
PESANTREN AND RE-CREATION OF ISLAMIC KNOWLEDGE THROUGH QUR'ANIC SCHOOL SYSTEM FOCUSING ON TEACHER TRAINING EDUCATION

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Received: 30th June 2016; Revised: 11th October 2016; Accepted: 28th December 2016

Abstract

Pesantren and Qur'anic school are prominent educational pioneers in the largest Muslim populated country, Indonesia. Qur'anic school is the oldest education system, which later inspired the birth of traditional Islamic boarding schools or pesantren that have been growing so rapidly and giving unique characteristics of Islamic education practice throughout of the country. Nowadays Qur'anic schools are almost everywhere in cities and villages, providing Qur'anic reading lesson for Muslim children and educating them to be pious generation based on Qur'an and Hadist. At present, Pesantren has reformed its roles not only serving Islamic education for ordinary villagers, the sons of the middle-class Muslims, and aspiring religious scholars, but also functioning as center of trainings for Qur'anic schools teachers. Although Qur'anic schools and Pesantren are always popular, researches about them remain few. This study uncovered the role of Pesantren at semi-urban rural area of Banjarnegara Regency in Central Java in Qiro'ati and Iqro Qur'anic teacher training education as well as described the process of reconstruction of Islamic knowledge by Qur'anic school teachers. It was found out that there were three steps of reconstruction of knowledge, namely filtering, adaptation, and implementation.

Keywords: Islamic knowledge; Qur'anic school; teachers training education; qiro'ati; iqro

Abstrak

Pesantren dan sekolah berlandaskan Al-Qur'an adalah pionir utama dalam dunia pendidikan di negara dengan populasi muslim terbesar, Indonesia. Sekolah berlandaskan Al-Qur'an adalah sistem pendidikan tertua, dikemudian hari menginspirasi lahirnya Pesantren tradisional yang kemudian tumbuh pesat dan memberikan warna yang khas dalam pendidikan Islam di seluruh negeri. Saat ini sekolah berbasis Al-Qur'an dapat ditemukan di hampir seluruh kota dan desa, memberikan pembelajaran Al-Qur'an bagi anak-anak muslim dan mendidik mereka untuk menjadi generasi yang taat berlandaskan Al-Qur'an dan Hadits. Saat ini, Pesantren telah mereformasi peran mereka tidak hanya melayani pendidikan Islam bagi masyarakat awam di pedesaan, kaum muslim kelas menengah, dan menghasilkan cendekiawan muslim, tapi juga berfungsi sebagai pusat pelatihan guru-guru Al-Qur'an di sekolah. Walaupun sekolah berbasis Al-Qur'an dan pesantren selalu populer, penelitian mengenai hal tersebut masih tergolong sedikit. Penelitian ini memaparkan peran pesantren di daerah semi-urban di daerah Banjarnegara Jawa tengah di dalam pelatihan guru di Qiro'ati dan Iqro Quranic dan juga menjelaskan proses rekonstruksi keilmuan Islam oleh para pengajar di sekolah berlandaskan Al-Qur'an. Diketahui bahwa ada tiga tahapan rekonstruksi keilmuan Islam, antara lain penyaringan, adaptasi dan implementasi.

Kata kunci: keilmuan Islam; sekolah al-Qur'an; pendidikan pelatihan guru; qiro'ati; iqro

How to Cite : Astuti, W. Kusakabe, T. (2016). Pesantren and Re-Creation of Islamic Knowledge Through Qur'anic School System Focusing on Teacher Training Education. *TARBIYA: Journal of Education in Muslim Society*, 3(2), 131-139. doi:10.15408/tjems.v3i2.3223.

Permalink/DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15408/tjems.v3i2.3223>

Introduction

Among Indonesian Muslims, learning Qur'an is one of the duties to be achieved from early ages. Qur'an is the Islamic sacred book, believed to be the words of God as dictated to the Prophet Muhammad by the archangel Gabriel and written down in Arabic. This Holy book functions as the primary source of every Muslim's faith and practice.

For Indonesians, learning how to read and memorize Arabic texts in the Qur'an is a major and difficult task. Indonesian people use Roman characters in writing which are totally different from the Arabic characters. In fact, it is obligatory for Muslims to be able to read and recite Arabic texts since all ritual activities in Islam are practiced in the Arabic language.

