# LEARNING STRATEGIES AT PESANTREN DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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# LEARNING STRATEGIES AT PESANTREN DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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## Introduction

Pesantren is an Islamic educational institution that has its uniqueness and has been developing in Indonesia for a long time. One of the uniqueness of pesantren requires students to live in dormitories that have been provided in the pesantren environment. In addition, the pesantren is led by a caregiver or council, has its worship facilities and study rooms in the pesantren, and has its curriculum which usually studies the "yellow book" or books by scholars from the past to the present. These five things are the main characteristics of pesantren, namely the existence of Kyai, santri, yellow books, mosques, dormitories. The existence of a complete set of Islamic boarding school facilities is a prerequisite for boarding schools. Although simple, all these devices are always held in the pesantren. Naturally, if the pesantren requires students to live in dormitories that have been provided by the pesantren. Pesantren as part of the Indonesian nation and even the world's Islamic educational institutions cannot escape the existing and developing situations and conditions in the global world, especially in the archipelago [1].

It has been more than a year since the world has faced a long-lasting "as if never-ending" pandemic in the form of the COVID-19 virus. This virus has been designated by the world health organization as a global pandemic that affects the majority of the world's population. In Indonesia, the COVID-19 pandemic has also become a serious problem affecting various sectors of life such as the economy, society, education, and other sectors. Until July 2021, almost two million Indonesians were affected by COVID-19, even in the last few days, more than 1000 people died every day, until health facilities became overcrowded treating Covid-19 patients. So that the government has decided on various policies since the beginning of the pandemic for the prevention and control of COVID-19. The policy of working from home and studying from home is a choice that must be decided by the government

The online learning policy has become a decision of the Indonesian government in the past year. What about pesantren, can pesantren adapt to this policy to minimize the spread of COVID-19. Although it is not an easy choice, pesantren must be wise and wise in responding to the existing situation and conditions. This paper discusses the learning carried out in Islamic boarding schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. This paper study uses a qualitative method by making the learning process in Islamic boarding schools during the pandemic the main object of research. Data collection comes from research results that have been published in various research journal publications and other research reports. In addition, the authors also collected data by interviewing several pesantren managers, guardians of students, and students. This paper seeks to answer how the learning innovations carried out by Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Learning Strategies in Islamic Boarding Schools during a Pandemic

Nurcholis Madjid has a prediction that if Indonesia had not been colonized, it would be very possible for Indonesia's higher education model to be pesantren such as the

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'universities' of Tremas, Krapyak, Tebuireng, Bangkalan, Lasem, and others. This is based on the fact that many Western higher education systems grew out of the forerunners of religiously oriented universities [2]. Cak Nur's assumption is reinforced by the statement of Martin van Bruinessen who argues that pesantren is a great tradition. Islamic boarding schools have a special contribution in transmitting traditional Islam through teaching or studying ancient books written several centuries earlier or better known as the yellow book [3]. Traditions that are unique in this special boarding school deserve appreciation, even if they need to be preserved. Among the uniqueness of pesantren learning is the division of learning classes oriented to mastery and understanding rather than age.

Learning in pesantren – in general – learns the yellow book, Santri listens to oral readings by Kyai (ajengan, ustāż or master teacher). while the santri give harakat to the yellow book they are holding as read by the kyai and record the explanation, both in lugawi (language) and maʻnawi (meaning). The learning system carried out in pesantren is a bandongan system or collective service, sorogan or individual service, and memorization (taḥfiż) and discussion systems (musyāwarah / mużākarah / munāḍarah). Learning strategies and learning methods include lectures, tadris wa ta'lim, assignments, simulations, practice (demonstrations), discussions, and muḥāḍarah 'āmmah (general stage). Bandongan is a teaching method with a lecture system where the kyai reads part of the book in front of a large number of students (usually advanced level) at certain times. Sorogan is a form of teaching and learning in which the kyai only faces a student or a small group of students who are still at the elementary level. The technique of learning is that the santri thrusts a book in front of the kyai then the kyai reads part of the book and then the Santri repeats the reading under the demands of the kyai[5].

The learning approach in Islamic boarding schools is holistic because the learning process and the totality of daily activities become a single unit, becoming an integral part of everyday life in the pesantren as a whole. The education developed by pesantren aims to make students maintain religion and develop values. Mastuhu suggests learning in Islamic boarding schools at least through *sorogan, bandongan, halaqah*, and rote [6]. Sorogan comes from the Javanese word sorog which means to thrust, a santri thrusts his book to the kyai to ask to be taught. The learning process is carried out individually with a student reading and translating the yellow book to a teacher so that there is an intensive interaction between the two. After the santri finish reading under the guidance of the kyai, they get a diploma (which is usually given orally) and after that, they can move to another pesantren to study other books. This learning system by Sabarudin is identified with individual service-learning. Therefore, students must prepare themselves before learning[4].

