



Integrating Tradition and Modernity in Islamic Higher Education: a Phenomenological Study of the Boarding System

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Abstract

This study examines the integration of pesantren traditions with modern higher education at STAI As-Sunnah, an Islamic college in Indonesia. Employing a phenomenological approach, the research analyzes how this institution balances traditional values with contemporary educational demands. Key findings highlight STAI As-Sunnah's success in maintaining a focus on Arabic language learning and Islamic values while offering accredited study programs. However, the study also identifies discourses surrounding gender inclusivity, access to technology, and the balance between tradition and modernity. The study concludes that adopting more inclusive and adaptive approaches, such as blended learning, may help STAI As-Sunnah become an innovative model in Islamic higher education, contributing significantly to the development of Islamic education in Indonesia.

Keywords: Islamic education; Tradition-modernity integration; Boarding system

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Introduction

Islamic education in Indonesia has undergone significant evolution in recent decades, reflecting complex dynamics between tradition and modernity. The phenomenon of "pesantren campus"¹ or the boarding system in Islamic higher education has emerged as a manifestation of the synthesis between traditional pesantren elements and the modern higher education system.² This development not only marks a paradigm shift in the landscape of Indonesian Islamic education but also presents a unique model with the potential to address global challenges in higher education.

Pesantren, as traditional Islamic educational institutions, have long been a primary pillar in shaping the character and intellectuality of Muslims in Indonesia.³ However, with the demands of modernization and globalization, there is a need to integrate traditional values with contemporary educational approaches. According to the latest data from the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, there has been a significant increase in the number of pesantren adopting modern curricula, from 40% in 2010 to 65% in 2022.⁴ Parallel to this trend, the number of Islamic higher education institutions implementing the boarding system has increased by 30% in the last five years.⁵ Along with the dynamics of pesantren modernity, the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia has also issued Regulation of the Minister of Religious Affairs Number 32 of 2020 concerning Ma'had Aly, as a step to integrate modernity in Islamic higher education with the pesantren system.

STAI As-Sunnah, with more than a decade of experience implementing the boarding system since 2012, presents an interesting case study. Its development from a Ma'had Aly into a higher education institution with five study programs illustrates the adaptive capacity of the boarding system in facing the demands of modernity without sacrificing its traditional essence.⁶ STAI As-Sunnah perceives modernism as an approach to reinterpreting Islamic teachings that are relevant to contemporary values while simultaneously exploiting opportunities for the development of Islamic educational institutions.⁷

Although there has been extensive research on pesantren⁸ and Islamic higher education⁹ separately, there is still a significant gap in understanding the dynamics of integrating tradition and modernity in the context of the boarding system in Islamic higher education.

¹ Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi, "Imam Zarkasyi's Modernization of Pesantren in Indonesia: (A Case Study of Darussalam Gontor)," *Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies* 8, no. 1 (2020): 161–200, <https://doi.org/10.21043/QIJIS.V8I1.5760>.

² Azyumardi Azra, "Reforms in Islamic Education: A Global Perspective Seen from the Indonesian Case. In C. Tan (Ed.), *Reforms in Islamic Education: International Perspectives* (1st Ed.)," *Bloomsbury Publishing Plc* 59 (2014).

³ Zamakhsari Dhofier, "Tradisi Pesantren: Studi Tentang Pandangan Hidup Kyai," (*No Title*), 1994.

⁴ Kementerian Agama, "Jumlah Pondok Pesantren Menurut Tipe," *Satu Data Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia* (Jakarta, Indonesia, 2024), <https://satudata.kemenag.go.id/dataset/tags/ponpes>.

⁵ Jejen Musfah et al., "Pesantren-Based School Curriculum Integration Model in Indonesia," *MANAGERIA: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam* 5, no. 2 (2021): 223–40, <https://doi.org/10.14421/manageria.2020.52-13>.

⁶ Sapii, Isnawati, and Nunzairina, "Observing the Development of the As-Sunnah Islamic College," *WARAQAT: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 7, no. 1 (2022): 134–49, <https://doi.org/10.51590/waraqat.v7i1.255>.

