

The Kilatan Tradition as a Model of Religious Literacy in Salaf Pesantren: An Analytical Study at Pondok Pesantren Al-Ittihad Poncol, Semarang

Anas¹

¹Institut Agama Islam Pemalang, Indonesia

¹anas@insipemalang.ac.id [✉]

ABSTRACT

Kilatan is a traditional learning model of classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*) that has become a distinctive intellectual culture in Indonesian Islamic boarding schools (*pondok pesantren*), conducted through *bandongan* methods at specific periods. *Sahih Bukhari* and *Sahih Muslim* are the primary and most authoritative references in the study of hadith within Islam. Pondok Pesantren Al-Ittihad is one of the pesantren that has maintained the tradition of *kilatan* for decades, conducted annually in the month of Jumadil Akhir.

This research is a qualitative field study using a descriptive-analytic method to explore the implementation and scholarly significance of the *kilatan* tradition. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation during the annual *kilatan* program. The findings reveal that the tradition of reading *Sahih al-Bukhari* and *Sahih Muslim* is not only a medium of transmission of religious knowledge and preservation of sanad authority, but also forms the cultural identity and intellectual character of pesantren salaf in maintaining Islamic scholarship amid modern transformations. The sustainability of this tradition demonstrates its role in strengthening religious literacy and spiritual values for the santri community.

Keywords: *Kiltan, Al-Ittihad, Sahih Bukhari, Sahih Muslim, kilatan, Islamic boarding school*

A. INTRODUCTION

Islamic boarding schools (*pondok pesantren*) represent the oldest Islamic educational system in Indonesia, existing long before the country gained independence. They have become a cultural identity in the national educational landscape, characterized by several core components: the *kyai*, classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*), *santri*, and mosques that stand firmly within the pesantren complex. The *kitab kuning* is inseparable from pesantren because traditional pesantren aim to preserve the intellectual heritage and authoritative explanations of Islamic teachings from classical scholars, serving as the standard of Islamic scholarship. These texts are considered accurate references in the study and understanding of Islam.

Pesantren are unique educational institutions not only due to their long-standing existence, but also because of their culture, traditions, teaching methods, and social networks. As indigenous Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia, pesantren serve as a subsystem of the national education

system, rooted firmly in constitutional and theological foundations. Their philosophical basis aligns with the first principle of *Pancasila*, the belief in the One and Only God, implying that Indonesian citizens must uphold religious values.

Historically, learning methods in pesantren were centered primarily on *sorogan* and *wetonan/bandongan*. Over time, educational approaches have evolved along with societal development, incorporating additional methods such as *halaqah*, *bandongan*, and others. Subjects commonly taught in pesantren include *fiqh*, *tauhid*, *hadith*, *aqidah akhlak*, *nahwu*, *sharaf*, *mantiq*, *balaghah*, and various other Islamic sciences, most of which are studied through classical Arabic texts known as *kitab kuning*—named after the yellowish color of their traditional paper.

The existence of *kitab kuning* as a central element in pesantren is essential, especially in studying linguistic tools such as *nahwu* and *sharaf*, which serve as foundational instruments for reading and interpreting other texts. In responding to modern developments, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) upholds the principle *al-muhafazhatu 'ala al-qadim as-shalih wa al-akhdzu bi al-jadid al-ashlah*—preserving valuable traditions while adopting beneficial modern values.

B. RESEARCH METHODS

This research was conducted from December 25, 2022 to January 17, 2023, coinciding with 1–24 Jumadil Akhir 1444 H, aligned with the annual implementation period of the *kilatan* program. The study took place at Pondok Pesantren Al-Ittihad Poncol, Bringin District, Batang Regency, Central Java.

Research methodology is essential to ensure the systematic, focused, and accurate production of research findings. This study employed several methodological approaches as follows:

1. Type of Research

This study utilized a qualitative field research design, where data were collected directly from the research site through observation, interviews, and documentation. Qualitative research emphasizes interpretation and the analysis of social phenomena without the use of statistical or numerical data. The approach aims to understand concepts, processes, and values within the social environment of the research context.

2. Data Collection Methods

Data collection was carried out through several techniques:

- **Observation**

Observation was conducted to directly examine real conditions at the research site in order to obtain factual and accurate data related to the implementation of the *kilatan* tradition of *Sahih Bukhari* and *Sahih Muslim* at PP. Al-Ittihad Poncol.

- **Interviews**

Interviews were conducted to obtain detailed information through direct dialogue with participants involved in the *kilatan* activities. This method ensured access to primary data and firsthand perspectives from scholars and santri engaged in the program.

- **Documentation**

Documentation was used to gather supporting written data such as institutional archives, books, profiles of PP. Al-Ittihad Poncol, photographs, and other relevant records to enrich the research findings.

3. Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis was conducted after all required data had been collected. This study applied a descriptive-analytic approach, aimed at describing, analyzing, and interpreting the research focus, namely the implementation of the *kilatan* tradition for *Sahih Bukhari* and *Sahih Muslim* at PP. Al-Ittihad Poncol, Bringin, Semarang. This method enabled the researcher to synthesize empirical findings into meaningful conclusions addressing the research questions.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Islamic boarding schools (*pondok pesantren*) possess distinctive characteristics within the Indonesian education system that differentiate them from other educational institutions. Their continued existence and growth are supported by strong cultural foundations and adaptive capacity in responding to societal needs. The close social relationships among *kyai*, *santri*, and the surrounding community form a reciprocal and mutually supportive ecosystem.

Traditional learning in *pesantren* emphasizes cognitive aspects supported by non-classical learning models such as *sorogan* and *wetonan/bandongan*. In the *sorogan* method, each student receives direct instruction individually from the *kyai* or his assistant (*badal*). Meanwhile, through the *bandongan/halaqah* method, students sit around the *kyai* while reading classical texts, translating word-by-word, and explaining meanings, while students carefully follow and annotate their own texts. Although *pesantren* generally do not apply formal evaluation systems, student competency can still be observed through their participation and mastery within the learning circle.

The Position of Sahih al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim in Pesantren Studies

Sahih al-Bukhari and *Sahih Muslim* are the two most authoritative collections of hadith in Islam. Imam al-Bukhari rigorously selected approximately 7,562 hadith from an estimated 600,000 that he memorized, resulting in an authentic compilation recognized globally. His scholarly reputation drew thousands of students and scholars, including Imam Muslim, compiler of *Sahih Muslim*, who later became one of the most respected hadith scholars.

Although considered slightly below *Sahih al-Bukhari*, many hadith scholars argue that *Sahih Muslim* surpasses it in organizational structure and systematic arrangement of hadith by thematic chapters without unnecessary repetition. Imam Muslim also prioritized precision in wording and comprehensive transmission without fragmenting narrations.

The Tradition of Kilatan at PP. Al-Ittihad Poncol

The annual *kilatan* of *Sahih Muslim* and *Sahih Bukhari* at PP. Al-Ittihad Poncol has been consistently practiced for 75 years, beginning in 1948 under KH. Ahmad Asy'ari. The recitation alternates each year between the two books and is conducted every Jumadil Akhir to commemorate the *haul* of KH. Hasan Asy'ari. The reading is performed according to specific divisions of chapters (*juz*) and scheduled time allocations, currently led by KH. Nurcholis Thohir, KH. Fathurrohman Thohir, KH. M. Fatih Al-Hafidz, and K. Irfan Adib.

In addition to the two canonical hadith books, students also study supplementary texts such as *Mau'idhoh Al-Mu'minin*, *Syarh Al-Asma' Al-Husna*, and *Tanqih Al-Qaul Al-Mufid*, adjusted to their levels of understanding and academic needs.

Cultural and Spiritual Significance

Kilatan provides a unique spiritual atmosphere, drawing both resident and visiting students who seek knowledge, blessings, and legitimized scholarly transmission (*sanad*). The chain of transmission is considered crucial in pesantren tradition as evidence of scholarly continuity and responsibility linking contemporary scholars directly to the Prophet Muhammad.

In modern times, when learning is often conducted independently through digital media, pesantren salaf resist relying solely on technology due to concerns of misguided interpretation and lack of scholarly authority. The preservation of *kilatan* thus becomes a form of intellectual resistance against superficial and fragmented knowledge trends.

Moreover, PP. Al-Ittihad has successfully integrated formal education (SMP and SMK) while maintaining strong salaf values. This hybrid environment blends modern educational needs with the preservation of traditional Islamic scholarship, reinforcing pesantren's role as a center of religious literacy and character formation.

D. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the *kilatan* tradition at Pondok Pesantren Al-Ittihad Poncol represents a fundamental cultural and intellectual heritage within the pesantren salaf environment. The consistent annual recitation of *Sahih Bukhari* and *Sahih Muslim*, sustained for 75 consecutive years, demonstrates the pesantren's strong commitment to preserving classical Islamic scholarship and maintaining the continuity of authoritative *sanad* transmission. The *kilatan* tradition not only reinforces religious literacy but also strengthens spiritual discipline, scholarly ethics, and the identity of santri in an era characterized by rapid digital development and modern challenges.

Furthermore, the persistence of this tradition shows the strategic role of pesantren as a center for cultivating Islamic knowledge, shaping religious character, and providing alternative educational values that emphasize authenticity, humility, and devotion. The integration of formal education within the pesantren environment also reflects the institution's adaptability in responding to contemporary educational needs without abandoning traditional foundations. Therefore, this research suggests the importance of maintaining and expanding *kilatan* activities as part of the broader effort to preserve the intellectual heritage and spiritual culture of Indonesian pesantren.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.

LITERATURE

References should be written in alphabetical order, with the following guidelines: 75% of the sources should be from the last 5 years, and 25% from the last 10 years. References should be written in the American Psychological Association 7th edition style (it is recommended to use citation tools such as Mendeley, Zotero, EndNote, etc.) with the following format:

Amaliyah, A., & Rahmat, A. (2021). Pengembangan Potensi Diri Peserta Didik Melalui Proses Pendidikan. *Attadib: Journal of Elementary Education*, 5(1), 28. <https://doi.org/10.32507/attadib.v5i1.926>.

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