

INTEGRATING BAHSUL KUTUB TO ENHANCE THE QUALITY OF SANTRI EDUCATION AT FADLUN MINALLAH ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

Improving the quality of learning in Islamic boarding schools is essential to ensure that Islamic scholarly traditions remain relevant amid developments in modern education. This study analyzes how the integration of Total Quality Management (TQM) principles into the Bahsul Kutub program can strengthen educational quality at Fadlun Minallah Islamic Boarding School. Using a qualitative approach involving observation, interviews, and document analysis, the study examines the roles of leadership and academic governance, as well as the dynamics of the Bahsul Kutub forum, in developing a culture of quality within the pesantren. The findings indicate that applying TQM principles including visionary leadership, continuous improvement, human resource development, and process management makes the implementation of Bahsul Kutub more systematic and effective. The program not only preserves the tradition of studying classical Islamic texts but also functions as a learning strategy that improves santri literacy in the kitab kuning, analytical competence, and critical-thinking skills. Its positive effects are evident in enhanced academic quality, intellectual development, a stronger scholarly character, and santri achievements in the Musabaqah Qira'atul Kutub (MQK) competition. This study confirms that integrating TQM and Bahsul Kutub offers a promising model for strengthening the quality of pesantren education. Future research should develop quantitative instruments for critical evaluation and compare the effectiveness of this model across different Islamic boarding schools.

Keywords: Bahsul Kutub, Islamic Boarding School Education Quality, Total Quality Management

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INTRODUCTION

Pesantren have distinctive learning systems, curricula, and academic cultures. As traditional educational institutions, pesantren not only teach Islamic sciences but also develop santri character, discipline, and social competence

through a range of distinctive instructional methods (Sakdiah and Zaini Dahlan 2023). One such method is the study of the kitab kuning, which has formed part of the identity of pesantren for centuries (Yunia Salmawati 2021). As society develops and expectations regarding educational quality increase, pesantren must innovate to ensure that kitab kuning instruction remains relevant and of high quality, enabling pesantren education to respond to contemporary demands (Ni'am and Arafah 2024). Nevertheless, kitab kuning instruction in Indonesian pesantren continues to face problems concerning the quality of santri understanding. Although pesantren are recognized as institutions that preserve the literacy tradition of turāth, studies show that instruction frequently proceeds without clear pedagogical standards and remains dependent on the individual competence of the kiai or ustadz (Salam 2024).

Instructional methods such as sorogan and bandongan are characteristic of pesantren because they effectively cultivate discipline and close relationships between teachers and santri. However, they do not always fully support the development of critical thinking, as they tend to emphasize one-way knowledge transmission (Chairi 2019; Gumindari and Maula 2023). Many pesantren also face limited access to supporting literature, shortages of instructors with expertise in the Arabic linguistic sciences, and insufficient innovation in instructional delivery (Sarnoto and Wahyuningsih 2022; Zailani 2017). Furthermore, according to Siti Alif Lailatul Sa'adah (2024), santri understanding of classical texts often remains at the level of literal reading without developing into in-depth analysis because instruction prioritizes reading fluency over mastery of meaning and legal context. These problems make reform of kitab kuning instruction an important need for pesantren throughout Indonesia if they are to produce graduates who can not only vocalize texts correctly but also understand their substance and contemporary relevance.

As tradition-based educational institutions, pesantren are required both to preserve their scholarly heritage and to adapt to changing times (Iskandar 2023). In the modern context, improving instructional quality is crucial if pesantren are to meet society's demand for competent, competitive, and principled graduates (Anom Pancawati 2022). According to Baihaqi and Yasin (2024), Total Quality Management is an effective management approach oriented toward customer satisfaction, continuous improvement, and human resource development. In modern education, Total Quality Management (TQM) has become a strategic approach to improving institutional quality comprehensively. TQM emphasizes process quality, the involvement of all organizational elements, and continuous improvement (Mubarak, Fuad, and Kholid 2023). Majidah (2021) views educational quality as the outcome of systematically designed processes extending from

planning and implementation to evaluation and continuous improvement. The application of TQM in modern educational institutions has been shown to improve school-management effectiveness, instructional quality, and educator performance (Saputri et al. 2024; Ds et al. 2024; Subaidi and Khalim 2018). Across schools and universities, TQM has also improved academic-management effectiveness, educator professionalism, and student satisfaction with educational services (Saleh et al. 2025).

Within pesantren, TQM is relevant because these institutions have highly dynamic systems involving numerous stakeholders, including kiai, boards of asatidz, administrators, santri, and the wider community. By applying TQM principles, pesantren can manage kitab kuning programs in a more professional, purposeful, and quality-oriented manner without abandoning their deeply rooted traditions. At Fadlun Minallah Islamic Boarding School, quality improvement is pursued through the Bahsul Kutub program. Historically, this tradition is a modification of bahsul masāil, a forum for discussing Islamic legal questions that developed in major Javanese pesantren such as Pesantren Sarang (Habibah 2024). Bahsul Kutub is not merely a method for studying classical texts; it is also a means of developing confidence, communication skills, and scholarly character (Anam 2018).

