

**Title** : Power of Islamic Boarding Schools in Facing Covid-19 Pandemic  
and Sustaining Local Traditions

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# **Power of Islamic Boarding Schools in Facing Covid-19 Pandemic and Sustaining Local Traditions**

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The Covid-19 pandemic has affected various aspects of life ranging from social, cultural, economic and education, especially education at Islamic boarding schools. Nurchalish Madjid emphasized that Islamic boarding schools are artifacts of Indonesian civilization built as traditional, unique, and indigenous religious educational institutions. The traditional style is currently appropriating modernity to easily study, understand, appreciate, and practice the teachings of Islam by emphasizing the importance of religious morality as a guide for daily behavior. Islamic boarding schools, in Indonesia called *pesantren*, is the oldest and most strategic educational institution in educating nation due to the fact that the number of Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia has reached 27,722 with a total of 4,175,555 students (Ministry of Religion, 2021) spread throughout the country. The existence of *pesantren* in facing the current global pandemic and sustaining traditions is an interesting aspect to discuss.

There are 5 pillars of *pesantren* namely: *kyai*, *santri* (students), book recitation, dormitories, and mosques with its activities (Usman, Muhammad Idris, 2013). *Kyai* is a pious, authoritative, respected, and responsible figure for the existence of *pesantren*. *Pondok* or dorm is a place where *santri* are equipped with physical and non-physical facilities. Mosque is a center for student worship and scientific activities. *Santri* are knowledge seekers who are bound by various rules and given up by their parents to seek knowledge. The yellow book is a book that is studied and can be understood as a curriculum system in Islamic boarding schools. The success of *pesantren* education rests on character building through coaching, monitoring, and escorting in the pattern of religious life for 24 hours a day. *Pesantren* is the most difficult type of education to carry out full online learning because there are types of lessons and habituation of character and behavior that must be done face-to-face. This full activity always involves the entire *pesantren* community, e.g. students, *ustadz* (teachers), and *Kyai*. There was an intensive interaction between

the academicians in the *pesantren* environment. Its culture is communal, which makes students difficult to keep their distance. One room measuring 4 x 4 meters can accommodate 10 students. *Santri* are used to sleeping, eating, worshiping, and even bathing together. All activities run communally.

In coping with Covid-19, it is a disease that infects the respiratory system caused by Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). The spread of SARS-CoV-2 is from human to human through droplets when coughing or sneezing. The virus can stick to objects so that, if the objects are touched by other people, there is a risk of being infected. Referring to the pattern of the virus transmission, maintaining physical distance is the key to stopping the spread of the virus. Meanwhile, the communal culture of the *pesantren* does not allow the maximum application of social distancing.

At the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, the government issued a policy for students to be sent home and boarding schools temporarily closed to prevent the emergence of new clusters of Covid-19. In line with the policy of implementing New Normal in July, Islamic boarding schools started to conduct their activities again (SKB 4 Minister of Education Guidelines in the Pandemic Period). *Santri* gradually returned to *pesantren* and the education system run full offline. This fact was different from other educational institutions that still implemented online learning and a combination of online-offline. Reporting from [Republika.co.id](http://Republika.co.id), Minister of Religion, Fachrul Rozi (2020) explained that there are four provisions that become the main requirements for conducting education in Islamic boarding schools during the pandemic. First, all *pesantren* members are required to make a task force to accelerate the handling of Covid-19. Second, they also have to implement health protocols along with the existence of good health facilities. Third, they have to provide a certificate from the task force for the acceleration of handling Covid-19 or from the local government. Finally, the leaders, managers, educators, and students are in good health. The question is, will these four components be sufficient for the reopening of *pesantren*?

With the pattern of communal life and the total number of *santri* that is not commensurate with the availability of facilities, the role of Kyai in controlling and directing the Covid-19 prevention system in Islamic boarding schools is important. Kyai is required to find a formula so that the *pesantren* can continue to operate. Moreover, the *santri* can continue to receive a typical *pesantren* education and perpetuate their traditions and noble values while still observing strict

health protocols and ensuring that new clusters of Covid-19 transmission do not occur. This is the biggest problem of *pesantren* in Indonesia. Is *pesantren* ready to provide and implement health protocols consistently? What is the right approach to face the Covid-19 pandemic? How to maintain the psyche of parents and students? And, how does the figure of Kyai play a role in dealing with this pandemic? This article is compiled based on the results of observations at Al-Amanah Islamic boarding school in Junwangi, Krian, Sidoarjo, and the interviews with the guardians of the students and the caregivers of the *pesantren*.

