

Reconstructing *Pesantren* Learning: *Kyai* Authority and *Santri* Agency Through Jean Piaget's Constructivism

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ABSTRACT

Pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) are not merely spaces for knowledge transmission but also places where Islamic values, identities, and scholarly traditions are shaped. Amid digitalization and changing educational demands, *Pesantren* face the challenge of maintaining *Kyai* (Islamic scholar/teacher) authority while expanding *Santri* (students) agency. This paper aims to examine the reconstruction of *Pesantren* learning through Jean Piaget's constructivist perspective, focusing on the relationship between *Kyai* authority and *Santri* agency. The study employs library research and qualitative analysis of academic literature on *Pesantren*, constructivism, Islamic educational authority, and learner-centered education. The study analyzes the literature to identify key concepts and their relevance to pedagogical authority, knowledge construction, and *Santri* participation. The findings suggest that transforming *Pesantren* learning does not require replacing *Kyai* authority but reorienting its pedagogical role toward more dialogic and reflective learning. From a Piagetian perspective, *Santri* are active learners who construct understanding through experience, interaction, assimilation, and accommodation. This framework provides a conceptual basis for examining traditions such as *sorogan*, *bandongan*, and *Musyawaharah* in relation to active learning and knowledge construction. However, their constructivist potential depends on how learning is conducted and how much participation *Santri* are given. The study conceptually connects Piaget's constructivism with *Kyai* authority and *Santri* agency, suggesting that pedagogical authority and active learning can complement each other while preserving *adab* and Islamic scholarly traditions. Thus, *Pesantren* transformation is better understood not as a choice between traditional authority and student agency, but as an effort to develop a complementary relationship between them

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A. INTRODUCTION

Pesantren (Islamic boarding school) is one of Indonesia's oldest Islamic educational institutions and plays a significant role in shaping the scholarly traditions, character, and spirituality of the Muslim community. These institutions are understood not merely as centers for transmitting religious knowledge but also as spaces for cultivating the values, culture, and social identities of the *Santri* (students). Historically, *Pesantren* education has been characterized by strong interpersonal relationships between the *Kyai* (religious teacher/leader) and the *Santri*. The *Kyai* serves as a central figure with scholarly, moral, and spiritual authority, while the *Santri* serve as recipients who internalize and practice the knowledge the *Kyai* imparts. This relationship has become a hallmark of *Pesantren* education,

enabling the continuity of Islamic traditions across generations.¹ Research on *Pesantren* highlights the central role of *Kyai* authority in shaping educational practices and relationships with *Santri*.² However, *Kyai* leadership may take different forms, including charismatic, transformative, and democratic approaches.

The relationship between *Kyai* and *Santri* is central to *Pesantren* education. *Kyai* are respected for their religious knowledge, moral example, and role in guiding students. However, the influence of religious authority also raises questions about how students can express concerns and participate in decisions that affect their learning and well-being. Winarno et al. (2025) examine unequal power relations between *Kyai* and female *Santri* in cases of sexual violence, showing how patriarchal norms and hierarchical relationships can leave students vulnerable.³ Similarly, Bukido et al. (2026), in their study of *Pesantren* in Aceh, identify problems that arise when *takzim* toward religious leaders becomes unquestioning obedience and institutional protection mechanisms remain weak. These concerns are also reflected in reports by the Indonesian Child Protection Commission concerning alleged sexual violence and weaknesses in safeguarding practices in *Pesantren*. Although these events differ in nature and cannot be used to judge *Pesantren* as a whole, they draw attention to the responsibilities that accompany religious authority.⁴ The issue, therefore, is not whether *Kyai* should retain their authority, but how that authority can guide students without limiting their dignity, participation, or ability to raise concerns.

However, the changing times, technological transformations, and shifts in global educational paradigms compel *Pesantren* to reconstruct their learning models. Traditional learning patterns focused entirely on the transmission of knowledge from teacher to student face challenges in fostering critical thinking, creativity, intellectual independence, and the ability of *Santri* to adapt to contemporary issues. Modern education no longer emphasizes merely the memorization and comprehension of texts; instead, it encourages students to construct knowledge through experience, dialogue, reflection, and problem-solving.⁵ It is within this context that the relationship between the authority of the *Kyai* and the agency of the *Santri* warrants re-examination, ensuring that *Pesantren* retain their traditional strengths while meeting the educational demands of the 21st century.

The concept of *Santri* agency posits that students are not merely passive objects of learning who receive knowledge; rather, they are active subjects capable of understanding, interpreting, and constructing knowledge based on their own experiences and life contexts. This paradigm shift does not entail eliminating the *Kyai's* role as a source of exemplary conduct and scholarly reference; instead, it transforms the pedagogical relationship into one that is more dialogical. The *Kyai* acts not only as a transmitter of knowledge but also as a facilitator who guides *Santri* through the process of seeking and constructing meaning. Thus, the scholarly authority of the *Kyai* can operate harmoniously alongside the development of the *Santri's* independent thinking. This view is consistent with research that conceptualizes

¹ Zamakhsyari Dhofier, *Tradisi pesantren: studi pandangan hidup kyai dan visinya mengenai masa depan Indonesia* (Yogyakarta: LP3ES, 2011). [Google](#).

² Didi Pramono, "The Authority of Kyai Toward the Santri: A Review of Gender Construction at Pondok Pesantren," *Komunitas* 10, no. 1 (March 2018): 92–100, <https://doi.org/10.15294/komunitas.v10i1.8142>.

³ Endri Puji Winarno et al., "Investigasi Pendidikan Islam Terhadap Kuasa Otoritas Kekerasan Seksual Di Pesantren," *Al Qalam: Jurnal Ilmiah Keagamaan Dan Kemasyarakatan* 19, no. 2 (March 2025): 958–72, <https://doi.org/10.35931/aq.v19i2.4795>.

⁴ Rosdalina Bukido et al., "Victim-Centered Legal Pluralism and Child Protection Governance in Addressing Sexual Violence in Aceh's Pesantren," *Khazanah Hukum* 8, no. 1 (May 2026): 197–226, <https://doi.org/10.15575/kh.v8i1.47268>.

⁵ suyanto Suyanto And Asep Jihad, *Menjadi Guru Profesional: Strategi Meningkatkan Kualifikasi dan Kualitas Guru di Era Global* (Yogyakarta: Penerbit Erlangga, 2013). [Google](#).

student agency as a process shaped by interactions between learners and teachers.⁶ Yoon and Rönnlund (2021) also show that student agency and teacher control are negotiated within educational relationships and institutional contexts.⁷

One educational theory relevant to explaining this transformation is constructivism, as developed by Jean Piaget. Constructivism posits that learning is not merely the passive receipt of information from an educator, but rather an active process wherein individuals construct knowledge based on their experiences, interactions, and cognitive development. Piaget explained that humans build understanding through the processes of assimilation and accommodation connecting new experiences with pre-existing knowledge structures to form new, more complex understandings.⁸ This perspective establishes that learners play a pivotal role in the learning process; knowledge cannot simply be transferred from teacher to student but must be actively constructed by the learner. Keiler (2018) explains that student-centred learning requires teachers to adjust their roles in the classroom.⁹ This also means that teachers can guide learning while giving students more opportunities to develop their own understanding.

In this study, *Kyai* authority, *Santri* agency, and constructivism are understood as three related but distinct concepts. *Kyai* authority refers to the *Kyai*'s scholarly legitimacy and pedagogical and moral role in guiding *Santri* learning. *Santri* agency refers to *Santri*'s capacity and opportunity to participate actively in learning through questioning, discussion, interpretation, and the construction of understanding. Jean Piaget's constructivism, meanwhile, provides a theoretical lens for understanding how learners construct knowledge through experience and interaction, including assimilation and accommodation. These concepts serve different functions in this study: *Kyai* authority represents the pedagogical role, *Santri* agency represents the active participation of learners, and constructivism explains the process of knowledge construction. Their relationship provides a basis for examining how *Santri* agency can develop without necessarily displacing the *Kyai*'s scholarly and moral authority.

