyze and reconstruct the concept of muadalah pesantren education from the perspective of Islamic educational philosophy. Specifically, it seeks to identify the ontological foundations that shape muadalah education's conceptions of human beings, knowledge, and educational purposes; analyze the epistemological framework that determines the sources, legitimacy, authority, and relationships between religious and general knowledge; examine the axiological orientations of muadalah education in fostering moral character, spirituality, and social responsibility; and explain how these three philosophical dimensions relate to pesantren educational autonomy and state recognition within the national education system. Through these objectives, the study is expected to develop a more comprehensive conceptual understanding of the identity of muadalah pesantren education and its contribution to the advancement of Islamic educational philosophy amid the changing dynamics of contemporary education.

Research Methods

This study employs a qualitative library research method with a philosophical-hermeneutical approach to analyze and reconstruct the concept of muadalah pesantren education through its ontological, epistemological, and axiological dimensions. The methodology adopts the principles of an integrative literature review, which enables the critical synthesis of diverse sources to develop a coherent conceptual understanding.¹⁸ Primary sources include regulations governing pesantren education and seminal works on Islamic educational philosophy, while secondary sources comprise relevant academic books and scholarly journal articles. The literature was retrieved through Google Scholar, GARUDA, DOAJ, and academic publishers' websites, with source selection guided by relevance and scholarly credibility.

Data were collected through documentary research by identifying, selecting, and classifying the literature according to the focus of the study.¹⁹ The data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns of thought and relationships among key concepts,²⁰ alongside hermeneutical interpretation to understand textual meanings within their historical and philosophical contexts.²¹ The analysis focused on the relationship among Islamic scholarly traditions, pesantren educational autonomy, and state recognition. The trustworthiness of the study was maintained through source triangulation, critical reading, and argumentative consistency to produce a systematic and contextually grounded philosophical reconstruction of muadalah pesantren education.

Result and Discussion

The Construction of Muadalah Pesantren Education: Findings on Scholarly Traditions, Curriculum, and State Recognition.

The synthesis of scholarly literature and policy documents indicates that muadalah pesantren education constitutes an Islamic educational system shaped by the interplay among pesantren scholarly traditions, curriculum development, and state recognition of educational institutions. This relationship demonstrates that muadalah education cannot be understood merely as a mechanism for establishing educational equivalency, but rather as a formal

¹⁸ Richard J. Torraco, "Writing Integrative Literature Reviews: Guidelines and Examples," Human Resource Development Review 4, no. 3 (2005): 356–67, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1534484305278283>

¹⁹ Glenn A. Bowen, "Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method," Qualitative Research Journal 9, no. 2 (2009): 27–40, <https://doi.org/10.3316/QRJ0902027>

²⁰ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," Qualitative Research in Psychology 3, no. 2 (2006): 77–101, <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp0630a>

²¹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, Truth and Method, 2nd rev. ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Continuum, 2004)

educational system that preserves the distinctive characteristics of Islamic intellectual traditions. Under Minister of Religious Affairs Regulation No. 31 of 2020, muadalah education encompasses two models: the salafiyah model, which is grounded in the study of kitab kuning (classical Islamic texts), and the muallimin model, which is based on *dirasah Islamiah* (Islamic studies) and the muallimin educational system. Both models are afforded the flexibility to develop curricula in accordance with the distinctive characteristics of their respective pesantren, while continuing to provide general education in accordance with applicable regulations.²²

The first finding indicates that scholarly tradition constitutes the foundation of identity formation in muadalah education. This tradition is expressed not only through the use of kitab kuning (classical Islamic texts) or religious instruction, but also through the pedagogical relationships among kiai (Islamic boarding school leaders), ustaz (religious teachers), and santri (pesantren students), the preservation of scholarly authority, and the cultivation of educational values in everyday pesantren life. Isbah explains that the ability of pesantren to sustain their existence is closely associated with their capacity to adapt to social change without entirely losing their institutional identity. This finding suggests that pesantren traditions are not entirely static systems but possess the capacity to adapt in response to social needs and educational developments. In the context of muadalah education, the continuity of these traditions takes on a new form through the development of an educational system that receives formal recognition.²³

