

Curriculum Changes in Indonesia; Implementation and its Challenges in Religious Institutions

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ABSTRACT

The rapid transformation of Indonesia's national curriculum from content-based to competency-based frameworks reflects broader global educational trends aimed at fostering interdisciplinary skills and adaptability. However, this transition presents unique challenges for pesantren-based madrasahs, traditional Islamic educational institutions tasked with balancing religious education with national academic standards. This study addresses the gap in research on how madrasahs respond to national curriculum changes, focusing on the implementation and challenges faced by Madrasah Tsanawiyah and Madrasah Aliyah Pondok Pesantren Al-Mawaddah in Ponorogo. Adopting a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis. Key informants were purposively selected. They included religious leaders (kyai), teachers, alumni, and students. Data analysis followed an interactive model consisting of three stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The findings reveal that while madrasahs implement the national curriculum incrementally, aligning it with traditional Islamic education, they face significant challenges, including increased learning loads, overlapping materials, limited teaching hours, and the dual burden of meeting both national and pesantren-specific evaluation standards. These challenges highlight the tension between maintaining traditional values and adapting to modern educational demands. The study underscores the importance of collaborative policymaking to develop flexible curriculum frameworks and targeted teacher training programs, enabling educators to navigate these complexities. By fostering a process-oriented curriculum that integrates Islamic and general education, pesantren-based madrasahs can better equip graduates with modern competencies while preserving their unique cultural and spiritual identity.

Keywords: curriculum changes, implementation, challenges, pondok pesantren.

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INTRODUCTION

Modern societies are grappling with a range of emerging challenges, spanning environmental, economic, health-related, and social dimensions. Issues like climate change and resource depletion are prompting reevaluations of consumption habits, advancements in artificial intelligence and technology are transforming traditional concepts of work, and globalization continues to drive migration, urbanization, and greater diversity, reshaping nations and economies. If schools persist in teaching students the same content taught to previous generations, they risk failing to prepare learners for a future characterized by rapid and unpredictable change.¹

In recent years, many countries have engaged in curriculum changes to equip students with the knowledge, skills, and competencies relevant to the modern era. The changes are often centrally regulated, with national government bodies determining the curriculum framework and guidelines for specific subjects. By revising national curricula, educational authorities aim to create coherent guidelines that outline essential competencies across various subjects. These guidelines not only provide a framework for educators but also ensure consistency between classroom learning objectives and national educational goals, that affect material organization as well as its learning activities. Through such changes, educational objectives and teaching practices can be aligned to meet the needs of future generations.² The success of curriculum implementation depends significantly on stakeholders' understanding, especially teachers, of the changes. Success is often assessed through the fidelity and compliance of implementers with the new curriculum design.³

Curriculum changes are deeply influenced by social transformations. Significant changes in curriculum planning at the systemic level should not be seen merely as modifications to educational methods. Rather, they are reflections of broader societal changes translated into adjustments within the educational system. Curriculum construction must consider changes in society, science, leadership, and politics system.⁴ Nevertheless, curriculum change in educational institutions reflects not only change but also continuity. Certain aspects of the curriculum evolve, while others remain constant.⁵

¹ Pierre Gouédard et al., "Curriculum Reform," *OECD Education Working Papers*, vol. 239, OECD Education Working Papers, December 11, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1787/efe8a48c-en>.

² Gouédard et al. and Mohamad Ansyar, *Kurikulum: Hakikat, Fondasi, Desain Dan Pengembangan* (Jakarta: Prenada Media, 2017)

³ A Vic Kelly, "The Curriculum: Theory and Practice," *SAGE Publications Ltd; Sixth Edition Edition*, 2009, 336, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02615470802681344>; Ola Erstad and Joke Voogt, "The Twenty-First Century Curriculum: Issues and Challenges," in *Handbook of Information Technology in Primary and Secondary Education*, 2018, 1–19, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-53803-7_1-1.

⁴ Mohamad Ansyar, *Kurikulum: Hakikat, Fondasi, Desain Dan Pengembangan* (Jakarta: Prenada Media, 2017); Gouédard et al., "Curriculum Reform"; Carie Justine P Estrellado, "Matatag Curriculum; Why Curriculum [Must] Change," *Journal of Interdisciplinary Perspectives* 2, no. 1 (2024): 6–10.

⁵ Erstad and Voogt, "The Twenty-First Century Curriculum: Issues and Challenges"; Gülçin Karakuş, "A Literary Review on Curriculum Implementation Problems," *Shanlax International Journal of Education* 9, no. 3 (2021): 201–20, <https://doi.org/10.34293/education.v9i3.3983>.