In the context of *Pesantren*, Piaget's constructivist principles resonate strongly with Islamic learning traditions, which have long incorporated dialogue, discussion, in-depth study, and the pursuit of meaning. Traditions such as *bandongan* and *sorogan*, for instance, demonstrate the interaction between the *Kyai* and the *Santri* in comprehending religious texts. Although the *Kyai* holds an authoritative position in traditional practice, the learning process still affords students the space to understand, interpret, and develop knowledge in accordance with their intellectual capabilities. Consequently, constructivism need not be viewed as conflicting with *Santri* traditions; rather, it offers a fresh perspective to reinforce a learning process that is more active and reflective.¹⁰

Transforming *Santri* learning through Piaget's constructivist approach also aligns with the needs of contemporary Islamic education, which aims to cultivate individuals who possess

⁶ Consuelo Mameli, Valentina Grazia, and Luisa Molinari, "Student Agency: Theoretical Elaborations and Implications for Research and Practice," *International Journal of Educational Research* 122 (January 2023): 102258, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2023.102258>.

⁷ Junghyun Yoon and Maria Rönnlund, "Control and Agency in Student-Teacher Relations: A Cross-Cultural Perspective on Finnish and Korean Comprehensive Schools," *Education Inquiry* 12, no. 1 (January 2021): 54–72, <https://doi.org/10.1080/20004508.2020.1744350>.

⁸ Laily Mazilatul Magfiroh et al., "Konstruktivisme Jean Piaget Dan Implikasinya Terhadap Pembelajaran Kreatif Serta Inovatif Dalam Pendidikan Di Era Digital," *Indonesian Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies* 1, no. 3 (December 2025): 34–48. <https://e-journal.epistemeacademia.org/index.php/IJMS/article/view/28>

⁹ Leslie S. Keiler, "Teachers' Roles and Identities in Student-Centered Classrooms," *International Journal of STEM Education* 5, no. 1 (September 2018): 34, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40594-018-0131-6>.

¹⁰ Syaichon Ibad, Alaika M. Bagus Kurnia PS, and Ahmad Rido Robbani, "Merdeka Belajar: Relevansi Tradisi Macapat Denganfeodalisme dalam Perkembangan Pendidikan Islam Indonesia Analisis Konstruktivisme Jean Piaget," *Global Islamika: Jurnal Studi Islam dan Pemikiran Islam* 1, no. 1 (July 2022): 17–43, <https://doi.org/10.5281/ZENODO.7030338>.

both critical thinking skills and spiritual depth. Islamic education seeks not only to produce individuals well-versed in religious knowledge but also to build the capacity to navigate the complexities of social life, technological advancements, and cultural shifts. Therefore, students must be given the space to develop independent thinking skills without compromising the values of respect for teachers and Islamic scholarly traditions. A constructivist learning model can serve as a bridge between the value-based heritage of *Santri* education and the competency-based requirements of modern education.

Recent studies indicate that applying a constructivist approach in Islamic education can enhance student engagement in the learning process. Students are not merely guided to understand material textually; they are also trained to reflect, connect concepts to reality, and construct understanding through meaningful learning experiences¹¹. This suggests that constructivism holds significant potential for development within the *Pesantren* environment, particularly in strengthening the role of *Santri* (students) as active learners. However, implementing constructivism in *Pesantren* education requires an approach aligned with their unique cultural characteristics. *Santri* uphold a value system that prioritizes *adab* (proper conduct), respect for the *Kyai*, and the continuity of Islamic scholarly traditions. Therefore, transforming *Santri* education does not mean completely replacing the old paradigm with a new one; rather, it involves a reconstruction that harmonizes the authority of the *Kyai* with the agency of the *Santri*. The *Kyai* remains the central figure of values and moral guidance, while *Santri* are given space to develop their abilities to think, question, engage in dialogue, and independently discover understanding.

Several previous studies share a similar research focus; for instance, research on the evolution of *Pesantren* learning models reveals a shift from traditional patterns such as *sorogan* and *bandongan* toward models that are more adaptive, integrative, and technology-based, while still preserving Islamic values as the core of *Pesantren* identity.¹² Other studies confirm that the digitalization of *Santri* has fostered more flexible learning patterns through technology integration, capacity building for *Santri*, and a shift toward more participatory learning governance.¹³ Furthermore, research on *Santri* transformation in the modern era indicates that their sustainability depends heavily on the ability to negotiate between classical scholarly traditions and contemporary educational needs, including the creation of learning environments that are more student-centered.¹⁴ However, existing studies have primarily focused on curriculum transformation, digitalization, and institutional adaptation in *Pesantren*. Although these studies explain how *Pesantren* respond to changing educational demands, further conceptual analysis is needed to understand how *Kyai* authority and *Santri* agency can coexist and complement each other in the learning process, particularly through the perspective of Jean Piaget's constructivism.

In addition, studies on constructivism in Islamic education have highlighted the importance of students' active involvement in constructing knowledge through experience, interaction, and reflection. Nevertheless, studies that specifically connect the dynamics of *Kyai* authority and the development of *Santri* agency through Jean Piaget's constructivism remain

¹¹ Nofi Arum Aqilla et al., "Relevansi Filsafat Konstruktivisme Dalam Meningkatkan Pendidikan Siswa Di Era Digital," *Jurnal Genta Mulia* 15, no. 1 (January 2024): 36–47. <http://ejournal.uncm.ac.id/index.php/gm/article/view/809>

¹² Edi Suresman et al., "From Sorogan to Digital Learning: A Systematic Literature Network Analysis of Pesantren Learning Models," *Cogent Education* 12, no. 1 (December 2025): 2580776, <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2025.2580776>.

¹³ Sofwan Manaf et al., "Digital Transformation of Santri: Integrating Learning Organisation with Adaptive Learning in Pesantren," *Edukasiana: Journal of Islamic Education* 5, no. 1 (April 2026): 1–7, <https://doi.org/10.61159/edukasiana.v5i1.803>.

¹⁴ Muhammad Saefullah et al., "The Transforming Traditional Islamic Boarding Schools into Modern Educational Institutions: A Systematic Literature Review," *Indonesian Journal of Educational Management and Leadership* 4, no. 1 (August 2026): 335–57, <https://doi.org/10.51214/ijemal.v4i1.2001>.

relatively limited. Although previous studies have examined student agency and pedagogical authority separately,¹⁵ their relationship in the context of *Pesantren* learning deserves further conceptual examination. In the context of *Pesantren*, the relationship between *Kyai* and *Santri* has traditionally been characterized by respect for religious knowledge, moral guidance, and scholarly authority. However, the development of *Santri* agency requires opportunities for students to ask questions, engage in discussion, interpret learning materials, and construct understanding based on their experiences. This does not mean eliminating the *Kyai's* role as a religious authority or replacing established *Pesantren* traditions. Rather, it raises the question of how the authority of the *Kyai* can be maintained while encouraging *Santri* to participate more actively in the learning process. The contribution of this study lies in examining how *Kyai* authority and *Santri* agency can complement each other through the perspective of Piaget's constructivism. Rather than positioning traditional authority and student agency as opposing forces, this study offers a conceptual understanding of how *Santri* can actively construct knowledge while maintaining respect for the *Kyai's* scholarly and moral guidance.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyse the transformation of *Pesantren* learning through the perspective of Jean Piaget's constructivism, with particular attention to the relationship between *Kyai* authority and *Santri* agency. Using a qualitative library research approach, this study examines how the principles of constructivism can help explain the shift from a knowledge-transmission paradigm to a knowledge-construction paradigm that positions *Santri* as active participants in learning. It also explores how this transformation can take place while maintaining respect for *Kyai*, Islamic scholarly traditions, and the religious values that underpin *Pesantren* education. Through this analysis, the study seeks to provide a conceptual understanding of how the *Kyai's* role as a religious teacher and moral guide can remain important while creating greater opportunities for *Santri* to develop independent thinking, engage in dialogue, and construct their own understanding in the context of contemporary Islamic education.