The second finding indicates that muadalah education is undergoing a process of negotiation between curricular autonomy and the development of the national education system. Ni'am and Arafah identify that the transformation of formal pesantren education following the enactment of the Pesantren Law has created a need to align traditional pesantren curricula with the demands of contemporary education.²⁴ Meanwhile, Zibbat and Hariri, explain that the recognition of pesantren education provides opportunities for developing curricula and teaching methods that reflect the distinctive characteristics of these

²² Republik Indonesia, *Undang-Undang Nomor 18 Tahun 2019 tentang Pesantren* (2019); Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, *Peraturan Menteri Agama Nomor 31 Tahun 2020 tentang Pendidikan Pesantren* (2020), khususnya pasal 8 dan 12–15.

²³ M. Falikul Isbah, "Pesantren in the Changing Indonesian Context: History and Current Developments," *QIJS (Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies)* 8, no. 1 (2020): 65–106, <https://doi.org/10.21043/qijis.v8i1.5629>.

²⁴ Shokhibun Ni'am and Nawal Nur Arafah, "Transformasi Sistem Pendidikan Formal Pesantren," *DIMAR: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 6, no. 1 (2024): 69–84, <https://doi.org/10.58577/dimar.v6i1.271>;

institutions. Taken together, these studies suggest that state recognition does not automatically eliminate pesantren educational autonomy but instead establishes a new relationship between institutional authority and national education requirements.²⁵

The third finding concerns the challenges of translating scholarly traditions into contemporary teaching and learning practices. Research by Rusiana, Syafe'i, and Sada (2025) at Al-Mujtama' Al-Islami Islamic Boarding School in South Lampung indicates that the implementation of the muadalah curriculum contributes to instruction in Arabic, Qur'anic memorization (tahfiz), and Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh). Nevertheless, challenges remain regarding language proficiency, comprehension of religious texts, and student motivation. Similarly, research by Basyari, Komala, and Rohaeni identifies pedagogical adaptation challenges arising from the interaction between the muadalah curriculum and contemporary learning principles. These studies demonstrate that the effectiveness of muadalah education depends not only on the existence of a curriculum but also on educators' ability to interpret and translate educational values into actual learning practices.²⁶

The fourth finding indicates that state recognition creates institutional opportunities while raising questions about the boundaries of pesantren educational autonomy. Yamil, Ahyar, and Saparudin explain that the Pesantren Law provides formal legitimacy and expands institutional access to state resources.²⁷ However, their study also identifies potential tensions when bureaucratic standardization does not fully accommodate the epistemological characteristics of pesantren. This issue suggests that the relationship between pesantren and the state cannot be adequately understood solely in terms of legal recognition; rather, it must also be analyzed in relation to the authority to determine what constitutes legitimate knowledge, the purposes of education, and the standards by which learning outcomes are evaluated.

Taken together, these findings suggest that muadalah education exhibits three important characteristics: the continuity of Islamic scholarly traditions, the development of a formal educational system that preserves space for pesantren identity, and the negotiation

²⁵ Muhammad Zibbat and Ahmad Hariri, "Eksistensi Pendidikan Pesantren dalam Sistem Pendidikan Nasional Berdasarkan Undang-Undang Pesantren," *Al-Ulum: Jurnal Pemikiran dan Penelitian ke-Islaman* 11, no. 1 (2024): 103–17, <https://doi.org/10.31102/alulum.11.1.2024.103-117>

²⁶ Riski Tri Rusiana, Imam Syafe'i, and Heru Juabdin Sada, "Implementing the Muadalah Curriculum at Pondok Pesantren Al-Mujtama' Al-Islami Lampung Selatan: Challenges and Achievements in Arabic, Tahfizh, and Fiqh Education," *Pendas: Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Dasar* 10, no. 2 (2025): 201–13, <https://doi.org/10.23969/jp.v10i02.27115>

²⁷ Riski Tri Rusiana, Imam Syafe'i, and Heru Juabdin Sada, "Implementing the Muadalah Curriculum at Pondok Pesantren Al-Mujtama' Al-Islami Lampung Selatan: Challenges and Achievements in Arabic, Tahfizh, and Fiqh Education," *Pendas: Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Dasar* 10, no. 2 (2025): 201–13, <https://doi.org/10.23969/jp.v10i02.27115>

between educational autonomy and state regulatory requirements. These characteristics give rise to philosophical questions that extend beyond curriculum integration. At their core, these questions concern how muadalah education conceptualizes human nature, establishes the legitimacy of knowledge, and determines the values and purposes of education amid institutional transformation. Accordingly, the findings of this synthesis require further examination through ontological, epistemological, and axiological perspectives to develop a deeper understanding of the philosophical construction of muadalah pesantren education.