Schools have internal mechanisms to maintain curriculum stability despite external pressures.⁶ This stability often occurs at the operational level, both in schools and classrooms. In practice, this stability allows for the continuity of curriculum implementation, even when externally mandated changes are imposed. Teachers play a crucial role as mediators of external changes through a process of refraction, which involves repeated adaptations to align changes with existing practices.⁷ However, schools' responses to curriculum changes vary, ranging from accommodative, tactical, and voluntary approaches to assimilation or resistance.⁸ The types of curriculum changes also vary, ranging from substitution, alteration, perturbations, to restructuring and value-orientation.⁹ Curriculum changes can occur either fundamentally or incrementally.¹⁰

However, implementing curriculum reforms presents significant challenges, particularly in integrating changes in learning objectives, content knowledge, and the values and attitudes expected from students.¹¹ The cultural and political embeddedness of curriculum reform further complicates its implementation.¹² As Oliver et.al note, revising content and addressing related student learning issues requires a nuanced approach to balance societal needs and pedagogical priorities.¹³ This process is often hindered by internal and external stakeholders' understanding of the reforms.¹⁴ In many cases, individuals and institutions tend to maintain the status quo, making the reform process slow and fraught with challenges.¹⁵ For instance, in developing countries like Indonesia, the complexity of curriculum implementation is particularly evident in the context of faith-based education.

In Indonesia, the curriculum at primary and secondary education levels has undergone two major transitions in the last decade, namely the introduction of the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum.¹⁶ Although these changes aim to create a standardized national

⁶ L Cuban, "Curriculum Stability and Change," in *Handbook of Research on Curriculum*, ed. Philip W Jackson (Simon & Schuster Macmillan, 1996); Ansyar, *Kurikulum: Hakikat, Fondasi, Desain Dan Pengembangan*.

⁷ Gouëdard et al., "Curriculum Reform."

⁸ Cuban, "Curriculum Stability and Change"; Gouëdard et al., "Curriculum Reform"; Eunsook Oliver, Shawn L. & Hyun, "Comprehensive Curriculum Reform in Higher Education: Collaborative Engagement of Faculty and Administrators.," *Journal of Case Studies in Education 2* (2011): 1–20.

⁹ Nilay Mondal and Chandra Arjun Das, "Overview of Curriculum Change; A Brief Discussion," *EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR)-Peer Reviewed Journal 7*, no. 3 (2021): 260–65, <https://doi.org/10.36713/epra2013>.

¹⁰ Cuban, "Curriculum Stability and Change"; Ansyar, *Kurikulum: Hakikat, Fondasi, Desain Dan Pengembangan*.

¹¹ Gouëdard et al., "Curriculum Reform."

¹² Dinn Wahyudin and Andi Suwirta, "Politics of Curriculum in the Educational System in Indonesia," *Tawarikh Journal of Historical Studies 11*, no. 2 (2020): 143–58; Kelly, "The Curriculum: Theory and Practice."

¹³ Oliver, Shawn L. & Hyun, "Comprehensive Curriculum Reform in Higher Education: Collaborative Engagement of Faculty and Administrators."

¹⁴ Mondal and Das, "Overview of Curriculum Change; A Brief Discussion."

¹⁵ Gouëdard et al., "Curriculum Reform"; Karakuş, "A Literary Review on Curriculum Implementation Problems"; Oliver, Shawn L. & Hyun, "Comprehensive Curriculum Reform in Higher Education: Collaborative Engagement of Faculty and Administrators."

¹⁶ Ramdanil Mubarak, Makherus Sholeh, and Ika Irayana, "Classroom Management Strategy in Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum (Independent Curriculum) in Primary Education Institutions," *Al-Adzka: Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Guru Madrasah Ibtidaiyah 13*, no. 2 (December 31, 2023): 189–202, <https://doi.org/10.18592/aladzkapgmi.v13i2.11356>.

education framework, their implementation often encounters significant gaps, particularly in private religious schools like pesantren.¹⁷ As traditional Islamic educational institutions, pesantren play a critical role in preserving Islamic scholarly traditions, reproducing religious leaders, and disseminating Islamic teachings. However, pesantren also face challenges in aligning their formal education curricula, such as those used in Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs) and Madrasah Aliyah (MA), with the government-mandated national curriculum.¹⁸ This creates a substantial implementation gap, as pesantren must balance their traditional functions with the demands of formal curricula.

Research on curriculum transformation in pesantren has been extensively conducted by both domestic and international scholars, such as Lukens-Bull,¹⁹ Azra,²⁰ Zarkasy,²¹ Ihsan et.al,²² Asrohah,²³ Laila et al.²⁴ and Hanif et.al.²⁵ These studies generally highlight how pesantren respond to modernization and globalization challenges through curriculum transformation as an adaptive strategy. However, studies specifically addressing pesantren's responses to national curriculum changes in their formal education units, such as Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs) and Madrasah Aliyah (MA), remain limited.

This article aims to fill this gap by examining pesantren's responses to national curriculum changes in their formal education units. Specifically, it seeks to answer two key questions: (1) how pesantren implements the national curriculum in its madrasah, and (2) what forms of challenges arise during the implementation process. This study aims to provide deeper insights into the dynamics between national educational policies and the sustainability of Islamic educational traditions within the context of Indonesian pesantren.

¹⁷ Ihsan Ihsan et al., "The Contestation of National and Religious Curricula in Indonesia's Madrasahs since the Passage of the Uuspn," *Educational Studies* 50, no. 4 (2021): 434–47, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03055698.2021.1958757>; ST. Noer Farida Laila et al., *Konstruksi Kurikulum Menakar Integrasi Kurikulum Pendidikan Pesantren* (Yogyakarta: Bildung, 2020); M. Shoffa Saifillah Al Faruq, M. Asep Fathur Rozi, and Ahmad Sunoko, "Implementation of the Juran Trilogy in Improving the Quality of Islamic Higher Education," *Al-Hayat: Journal of Islamic Education* 8, no. 1 (January 21, 2024): 169, <https://doi.org/10.35723/ajie.v8i1.420>.