B. METHODS

This study employs qualitative library research to examine the transformation of *Pesantren* learning through Jean Piaget's constructivist perspective, with particular attention to the relationship between *Kyai* authority and *Santri* agency. Rather than collecting field data, the study explores and interprets relevant academic literature, including journal articles, scholarly books, and previous studies on *Pesantren* education, Islamic educational authority, constructivism, and learner-centered learning. The study used Google Scholar to identify relevant publications and consulted journal websites and publisher platforms to verify bibliographic information and access available sources. Sources were selected based on their relevance to the research focus, particularly the relationship between *Kyai* authority and *Santri* agency in *Pesantren* learning. The analysis involved identifying key concepts and themes, examining the theoretical contributions of the selected literature, and synthesizing their relevance to the reconstruction of *Pesantren* learning. This approach provides a conceptual basis for examining how constructivist learning can strengthen *Santri* agency while maintaining the scholarly and pedagogical authority of the *Kyai*.¹⁶

¹⁵ Elina Harjunen, "Students' Consent to a Teacher's Pedagogical Authority," *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research* 55, no. 4 (August 2011): 403–24, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2011.587325>; Marni, Grazia, and Molinari, "Student Agency." <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2023.102258>.

¹⁶ Suwendi Suwendi and Salsabila Anitra Firdaus, "Learning Transformation in the Digital Age: The Role of Islamic Education Teachers in Implementing Constructivism Learning," *Ta'dibuna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 14, no. 3 (June 2025): 148–65, <https://doi.org/10.32832/tadibuna.v14i3.18927>; Indriyani Ma'rifah and Ahmad Asroni, "Jean Piaget's Constructivism in Islamic Religious Education: Konstruktivisme Jean Piaget Dalam Pendidikan Agama Islam," *EduLab: Majalah Ilmiah Laboratorium Pendidikan* 9, no. 1 (July 2024): 19–32, <https://doi.org/10.14421/edulab.2024.91.02>.

The selected literature provides the theoretical and conceptual foundation for examining the relationship between *Kyai* authority, *Santri* agency, and constructivist learning in *Pesantren*. Piaget's theory of constructivism serves as the primary theoretical lens, while studies on *Pesantren* traditions and *Kyai* leadership provide the institutional context for understanding pedagogical authority. Research on student agency and teacher-student relationships further informs the analysis of how *Santri* participate in the learning process and negotiate their roles within established authority structures. The selected sources and their respective contributions to the analytical framework are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Core Books and Journal Articles Examined in the Study

No	Author(s) and Year	Main Focus	Relevance to This Study
1	Piaget (1970/1972)	Constructivism, intellectual development, and knowledge construction	Provides the primary theoretical foundation for understanding <i>Santri</i> as active learners who construct knowledge through experience, assimilation, and accommodation.
2	Dhofier (2021)	<i>Pesantren</i> traditions and <i>Kyai</i> authority	Establishes the institutional and scholarly context of <i>Pesantren</i> and the role of <i>Kyai</i> in maintaining Islamic scholarly traditions.
3	Soraya, Anggara, and Zain (2026)	Implementation of Piaget's cognitive development theory in modern <i>Pesantren</i> learning	Provides a direct connection between Piaget's theory and learning practices in modern <i>Pesantren</i> , supporting the contextual application of constructivism in <i>Pesantren</i> education.
4	Pramono (2018)	<i>Kyai</i> authority and <i>Santri</i> relationships	Provides context for examining the relationship between <i>Kyai</i> authority and <i>Santri</i> within <i>Pesantren</i> .
5	Muttaqin (2020)	<i>Kyai</i> leadership in <i>Pesantren</i>	Helps explain different forms of <i>Kyai</i> leadership and their implications for pedagogical authority.
6	Harjunen (2011)	Students' consent to pedagogical authority	Supports the analysis of pedagogical authority in relation to student participation.
7	Keiler (2018)	Teachers' roles in student-centered classrooms	Helps explain how educators can guide learning while allowing students to develop their own understanding.
8	Yoon and Rönnlund (2021)	Student agency and teacher control	Provides a perspective on the relationship between student agency and teacher authority.
9	Mameli et al. (2023)	Student agency	Provides a conceptual basis for understanding student agency as an important dimension of the learning process.
10	Winarno et al. (2025)	Authority and sexual violence in <i>Pesantren</i>	Provides contextual insight into power relations in <i>Pesantren</i> and the importance of examining authority critically.

This study employs qualitative library research using conceptual analysis to examine the transformation of *Pesantren* learning through Jean Piaget's constructivist perspective. The selected literature is analyzed interpretatively to identify key concepts, recurring themes, and conceptual relationships concerning *Kyai* authority, *Santri* agency, and knowledge construction. Particular attention is given to Piaget's principles of assimilation and accommodation and their relevance to understanding *Santri* as active learners within *Pesantren* education. The analysis involves examining the theoretical contributions of the selected sources, relating constructivist principles to the pedagogical authority of the *Kyai* and the participation of *Santri*, and synthesizing these insights into a conceptual argument.

Through this analysis, the study explores how *Kyai* authority can be reoriented toward more dialogic and reflective learning without diminishing the *Kyai*'s scholarly and moral role, thereby creating greater opportunities for *Santri* to participate actively in the construction of knowledge.¹⁷

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. *Pesantren* and the Authority of the *Kyai*

Pesantren is one of the oldest Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia, possessing characteristics that distinguish it from other educational bodies. It serves not only as a site for the transmission of Islamic knowledge but also as a space for shaping the character, culture, and social identity of the Muslim community. Within the traditional *Pesantren* structure, the *Kyai* occupies a central position, exerting significant influence over the direction of education, value systems, and the relational dynamics between educators and students. The *Kyai*'s authority within *Pesantren* stems from more than just their formal role as the institution's leader; it is forged through a long process involving scholarly competence, moral exemplarity, spiritual experience, and social recognition from the *Santri* community.¹⁸ Consequently, understanding *Pesantren* requires examining how the *Kyai*'s authority is established, maintained, and transformed in the face of modern social change.

In *Pesantren* tradition, *Kyai* have been central figures of authority in both religious and social spheres. They serve as teachers of classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*) as well as mentors who guide the moral, spiritual, and social development of *Santri*. Relationships between *Kyai* and *Santri* are built by fostering and prioritizing exemplary behavior, respect, and religious values as the primary foundations of education. This pedagogical relationship ensures that the educational process focuses not only on knowledge transmission but also on character development, guided by the *Kyai*'s example and leadership.¹⁹ Thus, the *Kyai*'s authority is both personal and cultural, as it is inherent to the individual and tied to the institutional structure.