⁷ Faizal Amin, Mowafg Masuwd, and Fauzan, "The Image of Modernism in the History of Islamic Intellectualism in Indonesia," *Kalam* 18, no. 1 (2024): 1–18, <https://doi.org/DOI:10.24042/002024182047800>.

⁸ Muhammad Riduan Harahap, "Tradisi Dalam Modernisasi Pendidikan Islam Di Indonesia," *WARAQAT: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 4, no. 1 (2020): 25, <https://doi.org/10.51590/waraqat.v4i1.71>.

⁹ Amiruddin Yahya, "Dinamika Lembaga Pendidikan Tinggi Islam Di Indonesia," *MIQOT: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 41, no. 1 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.30821/miqot.v41i1.314>.

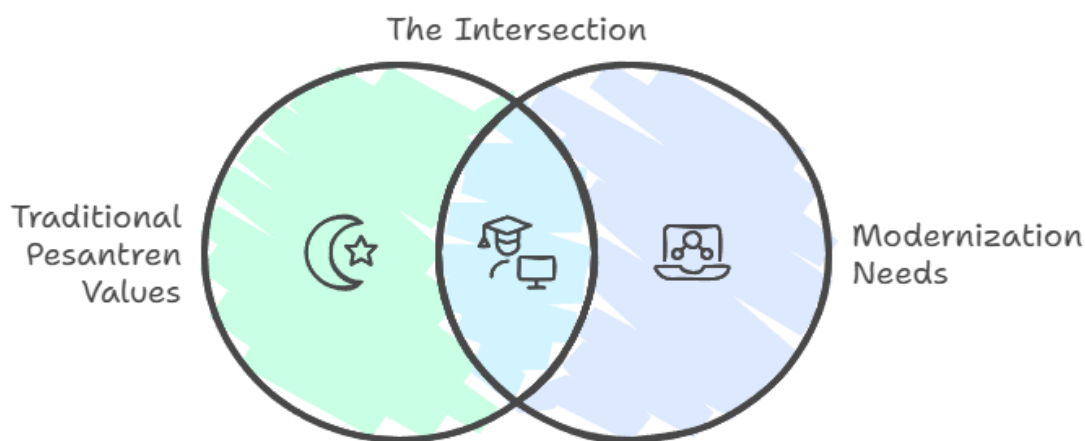
Rahman's study on the "Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition"¹⁰ and Hasan's "A Critical Study of Islamic Modernism in the Perspectives of Contemporary Religious Scholarship"¹¹ underscore the importance of further research on this hybrid education model, especially in the context of globalization and the industrial revolution 4.0.

This study aims to reveal the dynamics of integrating pesantren traditions with modern higher education at STAI As-Sunnah. The main focus of the research is to analyze the interaction between traditional pesantren elements and modern higher education elements in shaping the unique reality of the boarding system at this institution. Through the perspective of the Islamization of knowledge, this study also seeks to identify and examine the intersection that emerges from the combination of tradition and modernity in the context of Islamic education.

To achieve these objectives, this research attempts to answer two main questions. First, how does STAI As-Sunnah integrate traditional pesantren values with modern higher education academic standards? This question explores the processes, strategies, and approaches used by the institution in aligning heritage traditions with the demands of modernity. Second, what are the challenges and opportunities that arise from implementing the boarding system in the context of Islamic higher education? This question explores the dynamics, complexities, and potentials that arise from the adoption of the pesantren model in a modern academic environment.

By answering these questions, this research is expected to provide a deeper understanding of STAI As-Sunnah's efforts to integrate tradition and modernity and its implications for the development of Islamic higher education in general. The research findings are also expected to serve as a foundation for further research on innovative and responsive models of Islamic education to the demands of the times.

The Intersection of Modernity and Tradition



Picture 1: The intersection of Modernity and Tradition

¹⁰ Fazlur Rahman, *Islam & Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, vol. 15 (University of Chicago Press, 1982), file:///E:/Desertasi S3/Buku Referensi Teori Penelitian/Islam & Modernity Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition - Fazlur Rahman.pdf.