¹⁸ Azyumardi Azra, *Pendidikan Islam : Tradisi Dan Modernisasi Di Tengah Tantangan Milenium III* (Jakarta: Logos, 2012).

¹⁹ Ronald A Lukens-bull, "Teaching Morality : Javanese Islamic Education in a Globalizing Era 1," *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 3 (2000): 26–47, <https://doi.org/10.1525/aeq.2001.32.3.350>; Ronald A Lukens-Bull, "Two Sides of the Same Coin: Modernity and Tradition in Islamic Education in Indonesia," *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 32, no. 3 (2001): 350–72, <https://doi.org/10.1525/aeq.2001.32.3.350>.

²⁰ Azra, *Pendidikan Islam : Tradisi Dan Modernisasi Di Tengah Tantangan Milenium III*.

²¹ Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi, "Modern Pondok Pesantren: Maintaining Tradition in Modern System," *TSAQAFAH* 11, no. 2 (November 30, 2015): 223, <https://doi.org/10.21111/tsaqafah.v11i2.267>.

²² Ihsan et al., "The Contestation of National and Religious Curricula in Indonesia's Madrasahs since the Passage of the Uuspn."

²³ H Asrohah, "The Dynamics of Pesantren: Responses toward Modernity and Mechanism in Organizing Transformation," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 5, no. 1 (2011): 66–90.

²⁴ Laila et al., *Konstruksi Kurikulum Menakar Integrasi Kurikulum Pendidikan Pesantren*.

²⁵ Muh Hanif et al., "Pesantren Resistance to Indonesia's National Curriculum to Defend Its Curriculum Model," *Revista De Gestao Sociale E Ambiental* 18, no. 7 (2024): 1–32.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of how the national curriculum is implemented in Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs) and Madrasah Aliyah (MA) at Pondok Pesantren Al-Mawaddah (PPAM) Coper Ponorogo, as well as its challenges. The research focuses on addressing the “why” and “how” questions regarding how pesantren develops the national curriculum while maintaining the unique characteristics of its traditional curriculum, and the challenges that emerge during implementation. A descriptive-explanatory strategy is used to depict the development of the national curriculum in madrasah, while an exploratory strategy investigates the forms of challenges arising from the curriculum's implementation.²⁶ The study aims to provide a holistic understanding of curriculum reformation in pesantren.

Data collection was conducted during April 2019 to March 2020 and October-December 2022. Data were collected through three primary techniques. First, in-depth interviews were purposively conducted with three main groups of informants: *kyai* (religious leaders) as curriculum policymakers, *ustadz* (teachers) directly involved in implementation and senior students as the target audience of the curriculum. Second, participant observation was carried out in classrooms to observe curriculum implementation firsthand and in the pesantren environment to examine students' informal and non-formal activities. Third, document analysis was conducted on curriculum files, teaching documents, and archival records related to curriculum implementation.

Data analysis followed an interactive model consisting of three stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification.²⁷ Collected data were simplified, categorized into thematic groups, and systematically presented to draw relevant conclusions. Triangulation was employed to enhance the validity of findings by comparing data from various sources and methods and seeking validation from key informants. This approach ensures that the study's findings are credible and reliable.

DISCUSSION

Result

Implementation of the National Curriculum in Pesantren Based Madrasah

Pondok Pesantren al-Mawaddah (PPAM) Coper is an Islamic boarding school specifically for girls. Its education system is entirely pesantren-based, independent of other educational or teaching systems. Its primary objective is to nurture Muslim women who are spiritually, morally, and physically prepared to face modern challenges. The pesantren aspires to produce graduates who are independent, competent in various fields, and capable of addressing contemporary challenges while contributing to the Islamic, scientific, and economic development of the community.

²⁶ R.K. Yin, *Studi Kasus Desain Dan Metode* (Jakarta: Raja Grafindo Persada, 2013); Creswell. John W, *Penelitian Kualitatif & Desain Riset Memilih Di Antara Lima Pendekatan* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2015).

²⁷ M B Miles, A M Huberman, and J Saldaña, *Qualitative Data Analysis* (SAGE Publications, 2013).

Education at PPAM Coper lasts six years for elementary school graduates (SD/MI) and four years for junior high school graduates (MTs/SMP). The pesantren allows students to participate in national examinations equivalent to MTs/MA. To facilitate this, PPAM Coper operates formal madrasahs—Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs) and Madrasah Aliyah (MA)—to officially register students and enable them to pursue higher education or access the workforce. This integrative education model necessitates the development of a curriculum that blends the national curriculum with the pesantren's traditional curriculum.²⁸ The general content is derived from the structure of the Madrasah Tsanawiyah and Madrasah Aliyah curricula, while the religious content is adopted from the Kulliyatul Mu'allimin al-Islamiyah (KMI) Gontor curriculum and the pesantren's own curriculum. At the MA level, two specializations are offered: Mathematics and Natural Sciences, and Social Sciences.