Bahsul Kutub performs an important function in improving educational quality. TQM regards quality as the outcome of processes that are planned, organized, and implemented consistently by every party within an educational institution. In other words, quality is measured not only by final outcomes but also by how learning processes are managed. TQM can therefore be embodied through curriculum management, teacher involvement, regular programming, and continuous evaluation. The integration of Bahsul Kutub into the curriculum of Fadlun Minallah Islamic Boarding School is consistent with these principles. Learning is organized in levels, educators serve as active facilitators, activities are conducted systematically, and competencies are evaluated continuously (Habibah 2024). Moreover, the success of Fadlun Minallah santri in various Musabaqah Qira'atul Kutub (MQK) competitions provides tangible evidence that the system produces high-quality outcomes. Integrating TQM with Bahsul Kutub is therefore an important innovation that enables pesantren to provide tradition-based instruction while meeting modern standards of educational quality.

Accordingly, although this study focuses primarily on learning through Bahsul Kutub, it substantively belongs to the broader field of quality in pesantren education. This is because integrating TQM and Bahsul Kutub influences not only instruction but also educational management, leadership, quality culture, and human resource development, all of which are core components of the pesantren

education system. The research gap identified in this study is the absence of previous research on integrating an instructional method into educational quality development through kitab kuning instruction. This study therefore analyzes how Bahsul Kutub is systematically integrated to improve the quality of education at Fadlun Minallah Islamic Boarding School.

METHOD

This research employed a qualitative case-study design. A qualitative approach was selected to enable an in-depth understanding of instructional processes, contexts, and dynamics through direct engagement with the pesantren environment (Moleong 2021). The study focused on a specific phenomenon: the implementation of the Bahsul Kutub program as an initiative to improve instructional quality at Fadlun Minallah Islamic Boarding School.

The research was conducted at Fadlun Minallah Islamic Boarding School in Bantul, a salaf pesantren strongly committed to developing the ability to read the kitab kuning. The site was purposively selected because the pesantren had adopted Bahsul Kutub as a core program within its educational system. Data were obtained from parties directly involved in the program, including the pesantren leader, the board of qāri' and qāri'āt, administrators, and intermediate- and advanced-level santri. The researchers also used supporting documents—including photographs of activities, official schedules, organizational structures, and records of achievements in the Musabaqah Qira'atul Kutub (MQK)—to develop a more comprehensive account.

Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis (Sugiyono 2020). The researchers directly observed the implementation of Bahsul Kutub in both male and female residential complexes. These observations enabled them to examine the sequence of activities, interactions between qāri' and santri, and the academic atmosphere created in the forum. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with the pesantren leader, program facilitators, and several santri who actively participated in Bahsul Kutub. The interviews explored their perspectives on the program's aims, mechanisms, and effects on educational quality. Activity notes, schedules, the organizational structure of LPQK, and achievement records were also analyzed to complement the observational and interview findings.

The researchers used the analytical model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which consists of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data condensation occurred throughout the research process by selecting information relevant to the study's focus. The data were presented in narrative form to describe patterns, relationships, and dynamics found in the field. Conclusions were then drawn progressively from empirical findings verified

through source and method triangulation, producing a comprehensive understanding of the role of Bahsul Kutub in improving educational quality within the pesantren.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

It should be emphasized that, although Bahsul Kutub appears to be an instructional method, within the pesantren context it functions as an educational instrument that influences academic management, quality culture, character development, and institutional outcomes. The following discussion is therefore situated within the framework of quality in pesantren education.

1. Visionary Leadership and the Foundation of a Pesantren Quality Culture

The findings show that the kiai, as the pesantren leader, plays a central role in establishing a consistent culture of quality. From Deming's (1986) perspective, this finding corresponds to the first principle, constancy of purpose, whereby leaders establish a long-term vision for institutional quality. The vision of the kiai of Fadlun Minallah Islamic Boarding School—to strengthen santri ability to read, analyze, and understand classical texts—provides the foundation for developing Bahsul Kutub.

The role of the pesantren leader also reflects Deming's sixth principle, institute leadership, which emphasizes that leaders should not merely supervise but must ensure that all processes operate effectively in support of quality improvement. The kiai is directly involved in selecting texts, evaluating activities, mentoring the qāri', and monitoring santri development. This involvement demonstrates that pesantren leadership is substantive and quality-oriented rather than merely symbolic. This analysis is reinforced by Sallis (2002), who argues that TQM in education can function only when leaders are able to create a culture of quality. Fadlun Minallah has developed a strong scholarly culture in which santri participate in activities with discipline, respect knowledge, and adhere to consistent academic standards. The integration of charismatic pesantren leadership and TQM principles thus provides the foundation for successful kitab kuning instruction.