Muslim parents always want their children to start learning Arabic as early as possible because when they reach 12 years old, they are compulsory to do *shalat* or five times a day regular prayers in Arabic language. In Indonesia, it is difficult for children to memorize the prayer-culture if they only study about Islam for just 90 minutes/week at schools where they did not get Arabic language subject like at Islamic schools. Moreover, the failure of formal schools to sufficiently cater for the religious needs of Muslim children has made parents take them to alternative (non-formal) schools, for example Qur'anic school. This mushrooming and popular school facilitates children early Arabic language learning especially on how to read, recite, and memorize the Qur'an.

Qur'anic learning started with *tajweed*. This Arabic word means correct pronunciation of Qur'anic verses recitation. Without any proper lessons with experts, a person cannot read the Qur'an correctly and smoothly (Al-Qari, 1998). Theoretically, requirements to be Qur'anic teachers are generally challenging. Not all people

can do this heavy task without proper training. A study by Lubis, et al. (2011) in Sumatra Island, for example, justified the problems faced by teachers when teaching students the Qur'anic recitation. They had moderate difficulties in teaching, while the level of administrative and management problems were high, and the weakness of teachers to understand pedagogy was at a high level along with their attitude towards it.

Wiji & Kusakabe (2015) found out Qur'anic schools are diversified, mushrooming, and having self-reform system in rural Indonesia. The management style is very flexible as well as the curriculum. However, still there is space to discuss how the quality of teachers is assured in relation with roles of pesantren in Qur'anic school teacher training education and the ways the teachers recreate the Islamic knowledge.

This study revealed roles of pesantren in re-creation of Islamic knowledge through Qur'anic school system focused on teacher training education in semi-urban rural area. Re-creation in this perspective means reconstruction; it is how the Qur'anic schools have been reconstructing Islamic knowledge which may be different from mainstream Islamic knowledge.

Banjarnegara Regency, Central Java in Indonesia

Banjarnegara is a small town, located in a mountainous area about 394.7 km from Jakarta, the country capital city, and approximately 160.4 km from Semarang, the capital city of Central Java. It can be reached from Japan by flight via Kansai International Airport bound to Yogyakarta City. From Yogyakarta we can take public transport to Banjarnegara for about 4 hours.

Banjarnegara consists of 20 districts and 278 villages with the total area of 1069, 71 hectares, bordered with Wonosobo Regency in the east, Kebumen Regency in the south, Banyumas

Regency in the west, and Pekalongan and Batang Regencies in the north. In 2014 the total population reached to 898.896 people (Banjarnegara Regency Government Statistics Centre, 2014).

The educational situation in Banjarnegara can be seen in Table 1.

Islamic education in that Regency covers 10 public schools/madrasahs and many private schools set up by *Nahdahtul Ulama* and *Muhammadiyah* (the most prominent Muslim social organizations in the country). Almost all villages in Banjarnegara have elementary *madrasah*, which is mostly private; while the Islamic secondary schools are mainly located in each district (*kecamatan*).

Pesantrens, which are mainly established by *Nahdahtul Ulama* are spread out in some districts. This boarding-styled Islamic institution not only serves youths and adult learners. In certain days, for example in Sunday *Kliwon* (Javanese calendar-day), pesantrens also open Islamic lectures by *Kyai* (Islamic cleric) for aging people (mothers, fathers, and grandparents). During the day, many people from different villages and districts come to visit pesantren for the lectures from morning to late afternoon. The

road is always crowded with public vehicles transporting people to pesantren.

As summarized in Table 2, school-aged-children in Banjarnegara get in-formal education at home; formal education at schools, and non-formal education at society. In the mornings, children go to formal schools until afternoon where they learn secular subjects such as Mathematics, Science, and Language. In formal schools children learn little Islamic studies. The formal general schools curricula are strictly controlled by Misnistry of Education and Culture; while for the formal Islamic schools, the curricula are controlled by Ministry of Religious Affairs. In late afternoon, after finishing the formal schooling, Muslim children take Qur'anic learning in mosques nearby their houses. It is very amazing that almost in villages, the learning culture of Muslim children are just the same. At around 4.00 p.m. they come out of their homes, walk to mosque, *mushala*, or Qur'anic school to learn Arabic reading and writing. Such education is basically free of charge under volunteered teachers called *Ustad* (male teachers) and *Ustadzah* (female teachers). Many other children even stay in pesantren, which have formal school, too.