The Ontology of Muadalah Pesantren Education: Human Nature and the Formation of Knowledgeable Individuals.

From an ontological perspective, the philosophy of education begins with questions concerning the nature of reality, human beings, and the very existence of education. In the context of muadalah pesantren education, the fundamental ontological question concerns not merely the types of knowledge being taught, but also the kind of human being that education seeks to cultivate. This issue is significant because every educational system implicitly embodies particular assumptions about human nature and human life. Through their study of the educational ontology of Pesantren Al-Maqbul, Sulton and Siddiq demonstrate that the continuity of traditional education is connected to religious conceptions of God, humanity, the universe, and the sources of truth. Although their research focuses on a traditional pesantren and does not specifically represent all Muadalah Education Units, their findings underscore that pesantren educational systems are rooted in ontological constructions that shape their objectives and practices.²⁸

From the perspective of Islamic educational philosophy, human beings are understood not merely as biological entities or individuals prepared to meet economic needs. Rather, they possess interconnected physical, intellectual, spiritual, moral, and social dimensions. This understanding is associated with the concepts of human beings as 'abd Allah (servants of God) and khalifah fi al-ardh (stewards entrusted with responsibility on Earth). These concepts provide a philosophical foundation for understanding Islamic education as a process of human development that cultivates both God-consciousness and responsibility for life. Halstead explains that Islamic conceptions of education encompass individual development, moral and social formation, and the acquisition of knowledge. This

²⁸ Ahmad Sulton and Ahmad Siddiq, "The Educational Ontology of Traditional Pesantren: Exploring the Essential of Education in Pesantren Al-Maqbul," *Edukasia: Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan Islam* 19, no. 1 (2024): 61–78, <https://doi.org/10.21043/edukasia.v19i1.25440>.

perspective demonstrates that the acquisition of knowledge cannot be separated from the formation of character and the cultivation of moral responsibility.²⁹

Building on this perspective, muadalah pesantren education can be understood as a process of holistic human development rather than merely the transmission of religious knowledge or the provision of formal education equivalent to that offered by other educational institutions. Within this framework, mastery of religious knowledge, intellectual capacity, social skills, and personal development constitute interconnected elements. The tradition of *tafaqquh fi al-din* (deepening one's understanding of religion) need not be interpreted as a restriction on non-religious knowledge. Instead, it can be understood as an orientation toward profound religious learning that provides an ethical foundation for life and the development of other fields of knowledge. Accordingly, the relationship between religious and general education should be understood in terms of their shared contribution to holistic human development rather than merely through the categorization of subjects.

These ontological questions become increasingly significant when considered in relation to modern education, which tends to assess success through academic achievement, competencies, and institutional performance indicators. Biesta cautions that questions concerning the purposes of education cannot be reduced to issues of instructional effectiveness. Education should instead be understood through the relationship among qualification, socialization, and subjectification, which concerns the development of individuals capable of taking responsibility for their actions. Biesta's perspective provides an opportunity for dialogue with muadalah pesantren education because both approaches treat educational purposes as normative questions rather than merely technical concerns. Nevertheless, Biesta's framework cannot be directly equated with Islamic educational philosophy, as the two emerge from different intellectual traditions. Its relevance lies in its critique of reducing education to the achievement of competencies alone.³⁰

From an ontological perspective, state recognition of muadalah education must also be understood in proportionate terms. Formal status constitutes recognition of an educational institution's institutional existence, but it does not, in itself, determine the nature of the education provided within that institution. The legal status of education and its ontological purposes are related but distinct concerns. The state may formally recognize an institution,

²⁹ J. Mark Halstead, "An Islamic Concept of Education," *Comparative Education* 40, no. 4 (2004): 517–29, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0305006042000284510>.