Dian Nafi identified the *sorogan* method as identical with an indirect learning strategy with an active learning model in which the kyai acts as a facilitator as well as a guide, students are expected to be able to apply 'tool science' such as *naḥwu* (Arabic grammar), *sharf* (morphology) and other sciences that they have learned independently. theory in pesantren so far, therefore the cognitive aspect becomes dominant [7]. More than, sorogan can also be categorized as an experimental learning strategy, where students try to understand and translate the books they study and then submit them to their kyai or ustadz. In another perspective, sorogan can be categorized as an interactive learning strategy because when students submit readings and translations of the selected 'yellow' book, of course there will be interaction, it could even be a discussion between the santri and the kyai or ustad. Sutedjo Bradjanagara calls it an individual system (hoofdelijk or individueel). This system also applies in Europe until the 18th century or the beginning of

the 19th century, where the learning school of students advances one by one before the teacher to get teaching, followed by others in sequence[8].

The sorogan system contains the principles of a module system, individual learning, complete learning and continuous progress. Therefore he categorizes this system as a modern learning model. The purpose of sorogan learning is so that students have a deep understanding in mastering the 'way' of reading the yellow book in Arabic and its meaning. Usually, the meaning uses the Javanese language written using Arabic pegon writing. This process is not easy, of course, because the Arabic text that is read (in a bare book) without arakat (vocal letters) so to be able to read it must have the ability to translate words and grammatical arrangements. Santri are expected to be able to apply 'tool science' such as nahwu (Arabic grammar), sharaf (morphology), and others that they have learned theoretically in pesantren so far, therefore the cognitive aspect becomes dominant. In its development, Ali Anwar provided a different field of study with sorogan, namely in learning the Qur'an. The sorogan system learning is used in Al-Qur'an learning in all Lirboyo Islamic boarding schools where a student comes forward to his teacher to listen to the reading of the Qur'an according to the rules and laws of tajwid or to deposit the memorization. Then in the field of yellow book study, in lirboyo the sorogan system is intended for students who experience delays in understanding [11].

The sorogan system uses indirect learning strategies, direct learning strategies, empirical (experimental) learning strategies and interactive learning strategies. The four strategies are possible in the sorogan learning system. Indirect learning strategy because students choose the book they want to study and explore it then they learn to understand and analyze sentence structure building (nahwu-sorf) and then translate it so that problem solving skills and students' inquiry experience will be needed in this method. This sorogan learning can also use an experimental learning strategy, where students try to understand and translate the book they are studying and then submit it to their kyai or usta. The interactive learning strategy can also be considered because when depositing readings and translations of the selected 'yellow' book, of course there will be interaction, it could even be a discussion between the students and the teacher. Sorogan demands a deep understanding of the students of the yellow book that is being their subject, in the bandongan system, students do not have to show that they understand the lesson they are taking.

Bandongan's learning system is teacher-centered and deductive, including the collective learning process teaching method with the lecture method. Direct learning strategies tend to dominate for this learning succession because understanding this book requires a comprehensive understanding, therefore the kyai with his scientific authority becomes the main focus of this learning[5]. Martin van Bruinessen has criticized this learning system because kyai rarely give explanations of the book that are related to concrete things and contemporary situations [4]. However, in its development Bruinessen's criticism has been refuted, the kyai who have extensive knowledge and a lot of life experience can contextualize the explanation of the contents of the book and can describe their studies with the current situation and contemporary developments that are very dynamic and fast. Kyai often relates the explanation of the book he reads and explains with contemporary reality, although it depends on the taste, competence, and experience of the Kyai himself so that there are differences between one kyai and another. In implementing the bandongan's system, translators must have an understanding of Arabic grammar, literature, and other scientific branches [12].

Those who have experience and those who are willing to contextualize will be more broadly described than those who tend to limit themselves to contemporary

developments that are very dynamic and fast. In today's era, many kyai and ustāż are not only proficient in mastering ulūm syar'i but they are also college alumni and have a fairly broad association. Therefore contextualization in the bandongan method is a necessity. Learning strategies that are suitable in the bandongan system are direct-learning. The teacher reads the yellow book text then interprets and explains the meaning it contains to contextualize it with current conditions directly in front of many students who have flocked to take part in this study. In the modern context, the bandongan system is identical to the general stadium where the audience listens and pays close attention to what the speaker is saying, in this case, the kyai. However, what makes the difference is that in the audience's sorogan – in this case – the santri listen and give harakat on the book they are holding and is the same as the book described by the kyai, while the general stage is usually more on a particular theme area.

The next learning system is rote. Mastuhu more often termed it lalaran, Ali Anwar referred to it as muḥafaẓah as in the Liroboyo Islamic boarding school in Kediri. Meanwhile, Sabarudin uses the term taḥfiẓ when he describes learning at the Islamic boarding school of Tarjih Muhammadiyah clerics in Yogyakarta. In principle and the learning process is relatively the same. Lalaran is individual learning where students memorize independently, usually done anywhere such as in mosques, near tombs, mosque porches, room porches, and other places to then be deposited to the ustad or kyai [6]. Although often criticized, this rote learning system is still widely practiced in many Islamic boarding schools. For example, when Azyumardi Azra was interviewed by Ulil Abshar Abdalla on the Islamic study of timber forests as quoted by Ali Anwar, Azra had the opinion that the emphasis on memorization should be avoided, but memorization turned out to be the main method of learning in Islamic boarding schools, in Lirboyo and others, to pesantren at the local level memorization students are also still applied. Memorizing has a long history in Islamic education. Since the beginning of the emergence of Islam, memorization has become the main learning in maintaining the authenticity of the Qur'an, followed by hadith. More than, the power of memorization has become the main value of one's Islamic scientific authority. It is natural that George Makdisi quoted Ibn al-Najjar's verse which means "if you do not have a strong memorization, then your efforts to collect books are useless. So do you have the courage to speak in forums while your knowledge is left at your home"[11].