¹¹ Muhammad Husnain and Imran Hayat, "A Critical Study of Islamic Modernism in the Perspectives of Contemporary Religious Scholarship," *Jaban-e-Tahqeeq* 4, no. 2 (2021): 36–51.

This research employs several complementary theoretical frameworks to analyze the phenomenon of the boarding system at STAI As-Sunnah. The concept of Islamization of knowledge developed by Al-Attas¹² and Al-Faruqi¹³ serves as the main foundation in understanding the efforts to integrate Islamic values with the development of modern science. Turkle's digital intersection theory¹⁴ provides a perspective on the importance of authentic human interaction in the digital era, which is relevant to the practice of the boarding system at STAI As-Sunnah.

Al-Attas¹⁵ and Robinson's¹⁶ thoughts on a holistic learning environment are also used to analyze various aspects of the boarding system, such as the integration of formal-informal learning and character building. Meanwhile, Christensen's concept of "disruptive innovation"¹⁷ and Nasr's emphasis on preserving the Islamic intellectual tradition¹⁸ provide a framework for understanding the duality of modernization and traditionalism managed by STAI As-Sunnah.

This research adopts an interpretive phenomenological approach to uncover the lived experiences of stakeholders at STAI As-Sunnah.¹⁹ The research design combines a multi-dimensional qualitative approach, including: (1) Participant observation: Researchers conducted 200 hours of observations at campus facilities, including classrooms, dormitories, and public areas. (2) In-depth interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 30 participants, including 5 top management officials, 10 lecturers, and 15 students from various study programs. (3) Document analysis: Institutional documents, including the Strategic Plan (Renstra), curriculum documents, and annual reports, were analyzed.

Data analysis followed the six-step reflexive thematic analysis process outlined by Braun and Clarke.²⁰ This involved familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. To ensure trustworthiness, member checking and peer debriefing were employed.

Other primary sources include documentation of Arabic language usage activities in the campus environment. Considering that Arabic language proficiency is one of the distinctive characteristics of the pesantren tradition combined with modern higher education at STAI As-Sunnah, this documentation becomes important evidence of efforts to preserve and strengthen traditions amidst the currents of modernization.

¹² Rotraud Wielandt and Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, "Islam, Secularism and the Philosophy of the Future," *Die Welt Des Islams* 27, no. 1/3 (1987): 133, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1570522>.

¹³ Sri Hariyati Lestari, "Islamization of Knowledge of Ismail Raji Al-Faruqi in Typologies of Science and Religion," *TALIM: Jurnal Studi Pendidikan Islam* 3, no. 2 (2020): 128–40, <https://doi.org/10.52166/talim.v3i2.1998>.

¹⁴ Bradley Campbell, "Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other.," *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 33, no. 1–2 (2021): 196–99.

¹⁵ Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam* (Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia Kuala Lumpur, 1980).

¹⁶ Ken Robinson and Lou Aronica, *Creative Schools: The Grassroots Revolution That's Transforming Education* (Penguin books, 2016).

¹⁷ C Christensen, "Disrupting Class: How Disruptive Innovation Will Change the Way the World Learns" (McGraw-Hill, 2008).

¹⁸ Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Iran Religionsphilosoph, *Islam in the Modern World: Challenged by the West, Threatened by Fundamentalism, Keeping Faith with Tradition* (HarperOne New York, 2010).

¹⁹ Jonathan A. Smith and Mike Osborn, "Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis," *Doing Social Psychology Research*, 2008, 229–54, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470776278.ch10>.

²⁰ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Reflecting on Reflexive Thematic Analysis," *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health* 11, no. 4 (2019): 589–97.