The integration of the national madrasah curriculum into the pesantren's curriculum aligns with the demands of national education. The general content development focuses on preparing students for national examinations. This integration begins with mapping the general content of the 2013 Curriculum (K-13) structure, including its 2019 revisions. Mapping of examination content is conducted both vertically and horizontally, adhering to the structure of the 2013 Curriculum revisions and adjusted to available teaching hours. Instructional material is organized based on government-developed syllabi. Learning experiences for general content follow the revised 2019 guidelines of the 2013 Curriculum

Religious and linguistic components of the madrasah curriculum are independently developed by the pesantren to meet its educational goals. The similarity in curriculum structure between the pesantren and madrasah allows the pesantren to incorporate its content into the madrasah curriculum. Consequently, religious studies in madrasahs encompass not only Qur'an and Hadith, Aqidah Akhlak, Fiqh, and Islamic History but also other pesantren-taught Islamic sciences. Similarly, Arabic and English are taught as separate skills in accordance with linguistic competencies. This content-based curriculum development impacts the scope and sequence of lessons, which follow the structure of traditional Islamic texts and the associated learning experiences. The organization of religious subject learning follows the scope and sequence outlined in the KMI Gontor curriculum, as reflected in the textbooks used in KMI Gontor. The madrasah syllabus and student worksheets for religious subjects are used as a reference to provide additional material to aid students in their preparation for formal examinations.

The development of learning experience components in madrasah aligns with the curriculum content. Each curriculum content's learning experience development falls under the responsibility of two homeroom teachers, each tasked with planning, implementation, and evaluation activities. For general subjects, the learning experiences are developed based on the guidelines of the 2013 Curriculum (K-13), revised in 2019.²⁹ There are no specific guidelines from the pesantren regarding the teaching of general subjects. This indicates that pesantren fully recognize the importance of adhering to the principles of learning experience

²⁸ Dimas Raba Pramodana et al., "Model Inovasi Pengembangan Kurikulum Dan Pembelajaran PAI Era 4.0," *DIMAR: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 6, no. 1 (November 28, 2024): 1–11, <https://doi.org/10.58577/dimar.v6i1.242>.

²⁹ M. Furqon Wahyudi and Rosy Alfiana Dewi, "Perbandingan Konsep Pembelajaran PAI Berdasarkan Kurikulum KBK, K13 Dan MBKM," *Tarbawi Ngabar: Jurnal of Education* 4, no. 1 (February 7, 2023): 61–77, <https://doi.org/10.55380/tarbawi.v4i1.318>.

development within the madrasah curriculum for general subjects, ensuring students can perform optimally in national examinations. The development of learning experiences for general subjects is entrusted entirely to the subject teachers. Teachers are given the autonomy to organize their teaching according to the scope and sequence of the materials outlined in the madrasah syllabus. They are also authorized to allocate additional teaching hours if deemed necessary for better preparation for the national exams.

For religious and language subjects, the learning experiences are developed following the pesantren's instructional guidelines. This development adheres to the principles outlined in *Tarbiyah wat Ta'lim* by Mahmud Yunus, while the instructional steps are based on *Tarbiyah 'Amaliyah* by KH. Imam Zarkasy. A document study of *Tarbiyah wat Ta'lim* reveals that it discusses general theories of education and teaching, knowledge about students, educational administration, as well as the teaching of Islamic studies (*dirasah Islamiyah*) and the Arabic language. *Tarbiyah 'Amaliyah* provides a more detailed discussion of instructional steps for all Islamic studies and language subjects, along with the desired character traits of teachers for each subject. This demonstrates that pesantren not only preserve traditional pesantren content within their curriculum but also continue their longstanding scholarly traditions, even after adopting the madrasah system.

The development of learning experiences in religious and language subjects integrates formal, informal, and non-formal domains. The boarding system allows pesantren to blend learning activities across these domains. Classroom observations and dormitory activities reveal that Arabic is used as the medium of instruction for religious subjects starting from the second grade of the Madrasah Tsanawiyah level. Instructional steps are developed by subject teachers based on Herbart's five steps of teaching: introduction, explanation, association, conclusion, and evaluation. Various teaching methods are offered in *Tarbiyah* textbooks, but expository methods dominate teachers' instructional activities. Religious and language learning is further reinforced through religious and linguistic activities in the dormitory, including habituation, practices, exercises, role modeling, discipline, independence, and other related activities.

The description above highlights that madrasah of PPAM Coper employs different models of learning experience organization for general and religious/language subjects. The development of learning experiences for general subjects aligns with the principles and syllabus of K-13, while learning experiences for religious and language subjects are guided by the principles in *Tarbiyah wat Ta'lim* and *Tarbiyah 'Amaliyah*. Instructional activities follow the scope and sequence outlined in textbooks, with religious subject worksheets serving as a reference for teachers in preparing students for madrasah exams

Challenges of Curriculum Changes in Pesantren Education

The implementation of national curriculum in pesantren based madrasah, particularly at PPAM Coper Ponorogo, necessitates adjustments to the pesantren's educational goals. These objectives aim to balance knowledge, attitudes, and skills, offering a comprehensive approach to learning. Knowledge acquisition integrates religious, general, and linguistic disciplines. However, despite the broad objectives, specialization at the Madrasah Aliyah (MA) level is limited to two streams: Mathematics and Natural Sciences (Matematika dan Ilmu

Pengetahuan Alam/IPA) and Social Sciences (Ilmu Pengetahuan Sosial/IPS). According to the Director of PPAM, this focus excludes religious and language studies as specializations, because mastery of these areas is deemed essential for all students.