Table 1. Number of schools in Banjarnegara Regency

Formal Education	Kindergarten	Primary School	Junior High School	Senior High School	High	Pesantren	Qur'anic schools
Public	3	659	96	14		-	-
Private	539	210	49	30		96	266
Total	542	867	144	44		96	266

Source: Banjarnegara Regency Educational Office (2013)

Table 2. Education for Muslim children

At home (with parents)	At school (with formal teachers)	At Qur'anic school (with non-formal teachers)	At pesantren (with <i>Kyai</i>)
Time: flexible	Time: 07.00-14.00	Time: 16.00-18.00	Time: 18.00- 21.00
Subject: Islamic/moral education	Subject: Secular and little Islamic subjects	Subject: Arabic literacy and moral education	Subject: Islamic subjects and secular subjects when pesantren has formal school

Pesantren and Qur'anic school

In the previous decades, pesantren is known as *pondok pesantren* (Islamic boarding school). Its existence can be traced back to the 18th century or further. However, it was not until 1930 that pesantren officially admitted female students, beginning with the Pesantren Denanyar of Jombang in East Java. The acceptance of female students has a significant breakthrough in the Indonesian Islamic context. It has led to a unique provision of Muslim education in a largely gender-segregated setting, although the strictness of this depends on the flexibility of *Kyai*.

Pesantren should not be confused with Qur'anic schools, which are devoted to memorization of the Qur'an and instruction in Arabic letters. Such schooling indeed exist in Java, but informally, through the institution of *pengajian* (from *ngaji*, to read) where children between the ages of 4 to 12 gather after morning or evening prayer in a local mosque or private home to learn Qur'anic reading. The primary purpose of pesantren is to reproduce religious elites trained in Muslim theology, law, Qur'anic exegesis, and Arabic grammar, morphology, and syntax (Jones, 1983).

Pesantrens are far more than educational institutions. They exhibit all characteristics of a separate subculture. They have a world view shaped by Islam that stands in sharp contrast to the *abangan* or animist-mystic world of the society around it; a distinct lifestyle marked by strict adherence to religious ritual and an emphasis on discipline, asceticism, and study; and a system of internal authority focusing on the *Kyai* as the heads of pesantren. Yet, though separate, the pesantren is an institution firmly rooted in Javanese culture, and any examination of it as an agent of literacy must take that fact into account (Jones, 1983).

There are three different groups traditionally educated at pesantren: ordinary villagers, the sons of the middle-class Muslims, and aspiring religious scholars. The first group consists of village children, women, and older men who depend on the pesantren for the kind of religious instruction contained in *pengajian*. The second group is the day students, called *santri kalong*, because like the *kalong* or bat, they went out of the pesantren at night. These *santris* would be young men from nearby villages, sons of traders and well-to-do landowners who can afford to have their sons not work in the fields. The third group consists of those *santris* who desire to become Muslim scholars in their own right.

Pengajian sessions in pesantren for adults usually take place only once a week and consist primarily of Qur'anic recitation with commentary by the *Kyai*, and the sessions for children (Qur'anic learning) is done once or twice daily and included basic instruction in Arabic letters. As with most ritual languages, the point of learning letters was religious obligation, not literacy.

Teachers in pesantren have wide knowledge and experience in learning Islam. Before becoming teachers, they usually take 4-7 years of Islamic study either in Indonesian Islamic Universities or in overseas, such as in Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Egypt. They learn Islam from distinguished scholars and brought their knowledge to be implemented in pesantren.

Qur'anic school teachers get training from pesantren. Unlike in the past, nowadays they not only master the revealed knowledge (Islamic knowledge), but also the acquired or secular knowledge as many pesantrens have reformed to be modern educational institutions. As in Islam, Muslims are encouraged to seek both revealed and acquired knowledge throughout their lives that is from cradle to the grave (lifelong

education). This means that, Muslims recognize both religious and secular sources of knowledge. Muslims are therefore, encouraged to acquire both kinds of knowledge regardless of their gender, race or social status.