Meanwhile, secondary research sources include a literature review of the boarding system that serves as the education model at STAI As-Sunnah. This review provides a theoretical and conceptual foundation for understanding the characteristics, strengths, and challenges of the boarding system in the context of Islamic higher education. Researchers also conducted an in-depth analysis of institutional documents such as curricula, policies, Strategic Plans (Renstra), Operational Plans (Renop), and the Statute of STAI As-Sunnah. These documents provide a formal and written overview of the institution's vision, mission, objectives, and direction of development in integrating tradition and modernity. Furthermore, researchers also reviewed STAI As-Sunnah's academic development reports over time. Reviewing these reports helps researchers understand trends, achievements, and dynamics of change that occur in integrating tradition and modernity at the institution. By combining primary and secondary sources and integrating phenomenology with traditional Islamic research methodology, this research is expected to produce a comprehensive, in-depth, and contextual understanding of the reality of integrating tradition and modernity at STAI As-Sunnah. The findings of this research not only contribute to enriching the knowledge treasures of Islamic higher education but can also serve as inspiration and reference for similar institutions in their efforts to develop educational models that combine the excellence of tradition with the demands of modernity.

The collected data were analyzed in stages following Miles and Huberman's interactive model, which includes data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Open coding was applied to identify main themes and patterns.

This research adopts Stake's "naturalistic inquiry" approach²¹ combined with traditional Islamic research methodology in a multi-dimensional design. The qualitative dimensions include participatory observation in the campus environment, in-depth interviews with stakeholders from various study programs, analysis of Arabic language implementation, and the study of the impact of gender-based facility separation.

Following Creswell's recommendation²² on the mixed-method approach for complex case studies, data were collected through primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include direct observation in dormitories and classrooms, interviews with institutional leaders, dialogues with students from various study programs, and documentation of Arabic language usage activities. Secondary sources include literature reviews on the boarding system, analysis of institutional documents such as curricula and policies, review of academic development reports, and comparative studies with similar institutions.

To ensure research validity and reliability, quality assurance standards were applied according to Yin's guidelines.²³ The collected data were analyzed in stages following Miles and Huberman's interactive model,²⁴ which includes data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Open, axial, and selective coding processes were applied to identify main themes and patterns.²⁵ Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis approach²⁶ was used to interpret the findings, particularly in uncovering the tradition-

²¹ Robert Stake, *Case Study Research* (Springer, 1995).

²² John W Creswell and J David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Sage publications, 2017).

²³ Robert K Yin, "Case Study Research and Applications" (Sage Thousand Oaks, CA, 2018).

²⁴ A Huberman, "Qualitative Data Analysis a Methods Sourcebook," 2014.

²⁵ Juliet Corbin and Anselm Strauss, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory* (Sage publications, 2014).

²⁶ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Reflecting on Reflexive Thematic Analysis," *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health* 11, no. 4 (2019): 589–97, <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806>.

modernity intersection and examining it from the perspective of the Islamization of knowledge.

Through this comprehensive approach, this research aims not only to reveal how STAI As-Sunnah faces challenges in uniting tradition and modernity but also to provide insights into the potential of the boarding system as a relevant and responsive educational model for the future. In facing the ever-evolving challenges of Islamic education, the results of this research are expected to make a significant contribution to the development of curricula and educational practices in Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia and other countries with similar contexts.

Thus, this article serves not only as an academic study but also as a reflection for decision-makers and managers of educational institutions in formulating more inclusive and sustainable educational strategies in the modern era. Highlighting the intersections faced by STAI As-Sunnah, this paper invites all parties to participate in finding a middle ground that allows tradition and modernity to support each other. Ultimately, the solutions resulting from the dialogue between these two aspects are expected to be an example for other Islamic educational institutions in achieving holistic, integrative, and meaningful educational goals for society.

Result and Discussion

Direct observations and in-depth interviews with the leadership of STAI As-Sunnah reveal the institution's success in integrating pesantren traditions with the modern higher education system. One prominent aspect is the curriculum that combines intensive Arabic language learning with accredited general study programs. Through the implementation of the "direct method" learning system, students are equipped with proficient Arabic language skills, in line with the pesantren tradition that emphasizes Arabic language skills as the key to understanding classical Islamic sources.