The integration of the madrasah curriculum significantly affects the organization of learning materials and experiences. The inclusion of madrasah-specific subjects results in an increased number of subjects without a proportional increase in contact hours, creating a challenging imbalance. General subjects cover the specialization streams (IPA and IPS), while religious and language subjects rely on pesantren-specific content, such as *dirasah Islamiyah* and linguistic studies. Deputy head of madrasah for curriculum highlights the resulting strain: limited time to cover extensive content means neither the madrasah nor pesantren curriculum can be fully delivered.

Time constraints lead to curriculum streamlining. General subjects follow the government-mandated madrasah syllabus, but many topics are omitted. To compensate, additional courses are offered outside regular hours, particularly for exam preparation. Religious and language subjects adhere to the curriculum from KMI Gontor but are condensed to fit available teaching hours. For example, *tarbiyah* material is reduced to essential topics, and pesantren syllabi are evaluated biennially to ensure adaptability. Teachers are responsible for tailoring lessons within these constraints, sometimes dedicating extra hours for student support.

The reduction of content is determined by subject-specific teacher groups (*Musyawahar Guru Mata Pelajaran/MGMP*) during semester-end meetings. For example, topics with lower relevance to students' daily lives, such as *mantiq*, have been eliminated. Meanwhile, parallel subjects, like *nahwu*, must be fully taught regardless of time limitations to maintain competency levels. The Director of PPAM explains that adjustments include shifting certain subjects, such as physical education, to afternoon sessions, thereby freeing morning hours for Arabic, *nahwu*, and other core pesantren content.

Evaluation practices for general madrasah subjects align with the 2013 curriculum, including midterm and semester-end exams. To ensure alignment with external standards, some exam materials are sourced from national madrasah systems. Religious and language evaluations use both oral and written formats, developed by subject-specific teacher groups. These assessments culminate in two separate report cards: one for madrasah results, adhering to government standards, and another for pesantren-specific evaluations, reflecting additional metrics such as discipline and compliance. This dual reporting system accommodates differing evaluation criteria for academic and spiritual development.

Based on the above description, it can be concluded that the implementation of national curriculum in pesantren based madrasah requires significant structural and pedagogical adaptations. While this approach enriches the educational experience, it also poses challenges in balancing curricular demands, allocating teaching time, and evaluating student performance. Teachers and administrators continuously strive to harmonize these elements while preserving the core values and objectives of pesantren education.

Discussion

Implementation of the National Curriculum in Pesantren Based Madrasah

Indonesia's educational curriculum has undergone significant transformations since early 21st century - the shift from content-based curricula to competency-based curricula. Competency-based approaches emphasize the integration of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, enabling students to address the challenges of a constantly changing world. The focus of competency-based curricula is on developing multidisciplinary skills that allow students to apply their knowledge in real-world contexts. This shift changes the perspective of learning, moving from mere memorization and mastery of theory to problem-solving capabilities using interdisciplinary approaches.³⁰

The first major change was the introduction of the 2004 Curriculum, known as the Competency-Based Curriculum (Kurikulum Berbasis Kompetensi/KBK). This curriculum introduced a student-centered learning approach and emphasized educational decentralization by delegating authority to schools. The 2006 Curriculum (Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan/KTSP) refined the KBK by providing greater flexibility to schools and teachers to tailor the curriculum to local needs. KTSP was also seen as empowering teachers by giving them the space to develop instructional designs suited to students' needs. The 2013 Curriculum integrated competencies of attitudes, knowledge, and skills, as mandated by Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System. This curriculum introduced a holistic approach with four assessment aspects: knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behavior. It aimed to produce Indonesian individuals who are productive, creative, and innovative through more flexible, student-centered, and globally relevant competency-based learning.³¹

Curriculum changes require thoughtful adaptation in their implementation to ensure alignment with educational objectives and societal needs.³² While centrally regulated changes provide a framework for consistency, the practical success of these reforms depends heavily on how they are adapted at the school and classroom levels. Teachers, as key mediators, play a critical role in interpreting and integrating these changes into existing practices, often through a process of refraction that balances innovation with continuity. Effective adaptation involves not only adhering to new guidelines but also addressing operational stability, allowing for both the continuity of core practices and the incorporation of new competencies and methodologies.

The implementation of the national curriculum in pesantren-based madrasahs, such as those at PPAM Coper, exemplifies a unique adaptation within Indonesia's Islamic education system. This integrative model reflects pesantren efforts to balance the demands of national education with their core mission of Islamic education. This approach has been widely

³⁰ Kelly, "The Curriculum: Theory and Practice"; Ansyar, *Kurikulum: Hakikat, Fondasi, Desain Dan Pengembangan*.