Following the dynamic Muslim life in modern era, Qur'anic schools teachers have to face re-creation of relevant Islamic knowledge for contemporary and general Muslims. They seek new knowledge of Qur'an and Islam and in the same time they learn the latest teaching methodology to adapt with the present needs of Muslim children. How the teachers reconstruct the knowledge would be comprehensively discussed in the research findings.

Getting along with their learning in pesantren, Qur'anic school teachers conduct education reforms within each school. First, some Qur'anic schools are not attached to mosque or using space in teachers' house anymore. They have got their own school buildings as the awareness of community to establish Qur'anic schools is already high with strong encouragements from the teachers. For years, they work hand in hand to collect charity fund in order to purchase land and materials for constructing the Qur'anic schools buildings. This reform has successfully given impact to community participation toward development of normal schools as well especially in disadvantage areas where the infrastructure of the state-schools is often broken or damaged.

The second reform is that teachers do not rely on traditional text-book only as they learnt in pesantren. Nowadays they use modern tools and learning materials including ICT (computer, iPad, etc.) for teaching Qur'an. Also, teachers bring the students to the new era of Islam, which is more adaptable to modern life (Muslimness in global world). As a result, under the guidance of professional teachers, all Muslim children educated in Qur'anic schools are hoped to grow

up to be good and strong Muslims with noble Islamic characters.

Necessity of training for Qur'anic schools teachers

Teacher training is a critical issue to discuss as it is one of the basic needs for schools to have qualified teachers. Qur'anic teachers are the persons who are not only mastering reading the Qur'an, but also being able to transfer their knowledge about Qur'an and Islam, so that students can master and implement their knowledge independently. Moreover, the teachers transfer value and become role models for the students.

In the globalization era where we can see much violence by radical people in many parts of the world using label of Islam, Qur'anic teachers have important roles as stated by Ibrahim (2010) that the best way to prevent radicalization and terrorism is simply to educate young people in mainstream Islamic teachings. Therefore, they will be able to recognize and, after placing such radical narratives, dubious theology, or ignorant preaching in their proper contexts, reject them.

Djamarah (2005) mentioned roles of Qur'anic teachers as the followings: (1). Corrector; they teach the students to differentiate between good and bad values and correcting the wrong attitudes and behaviors of the students so that always in line with Islam way of life, (2). Inspirator; they give inspiration for students' learning and direct them on how to learn effectively, (3). Organizer; they manage learning activities for the students, (4). Facilitators; they provide facilities for students learning, (5). Guides; they guide the students and treat them with respect and love, (6). Class-manager; they provide and use classroom facilities or various teaching materials for effective learning, (7). Evaluator; they evaluate the students' learning as well as their own teaching performance.

Qur'anic teacher training, roles of pesantren, and knowledge recreation

The findings of this study are based on a combination of site visits and qualitative interviews.

Interviews and accompanying site visits were conducted in 4 selected Qur'anic schools in two different villages, Sigaluh and Gembongan, which belong to Sigaluh District in Banjarnegara Regency of Central Java Province in Indonesia. The schools are Raudhatul Jannah, Nur Iman, Hidayaturrahman, and As-Solihah with 11 teacher respondents in total.

Each interview lasted from 30 to 90 minutes, depending on whether information redundancy was reached. The interviews were conducted in the native Indonesian language, and recorded with a digital sound recorder. The obtained data was then analyzed and interpreted.

The number of students at the Qur'anic schools is between 25-57 children. Each school has relatively big number of students, while not all schools has wide classroom. Among four, only one school has its own building with classrooms; while the other three schools just use space inside of the mosque or praying hall.

Children who are 5-12 years old frequently go to Qur'anic schools almost every day including on Saturday and Sunday to have the Qur'anic lesson, which starts from around at 16.00-17.30. They come to school by on foot, bicycle, or accompanied by their father/mother. When we came to visit, we observed that as soon as children arrive at mosque, they approach and greet the teachers by saying, "Assalamu'alaikum," then shake and kiss the teachers' hands politely. While waiting for other classmates to come, the children play around in the mosque yard. In Qur'anic classes, children sit down on the floor with a reading table. The first activity is reciting prayer together to begin the lesson and followed by reviewing the previous lesson. The class then

is divided into some groups depending on the number of the teachers. Each teacher leads the students group in reading, reciting, and writing Arabic individually. The teachers introduce the 26 Arabic alphabets to the new students one by one. After mastering vowels and consonants, a child uses his/her skill to practice reading the Qur'an regularly. After that, step by step they are introduced to the Arabic writing skill.