The integration of tradition and modernity is also reflected in the implementation of study programs with the Semester Credit Unit (SKS) system and classical learning. Although adopting a modern approach in academic structure, STAI As-Sunnah maintains pesantren values, such as gender-based class separation. This policy reflects the institution's efforts to maintain etiquette and propriety in interactions between male and female students, in line with Islamic norms upheld in the pesantren environment.

Curriculum development at STAI As-Sunnah also demonstrates alignment with the demands of the modern work world. By adopting the Outcome-Based Education (OBE) approach, this institution aligns learning outcomes with the competencies needed in the job market. This shows an awareness of the importance of equipping graduates with relevant and applicable skills, without neglecting the Islamic values and traditions that are the identity of the pesantren.

In learning activities, STAI As-Sunnah supports the provision of adequate technological facilities and infrastructure to facilitate the delivery of materials, such as the use of "Smart TV" to display learning materials, expanding access to online learning platforms, and implementing video conferencing and distance learning with guest lecturers from abroad.

Although STAI As-Sunnah has integrated technology into the learning process, there are still restrictions on gadget access in the dormitory environment. This policy reflects the institution's efforts to maintain a balance between the utilization of technology and the creation of a conducive and focused learning environment. The limitation of gadget access also aims to reduce potential distractions and foster discipline in learning, in line with pesantren values that emphasize simplicity and self-control.

However, the research findings also identify several discourses that require further attention. One of them is the limited access to study programs for female students, where

only three out of six study programs are available for women. This situation raises a discourse on gender inclusivity in Islamic higher education. Although gender-based class separation is a pesantren tradition, it is important for STAI As-Sunnah to consider expanding equal access for female students in various fields of study, to encourage broader female participation in knowledge development and social contribution.

The limitation of interaction between female students and male lecturers in lecture halls is also an interesting discourse. On one hand, this policy reflects efforts to maintain etiquette and avoid slander in cross-gender interactions. On the other hand, this limitation demands the availability of competent female lecturers in various fields of knowledge. STAI As-Sunnah needs to consider strategies to increase the number and capacity of female lecturers, so that female students can obtain optimal academic guidance without neglecting Islamic norms of interaction.

Another challenge faced by STAI As-Sunnah is balancing pesantren traditions with the need for access to technology and digital resources in modern learning. In the era of the industrial revolution 4.0, the ability to navigate and utilize technology is becoming an increasingly important competency. STAI As-Sunnah needs to explore innovative approaches to more extensively integrate technology into the learning process, without sacrificing pesantren values and traditions. The development of hybrid or blended learning models can be a solution that allows students to access digital resources in a structured manner while maintaining direct interaction and character building in the pesantren environment.

These findings illustrate the complex dynamics in STAI As-Sunnah's efforts to integrate tradition and modernity in Islamic higher education. Despite achieving significant success, this institution still faces challenges in aspects of gender inclusivity and adaptation to learning technology. Further study and innovation are needed to find the optimal balance between preserving pesantren values and the demands of modern education. By developing inclusive, adaptive, and innovative approaches, STAI As-Sunnah can become an inspirational model for other Islamic higher education institutions in navigating the complexities of integrating tradition and modernity.

This research reveals that STAI As-Sunnah has successfully integrated the modern education system with traditional pesantren values within the framework of Islamic higher education. This success is reflected in the existence of six accredited study programs: Arabic Language Education, Islamic Religious Education, Islamic Broadcasting Communication, Islamic Counseling Guidance, Sharia Economic Law, and Language Preparation Program. Two programs, namely Arabic Language Education and Islamic Broadcasting Communication, achieved very good accreditation, while the other three programs are accredited with a good category.²⁷

One of the distinctive features of STAI As-Sunnah is the emphasis on the use of Arabic as a learning medium. All students from the five main study programs are required to have adequate Arabic language skills. The Language Preparation Program is specifically designed to facilitate students who do not have an Arabic language background, enabling them to follow other study programs that require proficiency in the language²⁸ This approach reflects the institution's efforts to maintain the pesantren tradition in the context of modern higher education.