From the perspective of the sociology of education, the *Kyai*'s authority can be understood as a form of social and religious legitimacy derived from a combination of religious knowledge, charisma, and *Santri* tradition. The *Kyai* commands respect not only for their ability to interpret religious texts but also for their capacity to embody moral exemplarity and represent Islamic values within the social life of the *Santri* community. In the context of *Pesantren*, knowledge and moral character are inseparable elements; consequently, the authority of the *Kyai* (religious leader) evolves through a continuous process of social, cultural, and religious recognition. Thus, the *Kyai*'s authority is not merely administrative but constitutes a form of symbolic and cultural authority rooted in the legitimacy granted by the *Santri* community.²⁰

¹⁷ Anwar Dhobith, "Relevansi Model Konstruktivisme Jean Piaget Bagi Pengembangan Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI)," *Oasis: Jurnal Ilmiah Kajian Islam* 10, no. 1 (August 2025): 13–27, <https://doi.org/10.24235/oasis.v10i1.20712>; Ni Ketut Erawati and Putu Budi Adnyana, "Implementation Of Jean Peaget's Theory Of Contructivism In Learning: A Literature Review," *Indonesian Journal of Educational Development (IJED)* 5, no. 3 (November 2024): 394–401, <https://doi.org/10.59672/ijed.v5i3.4148>.

¹⁸ Samsul Arifin et al., "Kiai's Transformative Leadership in Developing an Organizational Culture of Islamic Boarding Schools: Multicase Study," *Al-Ishlah: Jurnal Pendidikan* 16, no. 2 (June 2024), <https://doi.org/10.35445/alishlah.v16i2.5325>.

¹⁹ Siti Aisyah et al., "Kiai Leadership Concept in The Scope of Pesantren Organizational Culture," *Tafkir: Interdisciplinary Journal of Islamic Education* 3, no. 1 (January 2022): 40–59, <https://doi.org/10.31538/tijie.v3i1.106>.

²⁰ Balya Ziaulhaq Achmadin et al., "Deconstructing the Kiai and Santri Relationship: A Critical Review of Power and Cultural Dynamics," *El Harakah: Jurnal Budaya Islam* 26, no. 2 (November 2024): 367–92, <https://doi.org/10.18860/eh.v26i2.29573>; Devano Hilmy Al-Ghifari, Mokhammad Miftakhul Huda, and Aftab Haider, "Traditional Authority of Kyai and Its Impact on Religious Moderation in East Java Pesantren," *IJIBS* 2, no. 2 (December 2024): 129–44, <https://doi.org/10.35719/ijibs.v2i2.47>; Muhammad Turhan Yani et al., "Advancing

The *Kyai's* pivotal role within *Pesantren* is also evident in the formulation of curricula and teaching methods. Historically, many *Santri* have positioned the *Kyai* as the central decision-maker regarding the texts studied, teaching methodologies, and even the daily conduct of the *Santri* (students). Instructional systems such as *bandongan*, *sorogan*, and the study of classical texts serve as educational instruments that embody the direct relationship between the *Santri* and the *Kyai*. Through these methods, learning focuses not only on cognitive understanding but also on the formation of attitudes and character. The *Kyai's* epistemic authority is reflected in the interpretation and transmission of classical Islamic texts, while pedagogical authority is exercised through the selection of learning materials and the guidance of learning activities. Moral authority is expressed through exemplary conduct and the cultivation of adab, while spiritual authority is reflected in religious guidance and the internalization of Islamic values. These dimensions of authority contribute to the continuity of the *Pesantren's* intellectual and moral traditions.²¹ Consequently, the *Kyai's* authority acts as a crucial mechanism for preserving the continuity of the *Pesantren's* intellectual tradition.

However, the changing times have altered the nature of the *Kyai's* authority within *Pesantren*. Educational modernization, the advancement of information technology, and the *Santri's* increased access to diverse knowledge sources have led to a renegotiation of the *Kyai's* position. Contemporary *Santri* acquire religious knowledge not only within *Pesantren* setting but also through the internet, social media, and various global academic sources. This situation compels *Santri* to adapt in order to remain relevant without losing their traditional identity. This transformation does not necessarily signify a weakening of the *Kyai's* authority; rather, it shifts the form of that authority from absolute dominance to a model that is more dialogic, adaptive, and grounded in the *Pesantren's* ability to integrate tradition with digital innovation.²²

In the context of contemporary education, the *Kyai's* authority is shifting from a charismatic leadership model toward a professional one. Many modern *Santri* are developing educational management systems that incorporate organizational structures, the division of duties, and the implementation of academic standards. While the *Kyai* remains the central figure in defining the *Pesantren's* values and vision, the technical management of education increasingly involves other professionals. These changes demonstrate the *Pesantren's* capacity to uphold traditional values while simultaneously adopting modern management principles. This transformation highlights the *Pesantren's* flexibility in responding to the educational demands of the 21st century.²³

Despite ongoing changes, the authority of the *Kyai* remains pivotal because *Pesantren* is not merely a formal educational institution but also a value-based social community. The strength of *Pesantren* lies in its ability to create an educational environment that integrates knowledge, spirituality, and character building. In this context, the *Pesantren* acts as a guardian of values, ensuring that educational modernization does not erode the Islamic

the Discourse of Muslim Politics in Indonesia: A Study on Political Orientation of Kiai as Religious Elites in Nahdlatul Ulama," *Heliyon* 8, no. 12 (December 2022): e12218, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2022.e12218>.

²¹ Abuddin Nata, "Pendidikan Islam Di Era Milenial," *Conciencia* 18, no. 1 (July 2018): 10–28, <https://doi.org/10.19109/conciencia.v18i1.2436>.

²² Samsul Bahri, Abd Hamid Wahid, and Najiburrahman Najiburrahman, "Digital Transformation in Pesantren: The *Kyai's* Role in Improving Educational Services," *Indonesian Journal of Education and Social Studies* 3, no. 2 (December 2024): 61–72, <https://doi.org/10.33650/ijess.v3i2.3417>; Abdul Halim, Babun Suharto, and Imam Safe'i, "Digitalisasi Pesantren Dan Perubahan Otoritas Keilmuan," *Cendekia: Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 12, no. 1 (June 2026): 45–55, <https://doi.org/10.37348/cendekia.v12i1.941>.

²³ Devi Pramitha, "Kepemimpinan *Kyai* Di Pondok Pesantren Modern: Pengembangan Organisasi, Team Building, Dan Perilaku Inovatif," *Jurnal Akuntabilitas Manajemen Pendidikan* 8, no. 2 (September 2020): 147–54, <https://doi.org/10.21831/jamp.v8i2.33058>.

identity of the *Santri*. This role becomes increasingly crucial as modern education confronts challenges such as moral crises, individualism, and materialistic orientations.²⁴

Beyond their role as educational leaders, *Kyai* also play a significant social role within the community. Their authority extends beyond religious instruction within *Pesantren*, evolving into a social force that influences various aspects of public life (including religious, social, and national issues). This position grants the *Kyai* significant social capital for fostering community cohesion and maintaining social harmony. In the Indonesian context, *Pesantren*—under the leadership of the *Kyai*—serve as strategic spaces for internalizing values of religious moderation, such as tolerance, balance, and respect for diversity. The combination of the *Kyai*'s traditional authority and their adaptability to social change ensures that *Pesantren* remain relevant as both educational institutions and agents of social transformation.²⁵

However, the authority of the *Kyai* also faces challenges, particularly regarding the need for the democratization of education. Modern educational systems demand opportunities for participation, creativity, and critical thinking among students. If the *Kyai*'s authority is interpreted in absolute terms (leaving no room for dialogue) it may hinder the intellectual development of the *Santri* (students). Therefore, *Santri* need to cultivate a new dynamic in the relationship between *Kyai* and *Santri*—one that upholds respect while simultaneously creating space for critical thinking and intellectual independence. From a constructivist educational perspective, *Santri* are not merely recipients of knowledge but active subjects who construct their understanding through experience and social interaction.²⁶ Pedagogical authority also involves how learners recognize and respond to the authority of their educators. Harjunen (2011) offers a useful perspective for examining how pedagogical authority and student participation can coexist.²⁷ In the *Pesantren* context, this perspective invites consideration of how respect for the *Kyai* can be maintained while creating opportunities for *Santri* to participate more actively in learning. These dimensions of authority have different implications for *Santri* agency. While epistemic and pedagogical authority shape how *Santri* access and engage with knowledge, moral and spiritual authority provide the ethical and religious framework within which their participation develops. When exercised through guidance that allows questioning, interpretation, and reflection, *Kyai* authority can support *Santri* agency while maintaining respect for the *Kyai* and the scholarly traditions of *Pesantren*.