As a rapidly developing pesantren with a strong reputation for kitab kuning literacy, Fadlun Minallah has educated many high-achieving santri who have won MQK competitions at the regency and national levels and received scholarships to universities in Indonesia and abroad. These achievements provide an important context for understanding the implementation of the Bahsul Kutub system and TQM principles. The following discussion therefore presents a comprehensive analysis integrating field data with theoretical

frameworks to provide a complete account of how TQM and Bahsul Kutub improve the quality of santri education.

Educational quality at Fadlun Minallah Islamic Boarding School is inseparable from the leadership of its kiai. From a TQM perspective, leadership is the primary driver of a culture of quality (Saputri et al. 2024). The kiai acts as a visionary figure who ensures that all learning activities remain aligned with the institution's quality-improvement vision (Nengsih, Gusfira, and Pratama 2020). He performs not only administrative functions but also serves as a model of scholarly culture. His direct involvement ensures the quality of kitab instruction and demonstrates a comprehensive commitment to educational quality. The decision to modify the musyawarah system into Bahsul Kutub shows that educational innovation is integral to institutional improvement. This innovation affects not only instructional methods but also the broader educational system, including academic governance, quality culture, and the continuous development of santri competence. The kiai's leadership therefore plays a strategic role in shaping the direction, quality, and identity of pesantren education.

The kiai's vision of critical and in-depth engagement with classical texts transforms Bahsul Kutub from a routine activity into a purposeful strategy for improving santri academic quality. Visionary leadership in this pesantren demonstrates that TQM need not always depend on the formal management systems of modern institutions. Leaders who innovate to enhance the quality of both pesantren and santri also embody its principles. Charismatic leadership can likewise become the primary driver of a quality system. This indicates that TQM can be flexibly adapted to the local characteristics of Islamic educational institutions (Sulistiyanto 2000).

2. Bahsul Kutub as Critical Education

As part of the pesantren education system, Bahsul Kutub functions not merely as an instructional technique but as an educational strategy that shapes santri patterns of thought, academic culture, and scholarly competence. Observations at Fadlun Minallah indicate that Bahsul Kutub has developed into an innovation for improving the quality of santri education. In practice, it creates an active learning environment in which santri not only read texts but also construct meaning collaboratively. This process corresponds to the elements of critical thinking identified by Ennis (1985): analysis, through examining texts and linguistic structures; evaluation, through assessing the validity of fiqh arguments; inference, through drawing conclusions from textual

evidence; and explanation, through presenting arguments in a scholarly manner.

Within this framework, Bahsul Kutub represents active and peer learning. According to Sallis (2002), these are characteristics of quality education because they fully engage learners in constructing meaning. Bahsul Kutub provides a space in which santri practice critical thinking, formulate arguments, and develop the intellectual habits required in contemporary education. This confirms that the turāth tradition can serve as an adaptive and effective instrument for educational quality development when it is properly managed.

3. Integrating TQM Principles into the Governance of Bahsul Kutub

This turāth-based learning process allows santri to develop linguistic precision, analytical competence, and the ability to formulate arguments. Analyzing texts, examining their nahw and sarf structures, and discussing their fiqh contexts make the program an effective means of strengthening critical thinking (Syaifuddin Ahmad 2016). Ultimately, Bahsul Kutub trains santri to read critically, reason logically, compare scholarly opinions, and communicate ideas in an academic manner.

The use of classical Islamic texts as primary references also strengthens Islamic literacy and preserves the authenticity of the pesantren intellectual tradition. From the perspective of modern pedagogy, Bahsul Kutub displays characteristics consistent with active learning and peer learning, with santri acting as subjects who construct understanding through interaction and discussion. Bahsul Kutub is therefore not only a tradition but also an educational mechanism that meets contemporary standards of educational quality.

The implementation of Bahsul Kutub provides a concrete example of how Islamic scholarly traditions can be integrated with TQM principles to produce higher-quality education. The principle of customer focus is particularly evident. As the primary customers of pesantren education, santri participate in processes tailored to their need to master the kitab kuning and fiqh. Meanwhile, society, as an external customer, requires competent pesantren graduates who can respond to religious questions. Bahsul Kutub helps meet both needs. The principle of continuous improvement is also implemented through weekly evaluations by the kiai and asatidz concerning santri understanding and development. This regular evaluation supports ongoing improvements in educational quality.