The present Qur'an learning is different from the old one. In the past children learnt Qur'an in mosque under strict teachers in evenings. If the children were not fluent in repeating the teacher' utterance, they would be punished by the teacher using a stick. Qur'anic teachers were mainly *Kyai* or old persons; no young people were allowed to teach unlike what we have seen nowadays where many youths involve in Qur'anic teaching. After praying together, the children were taught one by one. The only stationery they use was a stick made from coconut leaves' stick to show the verse that they learnt. The teacher directly taught the students regardless their age on how to read the Arabic sentences word by word without giving explaining the Arabic alphabets first. Only the Qur'an book was used by the teacher in which most of the parents could not afford it. After years, once a child finish reading the whole of Qur'an book, the family conducted "Khataman Selamatan" attended by neighbours. During the *selamatan* (celebration), the child was tested by the *Kyai* to read well the verses of the Qur'an and closed with having dinner and prayers together.

The total number of the teachers in the Qur'anic schools was 2 males and 9 females with the age between 19-53 years old. All teachers had upper high school education and two of them got bachelor degree in kindergarten and elementary school education.

Teachers confessed that in term of frequency, they rarely get in-service teacher training. In a year, only one time they received a short training, for example, through a kind of one-day Qur'anic teaching workshop conducted by the local government in collaboration with pesantren. Despite the fact that the teachers lack of intensive trainings, all of them are aware of the two common of Qur'anic teaching methods namely Qiroati and Iqro. At present, the teachers basically use one of these methods in daily teachings, the methods which are different from the one they used to learn Qur'an during their childhood. Out of the formal training, the teachers read books, learn from internet, or make discussion with colleagues on how to improve their teaching performance.

Teachers stated that pesantrens have significant roles in introducing them the Qiro'ati and Iqro teaching methods. In Sigaluh District, it was noted that pesantren is the only available teacher training institution for Qur'anic teachers. Pesantren Miftahussolihin in Gembongan village, for example, opens regular in-service Qur'anic teacher training, with local *Kyai* graduated from Al-Ashar University of Egypt.

The trainings are basically conducted in three ways as summarized as following:

- The prospective teachers stay and study in pesantren for a certain period of time until they master certain level of Qur'anic knowledge and get certificate (pre-service training)
- Pesantrens invite teacher participants to directly come to visit the pesantren and join the trainings as scheduled (in-service training)
- Pesantrens dispatch trainers to give trainings in a designated place, which are held by the Regency or District Religious Affair Office and Qur'anic School Teachers Association

in Regency or District level (in-service training)

Something unique about the training is that for pre-service teacher training in pesantren, the participants are obliged to pay the tuition fee. However, almost in-service teacher trainings served by pesantren are basically free of charge. The teachers did not have to spend money for it, because the training cost has been covered by the sponsor. This idea is in line with the practice of Qur'anic school education where children can enjoy their service freely or without paying the school fee.

There are at least 10 pesantrens located not far from the two villages in Sigaluh District, which usually serve as the teacher training center. As Ms. Muslimah (30), a teacher in Hidayaturrohman Qur'anic School of Gembongan Village reported that, she has experienced training given by pesantren and by the Banjarnegara Regency Religious Affair Ministry Office. The training covers Qiro'ati teaching method, Qur'anic teaching using Arts, *Muqri Thoriqoh* reading and writing course, and Qur'anic teaching methods development. She further explained that Al-Fatah Pesantren, which is located in the central City of Banjarnegara, functions as a center of in-service teacher training. The pesantren regularly conducts the Qiro'ati training for both prospective Qur'anic teachers and those who have already been teachers. The training itself is relatively for long time (two years) with once in a week meeting. It is due to the status of the training participants in which most of them may work during the week days. The training is conducted only on Friday afternoon or Saturday for around 3 hours/meeting.