³⁰ Gert Biesta, "What Is Education For? On Good Education, Teacher Judgement, and Educational Professionalism," *European Journal of Education* 50, no. 1 (2015): 75–87, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12109>

while its philosophical understanding of human nature and educational purposes develops through the intellectual traditions and values upheld by the pesantren. Accordingly, muadalah education needs to preserve its autonomy in formulating its orientation toward human development while remaining responsive to the evolving needs of society.

Based on this analysis, the ontological construction of muadalah education can be formulated as an orientation toward human development that integrates spiritual, intellectual, moral, and social dimensions. Education should extend beyond cultivating students who can understand religious texts and instead aim to develop individuals capable of applying knowledge responsibly in their lives. Thus, the distinctive ontological character that muadalah education can develop lies not in separating religious individuals from rational individuals, but in bringing both dimensions together within a unified educational purpose. This formulation represents a philosophical interpretation that still requires examination in light of the variations in educational conceptions across different muadalah traditions.

The Epistemology of Muadalah Pesantren Education: The Dialectic of Revelation, Reason, Tradition, and Epistemic Autonomy.

Epistemology is the branch of philosophy concerned with the sources of knowledge, the ways in which knowledge is acquired, the grounds for its justification, and the limits of what human beings can know. In the context of muadalah pesantren education, epistemological questions occupy a central position because pesantren educational systems develop through distinctive traditions of Islamic knowledge transmission. These characteristics are reflected in the use of classical Islamic texts, the scholarly authority of kiai and ustaz, the preservation of scholarly sanad (chains of transmission), and teaching practices such as sorogan (individualized text instruction), bandongan (collective text-based instruction), and religious discussions. Sulton finds that education at Pesantren Al-Maqbul exhibits a tendency toward bayani epistemology, positioning the Qur'an, Hadith, and kitab kuning as authoritative sources of knowledge. This finding demonstrates that educational methods are inseparable from the ways in which an institution understands the sources and legitimacy of knowledge.³¹

Within Islamic intellectual traditions, epistemological constructions can be analyzed through the categories of bayani, burhani, and irfani. Bayani epistemology emphasizes textual authority and linguistic reasoning as primary means of acquiring knowledge. Burhani

³¹ Ahmad Sulton, "The Educational Epistemology of Traditional Pesantren," *TADRIS: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 17, no. 2 (2022): 379–93, <https://doi.org/10.19105/tipi.v17i2.7044>.

epistemology emphasizes rational argumentation, logical demonstration, and demonstrative reasoning, whereas irfani epistemology concerns spiritual experience and realization. These three categories can serve as conceptual tools for examining muadalah education, although their application should not lead to the oversimplified assumption that every pesantren automatically employs all three approaches in equal measure. In the study of kitab kuning, for example, textual interpretation may involve bayani reasoning, whereas the investigation of social issues and natural sciences requires rational argumentation and empirical evidence. The spiritual dimension, meanwhile, concerns the cultivation of awareness and the internalization of values. These differences in function demonstrate that a unified educational orientation does not require uniform methods of knowledge justification.

The epistemological dimensions of muadalah education cannot be adequately explained merely by the presence of religious and general subjects within a single curriculum. Administrative curriculum integration does not necessarily produce philosophical integration of knowledge. Epistemological integration acquires substantive meaning only when an explicable relationship exists among the sources of knowledge, methods of justification, purposes of knowledge application, and contexts of implementation. As a conceptual example, environmental education can bring together Islamic normative teachings concerning human responsibility toward nature and scientific explanations of ecosystems, pollution, and environmental sustainability. These two forms of knowledge need not be treated as identical in their methods of verification, but they can be brought into dialogue through shared inquiry into the reality under examination and human responsibility toward it. From this perspective, the integration of knowledge does not eliminate the distinctive characteristics of individual disciplines; rather, it establishes relationships through which they can enrich one another.