²⁷ As-sunnah, "Advantages of As-Sunnah Islamic College," Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam AS – SUNNAH, 2024, <https://staiassunnah.ac.id/>.

²⁸ Dori Chandra, Suhendri, and Ahmad Afandi, *Panduan Akademik; Tahun Akademik 2024-2025 Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam As-Sunnah Deli Serdang*, 2024.

Although STAI As-Sunnah offers various study programs, there are access restrictions for female students. Only three study programs are available for female students: Arabic Language Education, Islamic Religious Education, and Language Preparation Program²⁹ This condition creates an intersection between efforts to provide broad and inclusive education with the implementation of policies that limit options for female students. Considering that women and men have relatively equal roles in building society, women can not only contribute as educators for their offspring in religious aspects³⁰, but also play an important role in shaping generations with noble character and strong Islamic insights. Thus, the realization of equal access to education is an initial step in building community capabilities.

Equality in education must be accompanied by ease of access, as every individual, regardless of background, has the same right to access various types, levels, and pathways of education.³¹ To reflect this quality and accessibility, special attention is needed on the vertical aspect of education, including education for women.

No	Program Studi	Accreditation	Available for Male Students	Available for Female Students
1	Pendidikan Bahasa Arab	Sangat Baik	Yes	Yes
2	Pendidikan Agama Islam	Baik	Yes	Yes
3	Komunikasi Penyiaran Islam	Sangat Baik	Yes	No
4	Bimbingan Penyuluhan Islam	Baik	Yes	No
5	Hukum Ekonomi Syariah	Baik	Yes	No
6	Program Persiapan Bahasa	-	Yes	Yes

Table 1: Program Studi, Accreditation, and Availability at STAI As-Sunnah

To analyze this situation, R. S. Peters' Holistic Education theory can be applied. Peters emphasizes that education should not only focus on knowledge transfer but also include character formation and the overall development of individuals.³² Based on this theory, it is important for STAI As-Sunnah to consider developing greater flexibility for female students so that they can optimally explore their academic and non-academic potential. As restrictions on interactions between female students and male lecturers are imposed, especially in lecture halls, the institution needs to present female lecturers with expertise in relevant fields. This step is important to create an active learning atmosphere and support the comfort and optimal participation of female students.

The lecture environment should encourage student involvement in various aspects of learning. The use of interactive methods not only helps improve material understanding but also creates a collaborative learning atmosphere. According to Machelles Linsenmeyer's research, applying techniques such as questioning, group discussions, and sharing thoughts

²⁹ Chandra, Suhendri, and Afandi.

³⁰ Firdanianty Pramono, "Analysis of the Family's Communication Pattern and the Benefits of Mother School Program for Building a Harmonious Family," *Informasi* 50, no. 1 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.21831/informasi.v50i1.30136>.

³¹ Syarifah Rahmah, *Pendidikan Bagi Perempuan (Suatu Analisis Dalam Perspektif Islam)*, 2021.

³² R. S. Peters, *Ethics and Education, Ethics and Education* (Routledge, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315712383>.

with friends can encourage students to actively participate in the learning process, thereby strengthening understanding and retention of material more deeply.³³

In comparison with the boarding system on several similar campuses, significant similarities and differences can be observed. For example, UNIDA Gontor is known for its pesantren-based educational approach that integrates academic education with religious learning and offers more study programs that suit the needs of the community.³⁴ It also provides broader access and choices for female students in various study programs.

The dynamically evolving world requires attention to several aspects of life that are more suitable if carried out by women. Therefore, institutions can continue to adapt to changes without neglecting their original purpose of establishment. The right of female students to a wider range of scientific options plays an important role in the empowerment process and enhances their understanding of rights and obligations. On the whole, institutions with a strong religious identity can design inclusive education programs that encourage respect for diversity and openness to differences.³⁵ Education, as a fundamental right for every individual, both in the Islamic perspective and in international agreements, becomes the foundation for society's progress and the formation of a peaceful generation aware of its responsibilities.