In addition to the four learning systems (*sorogan, bandongan, halaqah* and rote/*lalaran*) there is also development of *musyawarah*, muḥāḍarah and *muḥādaśah*. *Musyawarah* are carried out by grouping small groups of students between three to five people discussing the books that have been studied, usually many pesantren focus on deliberation in the field of *fiqh*. Perhaps among the fields that will become a lot of demands in the community in religion, many revolve around this field. Some pesantren categorize deliberation for elementary level students by discussing the book of *taqrib* and *baḥṣul masāil* for the higher level usually reviewing the book of al-māhālli, fatḥul Qarib and taqrib such as learning activities at the Lirboyo boarding school [11]. Learning strategies in the deliberation system tend to be independent learning strategies or interactive learning strategies where students are active in the dynamics of discussion in their groups to discuss a theme area being studied. Usually in this deliberation, students are grouped into several groups and each group is accompanied directly or under the guidance of senior santri or ustadz. The students have the freedom of opinion and argument on what they understand to their fellow members of the musyawarah. Muḥadaśah comes from the Arabic adaśa which means conversation, dialogue, or speaking. Learning means conversation or dialogue between students using Arabic to equip Arabic linguistic

competence, especially speaking in Arabic and getting used to it. Muḥadaśah is widely developed in Islamic boarding schools that have an active (foreign; Arabic/English) language tendency, such as the Gontor Islamic Boarding School and other modern pesantren [13].

The learning strategy used is usually an interactive learning strategy, between one student speaking a foreign language (Arabic / English) actively at a certain time with a certain theme or vocabulary given by the ustāż or senior santri who serves as a companion (rijālul lugah). The position of the ustad or senior santri is more of an observer as well as a mediator of conversation between these students. There are times when they correct when something is wrong or help when needed. Another form of learning in Islamic boarding schools develops muḥadarah as a means of preparing students' provisions later when mingling with the community. The muḥāḍarah system is student-based learning using independent learning strategies, where students practice lectures, learn to speak in public (other students). Learning in pesantren continues to develop over time and the needs that exist adjust the characteristics of each pesantren. Sabarudin suggested various learning methods in the Tarjih Muhammadiyah Islamic boarding school, for example, using developing learning methods of lectures-dialogue, tadris wa ta'lim, assignments, simulations, practice (demonstrations), discussions, and muḥāblood 'ammah / general stadium. [5].

The description of the results of the study related to the approaches and learning strategies above leads to an understanding that pesantren use teacher-centers learning than student centers. In the author's opinion, the choice of approach becomes natural because the main orientation of pesantren's education prioritizes mastery and a comprehensive understanding of the yellow book. Therefore, the role of kyai, ustadz (teacher) of pesantren becomes very important. The teacher center approach is widely used in the *sorogan, halaqah/lalaran*, and *bandongan* learning systems. However, the student center learning approach is also used in the pesantren education system such as *musyawarah, muhadlarah*, and *muhadasah*. Although the last three are not the main learning systems of the pesantren, many pesantren hold these activities. While the pesantren learning strategy uses all learning strategies that have been developed previously such as direct learning strategies on sorogan and bandongan, although sorogan learning also includes indirect learning strategies at some stages. Empirical learning strategies are also used in some sorogan learning systems. While interactive learning strategies are widely used in the bandongan education system, deliberation, *muhadlarah*, and *muhadatsah*. The independent learning strategies used in the pesantren education system are lalaran, deliberation, *muhadlarah*, and *muhadatsah*.

The above learning strategies are still being developed in Islamic boarding schools to this day. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Islamic boarding schools must comply with government policies to enforce health protocols in the learning process. The results of the author's observations and searches by conducting interviews with several pesantren caregivers and santri show that the learning strategies used during the pandemic are more direct learning either through online or offline systems. Online learning is carried out as an anticipation of the spread of the COVID-19 virus as well as following government policies. Even though the students live in the cottage after going through a series of health protocols such as being required to have a covid-free test, quarantine for two weeks in the dormitory that has been provided and not accepting goods / shipments from outside or meeting guests from outside the cottage.

## Conclusion

The study of this paper shows that learning strategies in Islamic boarding schools during the COVID-19 pandemic generally run as usual. However, there are adjustments to government policies to enforce health protocols during learning such as wearing masks / face shields and so on. Learning strategies are implemented directly or indirectly. The results of this study indicate that pesantren can adapt to the existing situation. In addition, this proves the existence of learning innovations in Islamic boarding schools even though there are certain limitations according to the values and policies of the leaders.

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