³¹ Rini Listiya Ningrum, Ahmad Ali Mirza, and Zaitun Qomariah, "Curriculum Reform in Indonesia," *Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan Nasional* 1, no. 3 (2023): 137–42; Herry Augustinus Simarmata and Ilza Mayuni, "Curriculum Reform In Indonesia: From Competency-Based To Freedom Of Learning," *International Journal of Pedagogical Novelty (IJOPNOV)* 2, no. 2 (2023): 1–13, <https://jurnal.pustakagalerimandiri.co.id/index.php/IJOPNOV>; Dinn Wahyudin and Andi Suwarta, "Politics of Curriculum in the Educational System in Indonesia," *Tawarikh Journal of Historical Studies* 11, no. 2 (2020): 143–58.

³² Erstad and Voogt, "The Twenty-First Century Curriculum: Issues and Challenges."

adopted by pesantrens in Indonesia, accommodating increasing government formal education initiatives and expanding career opportunities for graduates.³³

The adaptation process at pesantren-based madrasahs is predominantly incremental, as theorized by Cuban³⁴ and Ansyar.³⁵ Incremental changes involve refining existing systems to improve efficiency and effectiveness without disrupting foundational structures. At PPAM Coper, this is evident in the integration of national curriculum subjects into pesantren programs without compromising the pesantren's core mission of fostering Islamic scholarship. Moreover, the response to curriculum change at pesantrens is often accommodative and tactical.³⁶ Accommodative responses involve aligning the curriculum with external demands while preserving institutional stability. Tactical responses entail strategic adoption of changes to meet national requirements, such as allowing students to take national exams while maintaining a distinctive pesantren identity.

The integration of national and pesantren curricula at PPAM Coper also exemplifies content-based curriculum development, aligning with Kelly's (2009) principles of educational design. The dual focus on national academic standards and pesantren's religious values illustrates a holistic approach to education. This integration reflects vertical and horizontal articulation as well as differentiated experience. In vertical and horizontal articulation, the curriculum mapping at PPAM Coper ensures alignment with the 2013 curriculum revisions (K-13), integrating general subjects for national exams while maintaining religious content rooted in pesantren traditions. This alignment is consistent with Hancock, Dyk, & Jones's emphasis on curriculum coherence.³⁷ In differentiated experiences, the separation of religious and general education into distinct streams acknowledges the unique learning needs and outcomes of each domain. The national curriculum's pedagogical principles are applied to general subjects, while pesantren-specific methodologies guide religious education, reflecting a bifocal approach to curriculum delivery.

The dual standards in evaluation and reporting systems, wherein national curriculum assessments coexist with pesantren-specific evaluations, underscore the institution's hybrid educational model. This duality reflects the balancing act between national educational accountability and the preservation of pesantren traditions. The use of separate report cards aligns with Gouëdard et al.³⁸ theory of stability in operational curriculum practices, ensuring that both educational objectives are met without conflict.

The above discussion shows that integration of the national curriculum into pesantren-based madrasah aligns with the notion that education systems evolve to mirror changes in social, political, and economic contexts.³⁹ The transformation at PPAM Coper demonstrates how pesantrens, traditionally focused on Islamic studies, adapt to national demands for broader educational goals, such as preparing students for standardized examinations and

³³ Lukens-bull, "Teaching Morality : Javanese Islamic Education in a Globalizing Era 1"; Azra, *Pendidikan Islam : Tradisi Dan Modernisasi Di Tengah Tantangan Milenium III*; Hanif et al., "Pesantren Resistance to Indonesia's National Curriculum to Defend Its Curriculum Model."

³⁴ Cuban, "Curriculum Stability and Change."

³⁵ Ansyar, *Kurikulum: Hakikat, Fondasi, Desain Dan Pengembangan*.

³⁶ Mondal and Das, "Overview of Curriculum Change; A Brief Discussion."

³⁷ Mondal and Das.

³⁸ Gouëdard et al., "Curriculum Reform."

³⁹ Estrellado, "Matatag Curriculum; Why Curriculum [Must] Change"; Gouëdard et al., "Curriculum Reform."

equipping them with competencies for modern societal roles. This dual approach resonates with Ansyar's⁴⁰ and Cuban's⁴¹ framework of "changes and constancy," wherein institutions simultaneously embrace innovation while retaining core values. At PPAM Coper, while the structure and content of the national curriculum are adopted, the pesantren preserves its traditional role in transmitting Islamic knowledge and values. Furthermore, studies suggest that integrating the national curriculum into pesantren madrasahs ensures institutional sustainability.⁴²

However, the curriculum development in madrasah, which is content-based, is often considered at odds with the direction of the national curriculum changes that emphasize competency-based approaches. The national curriculum, such as the 2013 Curriculum, has adopted a global approach that emphasizes the integration of knowledge, skills, and attitudes to prepare students for the challenges of the 21st century. This approach aims to create individuals capable of solving problems creatively, thinking critically, and adapting to various contexts. In contrast, content-based curriculum development in pesantren-based madrasah focuses more on mastering specific materials, particularly in the fields of Islamic studies and language. This often results in learning that is monodisciplinary and provides limited opportunities for integration across disciplines. While this content-based curriculum is essential for preserving Islamic traditions and values, the primary challenge for pesantren lies in how to align their curriculum with global competency demands without neglecting their core mission as centers of religious education and character development.