STAI As-Sunnah faces significant challenges related to educational accessibility for female students. Although there are efforts to maintain the pesantren tradition, it is important to consider the need for inclusivity in education. The concept of inclusion in education outlined by Thomas Hehir emphasizes the importance of providing education that is accessible to all individuals regardless of gender, background, or ability.³⁶ In this case, the analysis shows that policies that encourage increased access for all students, both male and female, in various study programs are needed.

In the higher education environment, academic activities do not only focus on the education process alone but also refer to the implementation of the Tri Dharma of Higher Education, which includes education, research, and community service as the institution's top priorities. Therefore, providing equitable access to all academics is not just a matter of fairness but also an effort to encourage more inclusive and diverse innovation. Through open access, lecturers, students, and researchers from various backgrounds have the opportunity to contribute to the development of science. In addition, equitable access also strengthens cross-disciplinary collaboration and enriches research results that benefit the wider community.

The findings of this study also reveal an additional intersection in the boarding system of STAI As-Sunnah, namely the application of rules that limit the use of technology. Although aimed at maintaining concentration in the learning process, this policy creates challenges for students in balancing the need for access to digital resources with compliance with the rules.³⁷ This situation is reminiscent of the theory of Constructivism in

³³ Mabelle Linsenmeyer, "Brief Activities: Questioning, Brainstorming, Think-Pair-Share, Jigsaw, and Clinical Case Discussions," 2021, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-62916-8_5.

³⁴ Muhammad Nasir and Muhammad Khairul Rijal, "Keeping the Middle Path: Mainstreaming Religious Moderation through Islamic Higher Education Institutions in Indonesia," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 11, no. 2 (2021): 213–41.

³⁵ A. Jauhar Fuad and Mowafg Masuud, "Religiosity and Its Relationship with the Tolerance Attitudes of Higher Education Students," *Tribakti: Jurnal Pemikiran Keislaman* 34, no. 2 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.33367/tribakti.v34i2.3617>.

³⁶ Thomas Hehir, *New Directions in Special Education: Eliminating Ableism in Policy and Practice* (Harvard Education Press, 2005).

³⁷ Wawancara dengan mahasiswa STAI As-Sunnah, 15 September 2024

education proposed by Piaget,³⁸ and Vygotsky³⁹, which emphasizes the importance of interaction and exploration in the teaching and learning process.

To overcome the intersection between the need for technology access and restrictions on gadget use, the application of a blended learning approach becomes relevant. This approach, as outlined in "Blended Learning in Action," combines traditional face-to-face processes with online learning, allowing for better flexibility and accessibility to modern educational resources.⁴⁰ Hybrid learning allows students to access online materials at their convenience, accommodating diverse schedules and learning preferences.

One of the latest technological innovations that provides easy access to knowledge is artificial intelligence (AI). The increasingly developing presence of AI has now influenced almost all aspects of human life, including in the world of science, thus facilitating its accessibility. However, the use of AI also raises concerns regarding plagiarism and the originality of student work, which requires clear guidelines.⁴¹ In addition, excessive dependence on AI can hinder the development of critical thinking skills and problem-solving abilities among students.

Therefore, educational institutions have a responsibility to equip students with a proper understanding of the utilization of this technology. In addition to providing training related to the use of AI, institutions also need to educate students about the limits and portions of its use, particularly in the academic context. This aims to enable students to optimally utilize technology while still maintaining ethics, originality, and upholding academic values. STAI As-sunnah can learn from a more dynamic approach in aligning tradition with modern needs. The application of learning technologies, such as "Learning Analytics," can provide valuable insights into students' learning habits, resulting in more customized and effective approaches.⁴²

The results of interviews with STAI As-sunnah leaders and direct observations in the campus environment show that this institution has successfully built an educational foundation that combines pesantren traditions with the modernity of higher education. This success is reflected in several aspects, such as the integration of a curriculum that combines the teaching of classical Islamic sciences with modern scientific disciplines, the implementation of a learning system that accommodates pesantren traditions such as the study of kitab kuning with modern academic approaches such as discussions and presentations, and the provision of dormitory facilities that adopt the pesantren model but are equipped with modern infrastructure. This approach is in line with Al-Attas' concept of the Islamization of knowledge,⁴³ which emphasizes the integration of Islamic values with modern scientific disciplines.