Thus, the future of *Pesantren* depends partly on the ability to harmonize *Kyai* authority with the evolving agency of *Santri*. The *Kyai* remains an important source of scholarly guidance, moral values, and spiritual direction, while *Santri* need opportunities to develop as creative and critical individuals capable of navigating global changes. This transformation does not entail eliminating the *Kyai*'s position; rather, it expands the meaning of authority from mere power to transformative educational leadership. *Pesantren* that successfully

²⁴ Azyumardi Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia: Networks of Malay-Indonesian and Middle Eastern "Ulam?" in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 2004). [Google](#).

²⁵ Devano Hilmy Al-Ghifari, Mokhammad Miftakhul Huda, and Aftab Haider, "Traditional Authority of *Kyai* and Its Impact on Religious Moderation in East Java *Pesantren*," *IJIBS* 2, no. 2 (December 2024): 129–44, <https://doi.org/10.35719/ijibs.v2i2.47>; Wildani Hefni and Qurrotul Uyun, "Pendampingan Kader *Pesantren* Sebagai Aset Modal Sosial Dalam Penguatan Moderasi Beragama," *Dimas: Jurnal Pemikiran Agama Untuk Pemberdayaan* 20, no. 2 (December 2020): 175–90, <https://doi.org/10.21580/dms.2020.202.5452>; Norma Fitria, "The Leadership of the *Kyai* as a Conservative Instrument of the Islamic Boarding School (A Case Study at Pondok *Pesantren* Hidayatul Qur'an Banjarrejo)," *Nizham Journal of Islamic Studies* 13, no. 01 (July 2025): 100–115, <https://doi.org/10.32332/nizham.v13i01.10846>.

²⁶ Suyadi Suyadi and Hendro Widodo, "Millennialization of Islamic Education Based on Neuroscience in the Third Generation University in Yogyakarta Indonesia," *QIJIS (Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies)* 7, no. 1 (July 2019): 173–202, <https://doi.org/10.21043/qijis.v7i1.4922>.

²⁷ Elina Harjunen, "Students' Consent to a Teacher's Pedagogical Authority," *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research* 55, no. 4 (August 2011): 403–24, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2011.587325>.

balance tradition and innovation can continue to play an influential role in shaping Indonesian society.

2. Reconstructing *Santri* Learning Transformation Based on Jean Piaget's Constructivism

Pesantren is one of Indonesia's oldest Islamic educational institutions, characterized by a unique approach to transmitting knowledge and values and to shaping the character of its *Santri*. For centuries, the *Santri* learning tradition has been defined by strong relationships between the *Kyai* and the *Santri*, the use of *kitab kuning* (classical Islamic texts) as primary learning resources, and an emphasis on values such as submission, *adab* (proper conduct/etiquette), and exemplary behavior. Traditionally, learning has primarily occurred through the *ta'lim* process, positioning the *Kyai* as the source of scholarly authority while the *Santri* act as recipients of knowledge through methods such as *bandongan*, *sorogan*, and *pengajian kitab* (text-based study sessions). While this model has contributed significantly to preserving the continuity of Islamic scholarly traditions, the changing times demand that *Santri* undergo a transformation to meet increasingly complex modern educational needs.

Transforming *Santri* learning does not mean abandoning old traditions; rather, it involves reconstructing learning methods, approaches, and paradigms to ensure greater relevance to the students' development. One approach that can be used to analyze this transformation is Jean Piaget's constructivist theory. Piaget's constructivism asserts that knowledge is not merely transferred from teacher to student but is actively constructed through individual experience, interaction, and thought processes. Students are not passive objects in the learning process but active subjects capable of constructing understanding based on prior experiences.²⁸ This perspective is highly relevant to the learning needs of contemporary *Santri*, which aim not only to produce students who have mastered religious texts but also to foster the ability to think critically and reflectively, and to adapt to social change.

From Piaget's perspective, human intellectual development unfolds through a process of adaptation involving three key mechanisms: assimilation, accommodation, and equilibration. Assimilation occurs when an individual integrates new experiences into existing knowledge structures. Conversely, accommodation takes place when an individual modifies their cognitive structures upon encountering new experiences that do not align with prior understanding. Meanwhile, equilibration is the process of balancing existing knowledge with new information, resulting in a more complex understanding.²⁹ In the context of *Pesantren*, these mechanisms offer a conceptual lens for understanding how *Santri* engage with religious texts. During *sorogan*, *Santri* can connect a text's meaning with their prior understanding (assimilation) and revise their interpretation when guided to consider alternative explanations (accommodation). In *bandongan*, the *Kyai*'s explanation provides new information that *Santri* can compare with their existing knowledge. During *Musyawaharah*, *Santri* can discuss different interpretations, examine their reasoning, and refine their understanding. These activities may support equilibration as *Santri* work toward a more coherent understanding. Thus, the relevance of Piaget's theory lies not simply in the presence of these learning traditions, but in how the activities encourage *Santri* to interpret, reconsider, and construct knowledge.

These examples also illustrate that the constructivist potential of *Pesantren* learning depends on how each method is practiced. In *sorogan*, the opportunity for *Santri* to explain their understanding and receive clarification can support the active construction of meaning. In *bandongan*, the *Kyai*'s explanation can serve as a starting point for *Santri* to connect new

²⁸ Jean Piaget, *The Principles of Genetic Epistemology* (London: Psychology Press, 1997). [Google](#).

²⁹ Jean Piaget, *Science of Education and the Psychology of the Child* (United State: Orion Press, 1974). [Google](#).

information with their existing knowledge, rather than merely reproduce what they hear. *Musyawah* provides further opportunities to compare interpretations, articulate arguments, and reconsider initial assumptions through discussion. From a Piagetian perspective, these activities can support assimilation and accommodation, while the process of reconciling different understandings may contribute to equilibration. Thus, these traditional methods are not automatically constructivist; their potential depends on whether *Santri* are encouraged to interpret, reflect, and participate actively in learning.

Learning models in *Pesantren* have often been perceived as synonymous with rote memorization and the reproduction of knowledge. However, a deeper analysis reveals that the *Santri* tradition actually possesses constructivist potential through various learning activities. The *sorogan* method, for instance, facilitates direct interaction between the student and the *Kyai* (religious teacher), enabling clarification, interpretation, and the formation of individual understanding. Similarly, the tradition of *Musyawah* (deliberative discussion) represents a form of dialogic learning that allows students to develop argumentation skills and critical thinking.

Implementing Piagetian constructivism in *Pesantren* education can be achieved by shifting the student's role from a passive recipient of information to an active constructor of knowledge. In the traditional paradigm, learning success is often measured by a student's ability to recall and repeat material presented by the teacher. From a constructivist perspective, however, success is determined more by the student's ability to comprehend, connect, and apply that knowledge within the context of real life. The study of *kitab kuning* (classical Islamic texts), for example, need not stop at the ability to read Arabic script; it can be expanded through discussions regarding the relevance of classical scholars' ideas to contemporary issues. In this way, the text ceases to be merely an object of memorization and becomes a source of intellectual dialogue that fosters the students' cognitive development.