Within two years as Ms. Muslimah explained, the hundreds of training participants should finish 10 books of Qiro'ati method and after completing the training, the participants are

awarded a certificate. All 11 teachers confessed that Qiro'ati teaching method is not easy as Iqro' teaching method, which has been implemented for relatively long time in their Qur'anic school. Iqro' is popular among the teachers as the simplest method of teaching and learning the Qur'an since almost everyone who can at least read the Qur'an are basically able to teach reading the Qur'an using Iqro' text-book; but not for Qiro'ati which demands teachers to master certain high level of Qur'anic reading skills.

The teachers explained that they usually got invitation from pesantren for Qur'anic training. They just need to register before the deadline and then attend the training either in the pesantren itself or in a designated place. The problem arose when the training schedule was in weekdays. It means it would be difficult for the Qur'anic teachers, who have fixed job such as being a teacher at a formal school, to join the training as they have to work in weekdays.

Motivation of the teachers in upgrading their Qur'anic teaching is high as stated by Ms. Muslimah as follows:

“To teach basic Qur'anic reading is easy for me; but the main job of Qur'anic teacher is not just simple as that. Nowadays Muslim families are facing difficult time for their children due to very big impacts of globalization. Without learning in Qur'anic school, children may be affected much by television and on-line games, and internet. It happens even in rural villages. Whereas I have a fixed job at formal schools from morning to late afternoon; it is sometimes very tough for me to have additional volunteer job as Qur'anic teacher at the mosque. In the same time I have high motivation to upgrade my Qur'anic teaching skills, I really have little time for it due to my main position as a teacher in a formal school.” (Interview with Ms. Muslimah, October 2015).

Process of re-creation of Islamic knowledge among teachers

Teachers admitted that they got knowledge from diverse kinds of sources such as from reading Islamic themed books, learning from *Kyai* or senior teachers, and by taking some number of in-service trainings held by the pesantrens and other Islamic institutions under the control of Ministry of Religious Office in Regency level. The knowledge itself can be knowledge regarding Islam faith and knowledge about Qur'anic learning/teaching methods. All teachers during their childhood got very different method of learning the Qur'an compared with the recent methods they learn from pesantren. Instead of keeping the old Qur'anic learning method, the teachers prefer using the new ones, namely Iqro' and Qiroati. In delivering the Islamic knowledge to students in daily teaching, the teachers take three steps, namely filtering, adaptation, and implementation.

In filtering stage, the teachers match the recent acquired knowledge with the Islamic knowledge that they have learnt previously and also confirm it in the credible books of Islam, like a collection of hadith and fatwas. Regarding religious practice, for example, when the teachers acquire new practice, they will first see that religious practice commonly observed by the community where the students belong to. If the community has already got fixed practice for a long time, then the teachers tend not to teach that new Islamic knowledge although they themselves may implement it. For example about reading "iftitah" in five times a day prayer, the teachers have learnt two versions of it, namely “banged baeni” and “allohuakbar kabiro” and to decide the one which would be taught to the students, the teachers carefully confirm to the community first.

Music in Islam is considered to be “haram” and “halal”. Muslims who believe that music is forbidden will never listen and play music in their life-time; they neither allow their children to listen and play it. To such kinds of problems when the Qur’anic teachers once trained on the using of music for daily teachings, the teachers confirm to the community or the students’ parents whether they are permit able to use music to teach their children. Adaptation to the condition of the local community is a must where teachers usually conduct discussions with peers before implementing new Islamic knowledge to the students.

Conclusion

At the beginning, Qur’anic school leads to development of pesantren as the oldest educational institution in Indonesia. Later Pesantren has big roles in development of Qur’anic school especially in teacher training.

The authors found pesantren gets information outside of the society, update to the latest information of Islamic knowledge, meaning that pesantren has plenty of Islamic knowledge. Therefore, Qur’anic schools teachers get teacher training in pesantren. After that, Qur’anic schools teachers re-create relevant Islamic knowledge for contemporary and general Muslims and also they wrap up that Islamic knowledge to be understandable for children. The steps of knowledge reconstruction cover filtering, adaptation, and implementation. In children side, they get knowledge in Qur’anic schools and then change their behavior and opinion according to education in Qur’anic schools.

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