Analysis of the STAI As-sunnah Strategic Plan (Renstra) document for the 2020-2024 period also shows that the integration of tradition and modernity is one of the main objectives of institutional development. In the Renstra, targets are mentioned such as increasing graduates' competence in mastering Islamic sciences and modern knowledge,

³⁸ Jean Piaget, *The Psychology of Intelligence* (Routledge, 2005).

³⁹ Lev S Vygotsky, *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*, vol. 86 (Harvard university press, 1978).

⁴⁰ Catlin R Tucker, Tiffany Wycoff, and Jason T Green, *Blended Learning in Action: A Practical Guide toward Sustainable Change* (Corwin Press, 2016).

⁴¹ Frances O Donnell, Mark Porter, and Stephen Fitzgerald, "The Role of Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education : Higher Education Students Use of AI in Academic Assignments Keywords :” 8, no. 1 (n.d.).

⁴² John Biggs, Catherine Tang, and Gregor Kennedy, *Teaching for Quality Learning at University 5e* (McGraw-hill education (UK), 2022).

⁴³ Al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam*.

developing curricula that integrate pesantren values with the needs of the contemporary work world, and strengthening student character and spirituality through pesantren programs combined with soft skill development and global insights. This hybrid approach reflects Christensen's concept of 'disruptive innovation',⁴⁴ where traditional models are enhanced by innovative practices.

However, the results of observations and interviews also reveal several areas that still require further development in the effort to integrate tradition and modernity at STAI As-sunnah. For example, in the learning aspect, some lecturers still tend to use traditional approaches such as lectures and memorization, while the use of modern learning technologies such as e-learning and multimedia is not yet optimal. In the management aspect, some policies and procedures do not yet fully accommodate the increasingly diverse needs and aspirations of the academic community in line with the times.

Therefore, STAI As-sunnah needs to continue to strive for the implementation of more flexible policies and more optimal utilization of technology to achieve more inclusive and efficient educational goals, as mandated in the institution's Renstra. This transformation process will not only strengthen STAI As-sunnah's capacity to integrate tradition and modernity but also has the potential to make it an adaptive and competitive model of Islamic higher education at the national and global levels.

The dialectic between tradition and modernity that occurs at STAI As-sunnah not only stimulates thought but also offers deep insights into the reality and potential of contemporary Islamic education. By understanding and addressing the existing intersections, STAI As-sunnah can be an example of how Islamic educational institutions can develop without losing their traditional identity.

Conclusion

This research reveals that STAI As-sunnah has successfully integrated key elements of traditional pesantren education with modern higher education practices, particularly in curriculum design and pedagogical approaches. The institution's focus on Arabic language proficiency and Islamic values, combined with accredited study programs, demonstrates a viable model for balancing tradition and modernity in Islamic higher education.

However, challenges remain, particularly in the areas of gender inclusivity, technology integration, and maintaining the balance between traditional and modern educational approaches. To address these challenges and leverage opportunities, we recommend: 1) Expanding program offerings for female students to promote greater gender equality in educational access. 2) Implementing a structured blended learning approach that integrates technology while maintaining the benefits of the boarding system. 3) Developing faculty training programs to enhance skills in both traditional Islamic pedagogy and modern teaching methods.

These findings have significant implications for Islamic higher education institutions seeking to navigate the complexities of tradition and modernity. By adopting more inclusive and adaptive approaches, institutions like STAI As-sunnah can become innovative models in Islamic higher education, contributing to the broader development of Islamic education in Indonesia and beyond.

Future research should explore the long-term outcomes of graduates from such integrated systems, comparative studies with similar institutions in other Muslim-majority countries, and the impact of these education models on broader social and economic development within Muslim societies.

⁴⁴ Clay Christensen, Michael E Raynor, and Rory McDonald, *Disruptive Innovation* (Harvard Business Review Brighton, MA, USA, 2013).

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