*Pesantren's* efforts in fighting the pandemic require the involvement of various approaches, namely health, psychological, spiritual, and leadership approaches. First, in connection with health approach, the health protocols implemented by *pesantren* include periodic cleaning of rooms and the environment using disinfectants and provision of hand washing facilities with soap and water or hand sanitizers at every meeting point, such as classrooms, gates, every room or dormitory, dining room, and other frequently accessed places. In addition, there is a restriction on the students' gathering place. Periodically, the students are checked for their health condition and are provided isolation rooms. The boarding school also provides a *pesantren* health post (Poskestren) with doctors who are on standby every day, the availability of isolation rooms for infected students along with the assistance of doctors and nurses. If there is no progress, the students will be sent home with the Covid procedure. The isolation room is also intended for students who have just returned to the *pesantren*. They are isolated for 4 days before entering the dormitory. The next spearhead of health is mass vaccination for *santri* and *asatidz* in *pesantren*. In addition, physical exercise programs such as gymnastics every morning, sports, and regular community service as well as the consumption of healthy, safe, and nutritionally balanced foods are instruments for strengthening the students' health.

Second, the spiritual approach is the main factor that helps individuals achieve balance to maintain health and well-being and adapt to kinds of illness. Spiritual needs are essential for humans to maintain or restore faith and fulfill religious obligations, get forgiveness, love, and live a life with a full trust in Allah. This need must be met by every individual regardless the condition. Belief in Allah makes a person calm and confident in living both pleasant and unpleasant situation in life. *Pesantren* is a conducive place for students' spiritual development, starting from conducting obligatory prayers, *sunnah* prayers, *wirid* and *dhikr*, *tadarus* and *tahfidz* Al-Qur'an,

prayers, fasting, and others. In this pandemic situation, spiritual activity is enhanced by reciting *qunut Thibbil qulub* at every prayer time “*Allahumma sholli `ala Sayyidina Muhammadin Thibbil qulubi wa Dawah-iha, wa `Afiyatil abdani wa syifa-iha, wa Nuril abshori wa dhiya-iha, wa `alaalihi wa shohbihi wa sallim*”. It means: "Allah, pour out mercy on our Prophet Muhammad SAW, as a medicine for the heart and its healer, body healer, and cure and as a ray of sight of the eye and its light. May *sholawat* and greetings be poured out also to his family and friends". *Sholawat* is a compliment to Prophet Muhammad. With this praise, the students hope that God would give them health, recovery, and rejecting calamities. *Sholawat Thibbil Qulub* and recitations of Al-Qur'an echo and become the daily chants at the *pesantren*. In addition, the reading of *Al-Fatihah* for every sick student and the reading of *Q.S Yasin* and *tahlil* for students' family who die are also carried out. This spiritual approach has had a tremendous impact on the tranquility of the students studying at *pesantren* and the belief that *pesantren* can fight Covid-19.

Third, the psychological approach is meant as maintaining the psychological stability of parents and students by providing communication opportunities to reassure both of them. In turn, students are facilitated to communicate with parents via Whatsap Video Call for a few minutes. This makes the students happy because of ably sharing stories, sharing news, and sending prayers to be sincere and to strengthen each other. In addition, parents are given the opportunity to visit *pesantren* every 3 months with the implementation of strict health protocols. The *pesantren* also holds various programs that ignite the students' creativity so that they carry out activities at the *pesantren* happily and far from being bored because happiness is an important point in maintaining immunity.

Fourth, the leadership approach is indeed important. *Kyai* as a leader and a respected public figure has a role in monitoring optimal health, psychological, and spiritual approaches to fight the pandemic. He also guarantees to parents that the students are in good health and there is no need to worry about them. He ensures that the system runs in unison. He also collaborates with the health office to strengthen health aspects, including vaccination. He also ensure the task force's condition to conduct its program. *Ustadz*, administrators, and students do collaborative works against Covid and perpetuate the *pesantren's* traditions, namely scientific *rihlah*, researching, writing books, reading the yellow book, practicing *tariqat*, memorizing Al-Qur'an and holy books, Arabic traditions, and other socio-religious traditions.

The four approaches are able to fight Covid with the indication that not a single Covid case appears in this boarding school. Moreover, the *pesantren* can be a reference for other boarding schools. Finally, Covid 19 can not only be overcome with the health protocol, but also the spiritual protocol.

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