Research on the application of Piaget's constructivism in Islamic education indicates that this approach enhances students' active engagement in the learning process. Constructivist principles foster student-centered learning, wherein the teacher acts as a facilitator, creating an environment that enables students to explore, ask questions, and independently construct their understanding.³⁰ In the context of *Pesantren* education, this shift in the *Kyai*'s (religious teacher's) role does not entail a loss of scholarly authority; rather, it represents a transformation from a figure who merely transmits knowledge into a guide who facilitates the students' own pursuit of knowledge. This shift also requires educators to reconsider their roles in the learning process. Keiler (2018) shows that student-centred teaching involves changes in teachers' roles and professional identities.³¹ Applied cautiously to *Pesantren*, this perspective suggests that the *Kyai* can maintain scholarly and moral authority while creating opportunities for *Santri* to explore ideas, ask questions, and develop their own understanding.

This transformation is increasingly crucial given the significant changes in the characteristics of contemporary students. Digital-generation students enjoy broader access to diverse information sources via the internet, social media, and digital educational platforms. Consequently, *Pesantren* is no longer the sole venue for knowledge production for these students. If *Santri* persist with one-way teaching methods that lack space for intellectual exploration, there is a risk of a widening gap between *Santri* education and the demands of the times. Therefore, a constructivist approach offers a strategy to maintain the *Pesantren*'s

³⁰ Indriyani Ma'rifah and Ahmad Asroni, "Jean Piaget's Constructivism in Islamic Religious Education: Konstruktivisme Jean Piaget Dalam Pendidikan Agama Islam," *EduLab : Majalah Ilmiah Laboratorium Pendidikan* 9, no. 1 (July 2024): 19–32, <https://doi.org/10.14421/edulab.2024.91.02>.

³¹ Keiler, "Teachers' Roles and Identities in Student-Centered Classrooms," 34. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40594-018-0131-6>.

relevance by fostering independent thinking skills without compromising spiritual values or Islamic scholarly traditions.

From Piaget's perspective, effective learning must account for the students' stages of cognitive development. Adolescent students generally fall within the formal operational stage—a phase characterized by the ability to think abstractly, logically, and systematically. At this stage, students require more than just the transmission of concepts; they need opportunities to analyze, discuss, and solve problems. Studies on learning in modern *Santri* demonstrate that activities such as group discussions, muhadharah (public speaking/lectures), academic writing, and problem-based learning align well with Piaget's cognitive development characteristics, as they provide students with the space to construct arguments and engage in reflective thinking.³²

Reconstructing *Pesantren* education based on constructivism can also be achieved by developing experiential learning methods. Students (*Santri*) do not merely learn religion through texts but also through social experiences, community service, research, and the resolution of real-world issues. For instance, the study of *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) can be expanded to examine topics such as the digital economy, environmental issues, or technological advancements. Similarly, lessons on *akhlaq* (Islamic ethics) can be linked to the students' daily social interactions. In this way, religious knowledge transcends mere theory, becoming a meaningful experience that shapes both consciousness and behavior.

However, implementing constructivism within *Pesantren* presents certain challenges. One concern is that an approach granting students too much freedom might diminish respect for the *Kyai*'s (religious teacher's) scholarly authority. In the *Santri* tradition, the relationship between the *Kyai* and the student possesses profound spiritual and moral dimensions; therefore, any shift in the learning paradigm must preserve the value of *adab* (proper etiquette and respect). Consequently, constructivism cannot be applied in *Pesantren* education in the same mechanical manner as in general education; rather, it must be contextualized to align with the characteristics of Islamic education. Constructivism in this setting does not aim to replace the *Kyai* but rather to reinforce their role as an intellectual and moral guide.

Furthermore, successfully transforming *Santri* education requires enhancing the pedagogical competence of educators. Teachers (*ustadz*) need the ability to design learning experiences that foster exploration, dialogue, and reflection. The use of digital technology should also be directed toward expanding learning resources rather than replacing traditional *Pesantren* teaching methods. By combining traditional *Santri* values with modern constructivist approaches, these institutions can preserve their identity while producing graduates who possess both spiritual depth and critical thinking skills.

Ultimately, reconstructing the transformation of *Pesantren* learning based on Jean Piaget's constructivism reveals that these institutions possess significant potential for educational innovation without abandoning their traditional roots. Constructivism provides a framework wherein learning is an active process of constructing meaning, while *Pesantren* offers an educational environment rich in social, moral, and spiritual experiences. Integrating the two can yield a *Santri* learning model that produces students who not only master religious texts but also understand reality, think critically, and contribute to society. Thus, the transformation of the *Pesantren* is not a process of abandoning tradition, but rather an effort to reconstruct it so that it remains vibrant and relevant amidst the changing times.

³² Nyayu Soraya, Baldi Anggara, and Zaki Faddad Syarif Zain, "Implementation of Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory in Learning at Modern *Pesantren*," *Al-Insyiroh: Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 12, no. 1 (March 2026): 125–36, <https://doi.org/10.35309/alinsyiroh.v12i1.543>.

3. Student Agency: Towards a New Constructivist Paradigm in *Pesantren* Education

Pesantren is an Islamic educational institution with a unique character regarding the cultivation of scholarly traditions, character building, and the transmission of religious values. For centuries, *Santri* have evolved through an educational model that positions the *Kyai* (religious scholar/leader) as the central figure in the learning process. The *Kyai*'s scholarly authority serves as the primary source of legitimacy in determining the direction of education, learning materials, and the process of internalizing values among students (*Santri*). The relationship between the *Kyai* and the *Santri* within the *Pesantren* tradition is not merely academic; it also encompasses spiritual, moral, and cultural dimensions. However, social changes, the advancement of information technology, and the increasing complexity of modern life have compelled *Santri* to reconstruct their learning paradigms. A significant shift involves the *Santri* moving from being mere recipients of knowledge to becoming active subjects capable of independently constructing, interpreting, and developing knowledge.

The concept of student agency is crucial to understanding the contemporary transformation of *Santri*. Agency refers to an individual's capacity to act proactively, engage in reflection, make decisions, and derive meaning from their experiences. From a modern educational perspective, learners are no longer viewed as passive objects merely receiving knowledge transferred from a teacher, but rather as actors with the capacity to construct their own understanding. This view aligns with Jean Piaget's constructivist theory, which posits that learning is an active process wherein individuals build knowledge structures through the interaction between new experiences and prior knowledge. Piaget asserts that humans do not acquire knowledge directly from the environment but rather construct understanding through the processes of assimilation and accommodation regarding their experiences Jean Piaget.³³

In the context of *Pesantren*, the constructivist paradigm offers an opportunity to view *Santri* (students) as individuals who play an active role in the Islamic learning process. *Pesantren* traditions have long incorporated elements of constructivism through methods such as *sorogan*, *bandongan*, *Musyawah* kitab (textual deliberation), and religious discussions. These methods create a space for interaction among the *Santri*, religious texts, and the *Kyai* (religious teacher). However, in certain practices, the learning relationship is still often perceived hierarchically, with the *Kyai* viewed as the primary source of truth and the *Santri* as passive recipients of knowledge. The constructivist paradigm offers a fresh perspective: scholarly authority need not be lost but can evolve into a pedagogical relationship that is more dialogical, reflective, and participatory.