Challenges of Curriculum Changes in Pesantren Education

The transformation of Indonesia's national curriculum from content-based curricula to competency-based curricula reflects global trends in education. Competency-based curricula prioritize the integration of knowledge, skills, and attitudes to prepare students for the challenges of a dynamic world. This approach shifts learning from rote memorization and theoretical mastery to fostering interdisciplinary problem-solving skills applicable in real-world contexts. Although the competency-based curriculum holds significant potential, its implementation in Indonesia faces several challenges. Ningrum et al.⁴³ identify several issues in implementing curriculum changes in Indonesia, which can be categorized into three main challenges, namely teacher readiness, educational decentralization, and alignment with global standards. Competency-based curricula require teachers capable of designing meaningful learning experiences, selecting appropriate approaches, and establishing measurable success criteria. However, limited teacher competencies often pose a major obstacle. In addition, while the new curriculum grants autonomy to schools, not all schools possess the capacity to develop curricula independently. As a result, implementation often

⁴⁰ Ansyar, *Kurikulum: Hakikat, Fondasi, Desain Dan Pengembangan*.

⁴¹ Cuban, "Curriculum Stability and Change."

⁴² Lukens-bull, "Teaching Morality : Javanese Islamic Education in a Globalizing Era 1"; Azra, *Pendidikan Islam : Tradisi Dan Modernisasi Di Tengah Tantangan Milenium III*; Ihsan et al., "The Contestation of National and Religious Curricula in Indonesia's Madrasahs since the Passage of the Uuspn."

⁴³ Ningrum, Mirza, and Qomariah, "Curriculum Reform in Indonesia."

lacks uniformity. Furthermore, curriculum changes aimed to meet international benchmarks such as PISA and TIMSS. However, these goals have not been fully achieved due to inadequate educational infrastructure and resources.

Curriculum changes at the national level are often equated with syllabus alterations. While centralization aims to establish uniform benchmarks, it can lead to significant disparities in implementation across local educational institutions. Educators and administrative staff may face difficulties adapting centralized curricula to the unique needs of their student populations. This centralized approach frequently overlooks contextual realities such as cultural diversity, linguistic differences, and varying levels of access to educational resources. Consequently, teachers—who play a crucial role in enacting these changes—may lack the necessary training or resources to effectively implement the revised curriculum. As a result, there is often a gap between the prescribed curriculum and its actual delivery in classrooms, exacerbating inequalities in student learning outcomes.⁴⁴

The implementation of national curriculum changes, as observed in madrasahs such as PPAM Coper, reflects unique challenges in Indonesia's Islamic education system. A primary challenge is the increasing complexity of the curriculum, which encompasses two different systems. General madrasah content, such as mathematics, natural sciences, and social sciences, is adapted from the 2013 Curriculum, focusing on national exams. Meanwhile, religious and linguistic content, such as Arabic and English, adheres to pesantren curricula derived from KMI Gontor, emphasizing Islamic mastery and linguistic skills. This integration often leads to material overlap and heavy learning burdens for students.⁴⁵ According to Priestley, curriculum changes often follow traditional patterns, rendering curricula overly dense, confusing, and misaligned with actual needs. This suggests that curriculum changes must be evaluated to determine whether they represent substantive changes in educational practice or merely strategic responses to external policies. External pressures often drive superficial curriculum adoption without meaningful change in teaching practices.⁴⁶

The madrasah curriculum has a construct distinct from the pesantren curriculum. The K-13 design positions subjects as interconnected curriculum content, both horizontally and vertically. This design demands learner-centered, interactive, networked, active, collaborative, multimedia-utilizing, multidisciplinary, and critical approaches.⁴⁷ Conversely, most traditional Islamic educational institutions still follow a subject-based organizational

⁴⁴ Gouëdard et al., "Curriculum Reform"; Kelly, "The Curriculum: Theory and Practice"; Oliver, Shawn L. & Hyun, "Comprehensive Curriculum Reform in Higher Education: Collaborative Engagement of Faculty and Administrators."

⁴⁵ Amin Maghfuri, "Manajemen Sinergis Pesantren-Madrasah Di Era Modern Sebagai Alternatif Pendidikan Islam Indonesia," *Potensi; Jurnal Kependidikan Islam* 6, no. 1 (2020): 51–71; Azra, *Pendidikan Islam : Tradisi Dan Modernisasi Di Tengah Tantangan Milenium III*.

⁴⁶ Laila et al., *Konstruksi Kurikulum Menakar Integrasi Kurikulum Pendidikan Pesantren*.