From the perspective of process management, the implementation of Bahsul Kutub demonstrates structured educational governance. Scheduling,

the allocation of roles, the selection of texts according to santri competency levels, and the documentation of activities are forms of academic management that reflect Deming's principle of continually improving the system. This confirms that Bahsul Kutub has developed beyond an instructional method into a managerial mechanism that supports improvements in the quality of pesantren education. Human resource development is another important component of TQM integration. Training members of the qāri' board to become competent mentors and giving santri opportunities to develop their skills through sorogan, qirā'ah, and MQK preparation demonstrate systematic efforts to enhance the pesantren's human resources. Empowering high-achieving santri to mentor junior students further strengthens a cadre-based educational model and is consistent with Deming's principle of encouraging education. These processes show that strengthening Bahsul Kutub improves not only instructional practice but also the overall quality of pesantren education.

The integration of TQM and Bahsul Kutub demonstrates that pesantren can adapt modern management approaches without losing their traditional character. TQM principles instead strengthen pesantren traditions by providing a systematic framework for quality improvement. This approach may serve as a model for other pesantren seeking to improve kitab kuning instruction while preserving their classical character. Integrating Bahsul Kutub and TQM has broad effects on instructional quality. Academically, santri show substantial progress in reading classical texts, understanding fiqh texts, and conducting linguistic analysis. Intensive deliberative forums cultivate a strong academic culture, enrich intellectual capacity, and increase confidence in expressing opinions.

4. The Effects of Integrating TQM and Bahsul Kutub on the Quality of Pesantren Learning

Integrating TQM and Bahsul Kutub has significant effects on santri academic achievement and character. A learning process emphasizing analytical depth and critical discussion enables santri to become more proficient in reading the kitab kuning, understanding Arabic structures, and systematically analyzing scholarly opinions. This finding is consistent with the TQM principle that high-quality processes generate higher-quality outcomes. Intellectually, Fadlun Minallah santri become more critical and argumentative. They learn to validate opinions, offer scholarly counterarguments, and construct arguments grounded in authoritative texts. Spiritually and in terms of character, Bahsul Kutub cultivates valuable habits, including scholarly

discipline, accuracy, patience, and humility toward knowledge. The program therefore enhances academic competence while also developing mature scholarly character.

At the institutional level, santri achievements in MQK competitions, visits from government institutions, and increasing public trust have strengthened the pesantren's reputation as a high-quality educational institution. These improvements demonstrate that integrating traditional pesantren methods with modern quality management can produce tangible changes in both individual santri and the institution as a whole. Academic achievement and external recognition further show that Bahsul Kutub is not merely a tradition but an effective quality-improvement mechanism. From a TQM perspective, these achievements indicate that educational processes have met established quality standards and exceeded the expectations of educational customers, including santri and the wider community. This creates opportunities for future studies to develop more applicable quality-management models for pesantren. Overall, integrating TQM principles and Bahsul Kutub produces measurable improvements in three principal dimensions:

a) Academic Quality (Quality Output)

Santri become more proficient in reading texts, understanding fiqh contexts, and conducting linguistic analysis. This indicates that the learning process produces outcomes consistent with national competency standards for the kitab kuning.

b) Intellectual Quality (Value-Added Learning)

Bahsul Kutub trains santri to think critically, formulate arguments, and express opinions. This demonstrates the value-added impact described by Sallis: learning that increases students' intellectual capacity.

c) Character and Spiritual Quality (Hidden Quality)

Discipline, patience in reading texts, and scholarly ethics develop naturally. These attributes constitute the hidden quality of Islamic education: they exert a substantial influence but are not always visible in academic results. Santri success in MQK competitions and increasing public trust in the pesantren provide external evidence that the learning system has met public quality standards. From a TQM perspective, these achievements are not accidental but result from processes that have been carefully designed and controlled.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that integrating the principles of Total Quality Management (TQM) as articulated by Deming through the concepts of visionary

leadership, process management, human resource development, and continuous improvement with Bahsul Kutub has successfully improved the quality of santri learning at Fadlun Minallah Islamic Boarding School. Bahsul Kutub, which originated as a tradition of turāth study, has developed into a quality oriented pedagogical strategy that strengthens kitab kuning literacy, analytical competence, and critical-thinking indicators in accordance with Ennis's framework. Positive effects are evident in three dimensions: academic quality, reflected in improved ability to read and understand texts; intellectual quality, reflected in stronger argumentation and critical thinking; and spiritual quality, reflected in discipline and scholarly character. These developments are accompanied by improved MQK achievements and greater public trust in the pesantren. Future research should conduct comparative studies across other pesantren to assess the consistency of the TQM-Bahsul Kutub model's effectiveness, develop quantitative instruments for measuring santri critical-thinking skills, and examine the program's long-term effects on alumni quality and on quality-management-based models of turāth education that may be applied more broadly in Islamic educational institutions.

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