This analysis gains further relevance from research by Sofanudin, Tsauero, and Aricindy, who explain that pesantren epistemological traditions possess systems of knowledge legitimation grounded in sanad, turats (the Islamic intellectual heritage), adab, and deliberative traditions.³² Their study conceptualizes this system as a form of epistemic sovereignty that may be marginalized when modern standards of knowledge are treated as the sole criteria of legitimacy. The researchers also emphasize the importance of conceptual translation and strategic engagement with modern knowledge systems without abandoning

³² Aji Sofanudin, Muhammad Ahalla Tsauero, and Argitha Aricindy, "Epistemic Sovereignty and the Decolonization of Islamic Education: Rethinking Pesantren within Global Knowledge Hierarchies," *Analisa: Journal of Social Science and Religion* 11, no. 1 (2026): 112–31, <https://doi.org/10.18784/analisa.v11i1.4027>.

the epistemological identity of pesantren. These findings demonstrate that pesantren epistemic autonomy does not necessarily entail rejecting modern science. Rather, it involves preserving the capacity to determine educational orientations, evaluate scholarly authority, and develop knowledge within an intellectually defensible framework.

Nevertheless, the concept of epistemic sovereignty requires critical examination. Epistemic autonomy should not be understood as freedom from all forms of rational scrutiny and scientific criticism. The sanad tradition can establish the continuity of knowledge transmission, but continuity of transmission does not necessarily guarantee the truth of every argument. Similarly, the authority of a kiai can provide pedagogical and moral legitimacy, but that authority should not preclude dialogue, critical reasoning, or the reconsideration of emerging issues. Strengthening the epistemological foundations of muadalah education therefore requires a balance between respect for scholarly authority and the cultivation of students' intellectual responsibility.

This perspective is consistent with the work of Yuliantoro, Murtiningsih, Trisakti, and Sarhindi, who position pesantren pedagogy as a resource for reconstructing the relationship among knowledge, ethics, and the formation of educational subjects.³³ They argue that pesantren traditions have the potential to integrate revelation, rationality, and lived experience within an educational framework that extends beyond the acquisition of competencies alone.³⁴ In the context of muadalah education, this proposition can be developed through an educational approach that not only teaches subject matter but also cultivates students' ability to understand the foundations of particular claims, consider competing arguments, and connect knowledge with the moral consequences of its application. Such capacities are essential because educational systems that preserve scholarly traditions must also remain responsive to developments in knowledge and contemporary social challenges.

Accordingly, the epistemological construction of muadalah education can be formulated as dialogical and critical epistemic autonomy. Autonomy means that pesantren retain the capacity to determine the foundations, orientations, and development of their scholarly traditions, while the dialogical dimension signifies openness to relevant forms of

³³ ji Sofanudin, Muhammad Ahalla Tsauro, and Argitha Aricindy, "Epistemic Sovereignty and the Decolonization of Islamic Education: Rethinking Pesantren within Global Knowledge Hierarchies," *Analisa: Journal of Social Science and Religion* 11, no. 1 (2026): 112–31, <https://doi.org/10.18784/analisa.v11i1.4027>

³⁴ Moch Najib Yuliantoro et al., "Rethinking Merdeka Belajar: Toward an Ethical and Epistemic Reconstruction through Pesantren Pedagogy," *Analisa: Journal of Social Science and Religion* 11, no. 1 (2026): 92–111, <https://doi.org/10.18784/analisa.v11i1.4015>.

knowledge and intellectual developments. The critical dimension entails examining knowledge claims in light of their sources, methods, contexts, and grounds of justification. This construction enables muadalah education to preserve the authority of its traditions without establishing an absolute opposition between revelation and reason, religion and science, or classical and modern knowledge. Nevertheless, the differences between the salafiyah and muallimin models must be taken into account, as they possess distinct orientations and curricular structures that are not entirely identical.

The Axiology of Muadalah Pesantren Education: The Formation of Adab and the Reconstruction of Educational Paradigms in Relation to the State.