⁴⁷ Joko Paminto et al., "Implementasi Kurikulum 2013 Di Sekolah Pesantren Dengan Sistem Boarding School," *Indonesian Journal of Curriculum and Educational Technology Studies* 6, no. 1 (2018): 41–52, <https://doi.org/10.15294/ijcets.v6i1.15937>.

approach.^{48 49} The essence of subject-based organization lies in its adherence to the logic of the related disciplines, with materials and learning experiences organized accordingly. The curriculum experts determine this logic, while teachers focus on methods to convey the prescribed content. Mastery of subjects is paramount, with lectures as the main teaching method and textbooks as the primary resource. Standards, including evaluation criteria, are subject-based.⁵⁰

Amin⁵¹ and Azra⁵² critique the integrative model in curriculum implementation, suggesting that pesantrens adopting madrasah curricula often do so half-heartedly or in a patchwork manner. Madrasah curricula are implemented in a limited scope, often excluding the epistemological and axiological discourses of the taught sciences. Pesantren have yet to achieve full integration and interdependence among scientific disciplines. Religious and general sciences operate independently, resulting in a lack of new understanding. Ihsan et.al⁵³ observes that the development of general knowledge content serves only as a complement. This issue is exacerbated by monological teaching methods that persist in pesantren education.⁵⁴ Kelly⁵⁵ and Ansyar⁵⁶ advocate for a shift in curriculum orientation from a product model to a process model. This model positions the curriculum not merely as a technical document but as a comprehensive guide for holistic school improvement. Hence, the curriculum functions as a tool for meaningful educational transformation.

The above discussions show that pesantren-based madrasah faces significant challenges in implementing competency-based curricula due to the complexity of balancing traditional and modern educational approaches. The national competency-based curriculum emphasizes learner-centered, interactive, and multidisciplinary methodologies, requiring teachers to integrate knowledge, skills, and attitudes effectively. However, many madrasahs, rooted in content-based organizational traditions, struggle to align with these modern pedagogical demands. Limited teacher readiness is a persistent issue, as many educators lack the necessary training to design and deliver competency-based learning experiences. This gap is further exacerbated by inadequate access to professional development opportunities and resources, hindering the successful transition to competency-based methods. Consequently, there is often a disconnect between the curriculum's intended goals and its practical implementation in madrasah classrooms, leading to suboptimal student outcomes.

⁴⁸ Maghfuri, "Manajemen Sinergis Pesantren-Madrasah Di Era Modern Sebagai Alternatif Pendidikan Islam Indonesia."

⁴⁹ Mukhibat Mukhibat, Muhammad Fahim Tharaba, and Munair Yusuf Abdalhafiz Salah, "The Management of IAIN Ponorogo-Assisted Madrasahs: Religious, Populist, Center of Excellence, Diversity," *Cendekia: Jurnal Kependidikan Dan Kemasyarakatan* 18, no. 2 (2020): 171–87, <https://doi.org/10.21154/cendekia.v18i2.2083>.

⁵⁰ Ansyar, *Kurikulum: Hakikat, Fondasi, Desain Dan Pengembangan*.

⁵¹ Maghfuri, "Manajemen Sinergis Pesantren-Madrasah Di Era Modern Sebagai Alternatif Pendidikan Islam Indonesia."

⁵² Azra, *Pendidikan Islam : Tradisi Dan Modernisasi Di Tengah Tantangan Milenium III*.

⁵³ Ihsan et al., "The Contestation of National and Religious Curricula in Indonesia's Madrasahs since the Passage of the Uuspn."

⁵⁴ Maghfuri, "Manajemen Sinergis Pesantren-Madrasah Di Era Modern Sebagai Alternatif Pendidikan Islam Indonesia"; Azra, *Pendidikan Islam : Tradisi Dan Modernisasi Di Tengah Tantangan Milenium III*.

⁵⁵ Kelly, "The Curriculum: Theory and Practice."

⁵⁶ Ansyar, *Kurikulum: Hakikat, Fondasi, Desain Dan Pengembangan*.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of the national curriculum in pesantren-based madrasahs, such as PPAM Coper, represents a strategic effort to balance Islamic educational principles with modern national standards. While this dual-curriculum model aims to produce graduates equipped with both religious depth and contemporary competencies, it faces significant challenges. These include overlapping material, increased learning loads, limited teaching hours, and fragmented evaluation systems that struggle to align general and religious sciences cohesively. Additionally, the continued reliance on traditional, content-focused teaching methods often conflicts with the competency-based learning goals of the national curriculum, creating gaps in implementation and coherence. As a result, pesantren-based madrasahs encounter difficulties in delivering holistic, learner-centered education that meets modern competency standards, leading to less-than-optimal outcomes for students.

The findings emphasize the importance of adopting a process-oriented curriculum in pesantren-based madrasahs that seamlessly integrates Islamic and general education. Policymakers should design curriculum frameworks that are both adaptable and context-sensitive, aligning national standards with local needs. To support this, educational institutions need to prioritize teacher training, equipping educators to effectively implement competency-based learning alongside traditional subjects. Collaboration among pesantren, government bodies, and educational experts is essential for creating a unified evaluation system, minimizing redundancies, and optimizing learning processes while preserving the pesantren's distinct identity. By striking a balance between academic excellence and spiritual development, stakeholders can ensure that graduates are well-equipped with modern competencies and firmly grounded in Islamic values.

This study's primary limitation is its focus on a single pesantren-based madrasah, which limits the broader applicability of its findings. Although the study offers valuable insights, it may not fully reflect the diverse experiences and practices across Indonesia's vast and varied pesantren network. Differences in regional contexts, institutional sizes, available resources, and distinct educational models could present unique challenges and opportunities that were beyond the scope of this research. As a result, the findings should be approached with caution, as they may not represent the full range of dynamics present in other pesantren-based madrasahs nationwide. Future studies should aim to include a wider variety of institutions to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of curriculum implementation within this setting.

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