This paradigm shift does not diminish respect for the *Kyai* as the spiritual leader of the *Santri*. Instead, the *Kyai*'s role can be reinterpreted as that of an intellectual facilitator who helps *Santri* develop critical thinking skills. According to Vygotsky's social constructivism theory, learning occurs through social interaction, enabling students to develop with the assistance of their environment and "more knowledgeable others." The concept of scaffolding highlights the educator's crucial role in providing support so that students can independently achieve higher levels of understanding Lev S. Vygotsky.³⁴ Within *Pesantren*, the *Kyai* can serve as a mentor who fosters dialogue, offers methodological guidance, and cultivates a tradition of deep, critical thought.

The agency of *Santri* in a constructivist *Pesantren* setting is also linked to a shift in how religious knowledge is understood. Historically, *Santri* education often prioritized textual mastery, particularly through the study of *kitab kuning* (classical Islamic texts). While this tradition has contributed significantly to preserving the continuity of Islamic scholarship, the challenges of the modern era require *Santri* to do more than just understand texts; they must

³³ Piaget, *The Principles of Genetic Epistemology*. [Google](#).

³⁴ L. S. Vygotsky and Michael Cole, *Mind in Society: Development of Higher Psychological Processes* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1978). [Google](#).

also connect these texts to an ever-changing social reality. *Santri* need to possess skills in interpretation, analysis, and reflection so that the knowledge they acquire can offer solutions to the issues facing contemporary society.

Modern *Pesantren* are increasingly adopting a more constructive learning model by integrating religious and secular knowledge, utilizing digital technology, fostering entrepreneurial skills, and enhancing students' critical thinking abilities. Research by Siti Nur Hasanah et al.,³⁵ indicates that the transformation of modern *Santri* involves not only institutional changes but also a reconstruction of how students approach learning as they navigate the relationship between traditional *Santri* scholarship and modern academic demands. This suggests that contemporary students operate within a space of negotiation balancing the preservation of their *Santri* identity with the development of new competencies relevant to the changing times.

A constructivist perspective reinforces the idea that the *Santri* lifestyle is integral to shaping students' knowledge. A *Pesantren* is not merely a formal learning space but also a social environment where students interact, forge identities, and gain collective experiences. P. L. Berger and T. Luckmann,³⁶ explain that social reality is formed through a dialectical process between the individual and their social environment; individuals shape society, yet society simultaneously shapes the individual. In the *Santri* context, students do not simply passively receive institutional values; rather, they actively interpret these values based on their own experiences and understanding.

Consequently, student agency should not be viewed as a form of individual freedom that conflicts with *Santri* traditions. Instead, agency represents the capacity to understand, internalize, and creatively develop *Santri* values. Students who possess agency are not those who abandon tradition, but rather those who are able to use tradition as a foundation for navigating change. This aligns with Paulo Freire,³⁷ view that education should liberate individuals through the development of critical consciousness, rather than merely producing individuals who accept reality without the capacity to question it.

Within the new paradigm of constructivist *Santri* education, the learning process must focus on developing reflective, dialogic, and contextual thinking skills. Success in learning should not be measured solely by the ability to memorize texts, but also by the students' capacity to grasp meaning, connect concepts to reality, and generate new ideas. Learning models such as critical discussion, problem-based research, interdisciplinary study, and the use of digital technology can serve as strategies to strengthen *Santri* agency.

Recent studies on how *Santri* (Islamic boarding school students) construct their understanding indicate that their religious interpretations are not formed simply through the transfer of knowledge, but rather through an interplay of *Santri* culture, the exemplary role of the *Kyai* (religious teacher/leader), social experiences, and the students' own personal reflection. This process reveals a dimension of agency in the formation of the students' religious understanding. In other words, *Santri* do not merely passively receive values imparted by the *Santri*; they play an active role in shaping their own religious understanding and identity.

Ultimately, the constructivist *Santri* paradigm offers an educational model that balances respect for tradition with openness to innovation. While the *Kyai* remains a pivotal figure—serving as a guardian of values and a source of intellectual inspiration—students are granted the space to develop as active learners. Educational relationships, previously characterized by

³⁵ Siti Nur Hasanah et al., "Reconstructing Santri Learning Orientation in the Transformation of Modern Pesantren Education at Pondok Pesantren Bustanul Ulum Jember," *IJIE International Journal of Islamic Education* 5, no. 1 (June 2026): 1–14, <https://doi.org/10.35719/ijie.v5i1.2614>.

³⁶ Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1967). [Google](#).

³⁷ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970). [Google](#)

a predominantly one-way flow, can evolve into dialogic interactions that facilitate the exchange of ideas and experiences. Student agency serves as a crucial foundation for the sustainability of *Santri* in the modern era. *Santri* that succeed in fostering students as active subjects of learning will be better equipped to navigate social change, scientific advancements, and global challenges. This transformation does not entail abandoning the *Pesantren*'s authentic character; rather, it strengthens the institution as a center of Islamic education capable of producing a generation that is knowledgeable, critical, morally grounded, and adaptable. Thus, the future of *Pesantren* education depends not only on the strength of traditional authority but also on the institution's ability to create space for the emergence of student agency enabling students to act as intellectual and social agents.

Theoretically, this study brings together Jean Piaget's constructivism and discussions of authority and student agency to interpret the transformation of *Pesantren* learning. While *Kyai* authority provides scholarly and moral guidance, *Santri* agency develops through opportunities to interpret, question, reflect, and construct understanding. The conceptual contribution of this study lies in understanding these two elements as complementary rather than opposing forces. Piaget's concepts of assimilation and accommodation help explain how *Santri* engage with new knowledge and reconsider existing understandings, while the *Pesantren* context highlights the continuing significance of scholarly guidance, *adab*, and religious tradition. This perspective extends the discussion of constructivist learning by situating knowledge construction within the relationship between *Kyai* authority and *Santri* agency in Islamic education.

Practically, this perspective encourages *Pesantren* educators to create learning opportunities that allow *Santri* to ask questions, discuss religious texts, express their understanding, and reflect on their learning experiences. Such practices do not require the abandonment of *adab*, respect for *Kyai*, or the scholarly traditions of *Pesantren*. Instead, they encourage a more dialogic relationship in which guidance from *Kyai* and the active participation of *Santri* complement one another. In this way, strengthening *Santri* agency can contribute to a learning environment that respects religious authority while supporting the intellectual development, responsibility, and active participation of *Santri* in contemporary Islamic education.

4. Discussion

Theoretically, the transformation of *Santri* learning—shifting from a paradigm centered on *Kyai* authority to one emphasizing student agency can be understood as a process of epistemological reconstruction within Islamic education. Historically, *Santri* have operated through educational relationships that position the *Kyai* as the central authority for scholarly, moral, and spiritual guidance, while students occupy the role of recipients and internalizers of knowledge. This model holds historical legitimacy because *Santri* education focuses not merely on knowledge transfer but also on character building, fostered through the *Kyai*'s example and the interpersonal bond between teacher and student.³⁸ However, social changes, technological advancements, and the demands of 21st-century education are driving a shift in learning paradigms—moving from a transmission model toward a more participatory model of knowledge construction.

From Jean Piaget's constructivist perspective, knowledge cannot be viewed as something directly transferred from educator to learner. Knowledge is formed through an individual's cognitive activities while interacting with their environment, experiences, and pre-existing knowledge structures. The processes of assimilation and accommodation serve as the primary mechanisms by which learners construct new understandings through

³⁸ Dhofier, *Tradisi pesantren*. Google.

learning experiences.³⁹ This perspective implies that *Pesantren* are not merely passive objects of instruction receiving understanding from the *Kyai*, but active subjects capable of interpreting, developing, and reconstructing knowledge within the context of their own lives.