The axiology of education concerns questions of value, purpose, and the contribution of knowledge to human life. In Islamic educational philosophy, the axiological dimension occupies a significant position because knowledge is understood not merely as an instrument for mastering reality but also as a foundation for moral development and responsibility. In his study of Al-Maqbul Pesantren, Sulton found that the orientation of traditional education is associated with the values of obedience, spiritual devotion, and the pursuit of tafaqquh fi al-din (a deepening understanding of religion). The study demonstrates that the continuity of educational traditions is shaped not solely by institutional structures but also by beliefs about the values considered essential to the educational process.³⁵ In the context of muadalah education, this dimension provides a basis for understanding education as a process of value internalization that accompanies the intellectual and social activities of santri (pesantren students).

The concept of adab constitutes an important foundation for understanding the axiological orientation of pesantren education. Adab concerns not only politeness in relationships between students and educators but also the capacity to position knowledge, actions, and social relationships within a framework of responsibility. In this sense, the cultivation of adab requires moral awareness, self-discipline, respect for others, and the ability to consider the consequences of one's actions. Traditions of showing respect to the kiai (pesantren leader) and ustaz (religious teacher) can serve as a means of cultivating humility and appreciation for knowledge. However, such respect must be distinguished from obedience that eliminates critical reasoning. Education oriented toward adab should not

³⁵ Ahmad Sulton, "The Educational Axiology of Al-Maqbul Traditional Pesantren," *Analisa: Journal of Social Science and Religion* 8, no. 1 (2023): 118–35, <https://doi.org/10.18784/analisa.v8i1.1843>.

merely produce students who comply with norms but should also cultivate an understanding of the ethical foundations and purposes underlying those norms.

This axiological dimension is also connected to the relevance of pesantren education to the changing demands of modern life. Fahrudin and Malik demonstrate that the integration of pesantren cultural values with twenty-first-century skills can be developed through an educational model that brings together character formation, practical competencies, and the use of technology.³⁶ Their findings indicate that preserving the values of pesantren education need not conflict with the development of contemporary competencies. Nevertheless, this relationship requires philosophical examination to ensure that skills development does not become an independent end in itself. In the context of muadalah education, technological proficiency, communication skills, and critical-thinking abilities should be understood as means of developing human capacities that remain grounded in ethical and social responsibility.

This issue can be explored further through Biesta's critique of the tendency to understand education primarily in terms of cause-and-effect relationships and technical measures of success. Biesta conceptualizes education as a human practice involving communication, meaning-making, judgment, and deliberation about educational purposes.³⁷ This perspective reinforces the argument that the success of muadalah education cannot be adequately measured through diploma recognition, graduation rates, or mastery of learning materials alone. Such measures remain important within the framework of formal education, but they cannot replace assessments of personal development, moral integrity, and the social responsibility of santri. Accordingly, the central axiological question in muadalah education concerns how values can become an underlying orientation that permeates the educational process rather than merely an additional component of the curriculum.

In relation to the state, the axiological dimension of muadalah education raises questions about the boundaries between institutional recognition and the regulation of educational orientations. Yamil, Ahyar, and Saparudin demonstrate that state recognition has implications for institutional legitimacy, curriculum development, and access to educational resources. However, this relationship may also generate tensions when administrative

³⁶Ahmad Fahrudin and Muhammad Khoirul Malik, "A Pesantren Cultural Value-Based Learning Model: Integrating Islamic Values and 21st-Century Skills," *Cendekia: Jurnal Kependidikan dan Kemasyarakatan* 23, no. 1 (2025): 89–105, <https://doi.org/10.21154/cendekia.v23i1.10646>.

³⁷ Gert Biesta, "On the Two Cultures of Educational Research, and How We Might Move Ahead: Reconsidering the Ontology, Axiology and Praxeology of Education," *European Educational Research Journal* 14, no. 1 (2015): 11–22, <https://doi.org/10.1177/147490411456516>

requirements constrain the development of pesantren educational tradition.³⁸ Philosophically, this situation need not be understood as an absolute conflict between the state and pesantren. The state has a responsibility to guarantee the right to education, ensure the quality of educational provision, and protect students, while pesantren have a legitimate interest in preserving their distinctive scholarly traditions and educational values. The central issue is how to establish a relationship that enables public accountability without undermining the philosophical and pedagogical autonomy of pesantren.