In the context of *Pesantren* constructivist theory need not be viewed as a threat to the *Kyai*'s authority; rather, it serves as a pedagogical approach that can expand the meaning and function of that authority. The *Kyai*'s authority is no longer understood solely as a center for knowledge transmission but evolves into a form of pedagogical leadership that guides, facilitates, and directs the students' critical thinking processes. This transformation signifies a shift from teacher-centered learning patterns toward an approach oriented more around active student engagement (student-centered learning). Within this paradigm, students are positioned as active subjects capable of exploring, interpreting, and constructing knowledge through learning experiences, social interaction, and critical reflection. Studies on the implementation of student-centered learning in *Santri* environments indicate that this approach does not diminish the value of respect for the *Kyai*; instead, it fosters a more dialogic pedagogical relationship between educator and student.⁴⁰ Furthermore, the transformation of student learning orientations in modern *Santri* demonstrates that strengthening student agency can coexist with the continuity of the *Kyai*'s scholarly authority through a process of negotiation between *Santri* traditions and the demands of contemporary education.⁴¹ From a constructivist perspective, the concept of *Santri* agency suggests that the *Santri* educational process must provide space for students to cultivate intellectual awareness and critical thinking skills. Agency does not imply boundless freedom that erodes the values of obedience and respect toward the *Santri*; rather, it signifies the students' capacity to understand and creatively develop *Pesantren* values. Critical educational theory posits that learners should be viewed as individuals capable of interpreting reality, engaging in reflection, and deriving new meaning from their learning experiences.⁴² Thus, *Santri* who possess agency are not individuals who abandon *Santri* traditions, but rather those capable of actualizing these traditions when addressing contemporary issues.

Furthermore, the reconstruction of *Pesantren* learning through a constructivist approach can be understood as an effort to reconcile the continuity of Islamic scholarly traditions with the demands of contemporary educational innovation. *Santri* learning methods—such as *sorogan*, *bandongan*, *Musyawah* (deliberation), and *kajian kitab* (textual study)—possess an inherently dialogic character that facilitates processes of interpretation, the negotiation of meaning, and knowledge construction between the *Kyai* (religious teacher) and the *Santri* (student). However, in the face of social change and the evolution of information technology, these methods require development; they must move beyond mere textual mastery to foster the students' analytical, reflective, and practical capabilities regarding the various challenges of modern life. The digital transformation of *Santri* demonstrates that integrating technology does not mean replacing classical learning traditions; rather, it serves as a tool to expand access to knowledge, enhance learning flexibility, and strengthen the students' capacity for independent learning.⁴³ Moreover, the digitalization of *Santri* learning—through the development of learning platforms and innovative methods like virtual *bandongan*—illustrates the adaptive capacity of *Santri*

³⁹ Piaget, *The Principles of Genetic Epistemology*. Google.

⁴⁰ Salami Mahmud et al., "Integrating Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences in Islamic Education: A Systematic Review of Indonesian Practices," *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 12, no. 3 (September 2024): 1017–50, <https://doi.org/10.26811/peuradeun.v12i3.1215>.

⁴¹ Hasanah et al., "Reconstructing Santri Learning Orientation in the Transformation of Modern Pesantren Education at Pondok Pesantren Bustanul Ulum Jember," 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.35719/ijie.v5i1.2614>.

⁴² Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Google

⁴³ Mohammad Hasan, Muhammad Taufiq, and Hüseyin Elmhemit, "Digital Transformation of Islamic Education in Pesantren Madura," *TADRIS: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 18, no. 2 (October 2023): 1–16, <https://doi.org/10.19105/tjpi.v18i2.10535>.

traditions to uphold scholarly values while simultaneously addressing the educational needs of the digital era.⁴⁴ The potential of dialogic learning can also be understood through research on student agency in collective discussion. Chen (2025) shows how teacher guidance can help students identify uncertainties, negotiate meaning, and develop shared understanding during classroom discussions.⁴⁵ Although the study focuses on science education, its findings provide a useful comparative lens for examining how *Musyawah* in *Pesantren* may support *Santri* in articulating arguments, considering different interpretations, and constructing understanding through dialogue.

The theoretical contribution of this analysis lies in understanding the transformation of *Pesantren* learning as a renegotiation of pedagogical authority rather than its elimination. Piaget's constructivism explains how *Santri* actively construct and revise knowledge through their engagement with learning experiences, while the concept of student agency highlights their capacity to participate in this process through interpretation, reflection, and dialogue. In this relationship, the *Kyai's* authority remains important, but its pedagogical expression can create greater opportunities for *Santri* to articulate ideas, examine interpretations, and develop independent understanding. This argument extends discussions of learner agency by showing how active knowledge construction may be accommodated within an educational tradition that places strong value on scholarly authority, moral guidance, and *adab*. The proposed reconstruction therefore does not position authority and agency as opposing forces. Instead, it conceptualizes their relationship as complementary: *Kyai* authority provides scholarly and ethical guidance, while *Santri* agency enables the active appropriation and development of knowledge within the *Pesantren* tradition.

D. CONCLUSION

The transformation of *Pesantren* learning, viewed through the lens of Jean Piaget's constructivism, suggests that the sustainability of *Pesantren* in the contemporary era does not necessarily depend on eliminating the *Kyai's* authority. Instead, it involves reconstructing the pedagogical relationship between the *Kyai* and *Santri* in a more dialogic, reflective, and participatory direction. The *Kyai* retains a vital role as a source of scholarly knowledge, moral guidance, and spiritual values, while *Santri* are positioned as active subjects capable of constructing knowledge through experience, interaction, reflection, and critical thinking. Piaget's constructivist approach highlights that learning involves not only knowledge transmission but also the construction of meaning. The principal conceptual contribution of this study is to explain how *Kyai* authority and *Santri* agency can complement each other: the *Kyai* provides scholarly, pedagogical, moral, and spiritual guidance, while *Santri* actively interpret and develop their understanding through learning. This relationship offers a conceptual basis for reconstructing *Pesantren* learning without abandoning *adab* and respect for Islamic scholarly traditions. This study has certain limitations. As a qualitative library research study, the analysis relies on existing literature and conceptual interpretation rather than direct observation of learning practices in *Pesantren*. Therefore, further research is needed to examine how the relationship between *Kyai* authority and *Santri* agency is implemented in different *Pesantren* contexts. Future studies could employ case studies, classroom observations, and interviews with *Kyai*, *ustadz*, and *Santri* to explore how dialogic

⁴⁴ Muhammad Rofiq Annawa and Abdul Aziz, "Bandongan Virtual Sebagai Transformasi Digital Pembelajaran Pesantren," *Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan* 6, no. 1 (2026). <https://jurnal.stit-buntetpesantren.ac.id/index.php/tanzhimuna/article/view/923>

⁴⁵ Ying-Chih Chen, "Cultivating a Higher Level of Student Agency in Collective Discussion: Teacher Strategies to Navigate Student Scientific Uncertainty to Develop a Trajectory of Sensemaking," *International Journal of Science Education* 47, no. 3 (February 2025): 440–73, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09500693.2024.2333714>.

learning, critical discussion, and student participation are practiced while maintaining *adab* and respect for Islamic scholarly traditions.

E. DECLARATIONS

1. Author Contribution

Lathifah Hanum: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Writing Original Draft. **Gita Anggraini:** Formal Analysis, Writing Review & Editing. **Mustamar Iqbal Siregar:** Conceptualization, Resources, Validation, Supervision. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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3. Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

4. Declaration of AI Use

The authors used ChatGPT to assist with language editing and improve the manuscript's clarity. All AI-assisted suggestions were reviewed by the authors, who retain full responsibility for the final content.

5. Additional Information

Not applicable.

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