Building on the ontological, epistemological, and axiological analyses, this study proposes a conceptual framework that may be termed the paradigm of philosophical integration and responsible epistemic autonomy. This paradigm is grounded in four fundamental relationships. First, its ontological foundation positions the formation of human beings whose spiritual, intellectual, moral, and social dimensions are integrated as the central purpose of education. Second, its epistemological foundation develops a dialogical relationship among revelation, rationality, intellectual tradition, and experience while respecting the distinctive modes of justification associated with different forms of knowledge. Third, its axiological foundation positions *adab*, moral responsibility, and social benefit as guiding principles for the use of knowledge. Fourth, its institutional dimension views state recognition as a means of strengthening educational provision that must be aligned with the scholarly autonomy of pesantren.

This framework demonstrates that state recognition and pesantren autonomy need not be positioned as mutually exclusive interests. Formal recognition can strengthen the continuity of pesantren education when implemented with respect for the diversity of scholarly traditions. Meanwhile, pesantren autonomy acquires broader significance when accompanied by responsibility for educational quality, the advancement of knowledge, and the needs of society. From this perspective, the distinctiveness of *muadalah* education lies not merely in its use of the pesantren curriculum or the formal recognition of its equivalence to other educational pathways, but in its capacity to establish a coherent relationship among traditional values, educational rationality, and social responsibility within a unified orientation toward Islamic education.

Thus, the philosophical reconstruction of *muadalah* pesantren education leads to an understanding of education as a process of human formation through the integration of knowledge, values, and experience. The ontological dimension determines the kind of

³⁸ Yamil, Ahyar, and Saparudin, "Recognition of Islamic Boarding Schools," 1181–97.

human being education seeks to cultivate; the epistemological dimension explains how knowledge is acquired and justified; and the axiological dimension provides direction for the use of knowledge in human life. State recognition constitutes an institutional context that influences how these three dimensions are realized, but it cannot replace the philosophical foundations of education itself. This reconstruction offers an analytical framework for understanding muadalah education as an Islamic educational tradition that seeks to preserve its scholarly identity while participating responsibly in the development of the national education system. As a literature-based study, this framework represents a conceptual proposition that requires further examination through empirical research into educational practices across different Muadalah Education Units.

Conclusion

This study concludes that muadalah pesantren education constitutes an Islamic educational framework that is oriented not only toward formal recognition within the national education system but also grounded in a philosophical foundation rooted in the Islamic intellectual tradition. The findings indicate that muadalah education is shaped by the interplay between the continuity of pesantren intellectual traditions, autonomy in educational development, and state recognition. This relationship underscores that the identity of muadalah education is determined not merely by curricular structures or institutional legality, but also by philosophical conceptions of human nature, sources of knowledge, and the purposes of education. Ontologically, muadalah pesantren education aims to cultivate individuals whose spiritual, intellectual, moral, and social dimensions are integrated. Epistemologically, it creates space for dialogue among revelation, reason, scholarly traditions, and experience without erasing the distinctive characteristics of each source of knowledge. Axiologically, muadalah education positions *adab* (ethical comportment), moral character, social responsibility, and the practical benefits of knowledge as its primary educational orientations. These three dimensions demonstrate that muadalah pesantren education cannot be adequately understood as a process of knowledge transmission alone, but rather as a process of human formation through the integration of knowledge, values, and lived experience.

The conceptual contribution of this study lies in reconstructing the relationship among the philosophical foundations of Islamic education, the epistemological autonomy of pesantren, and state recognition. Through this framework, muadalah education can be understood as an educational system that preserves the authenticity of its intellectual

traditions while maintaining the capacity to respond to developments in contemporary education. State recognition need not be regarded as a threat to pesantren identity; rather, it can provide an opportunity for institutional strengthening, provided that scholarly autonomy and the value orientations underpinning pesantren education are respected. Accordingly, this study proposes a paradigm of philosophical integration and responsible epistemic autonomy as a conceptual framework for understanding the development of muadalah pesantren education. Given that this study is based on a literature review, the proposed framework requires further empirical investigation across different Muadalah Education Units to examine the diversity of its implementation in practice.

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