

A Critical Analysis of Islamic Education Policy on the Establishment and Administration of Islamic Boarding Schools

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Abstract

This study critically analyzes Islamic education policy concerning the establishment and administration of Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), with particular attention to the Minister of Religious Affairs Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia Number 30 of 2020 concerning the Establishment and Administration of Pesantren. The study employs a qualitative policy analysis approach by examining the substance and implications of selected provisions within the regulation from scientific, professional, and political perspectives. The analysis focuses on several provisions, particularly Article 1, which defines pesantren; Article 4, which concerns the registration of pesantren; Article 17, which concerns the values and principles underlying pesantren administration; and Article 24, which concerns learning methods. The findings indicate that the regulation provides an important legal framework for strengthening the recognition and administration of pesantren within the Indonesian education system. However, several provisions require critical consideration, particularly regarding the formulation of the definition of pesantren, registration requirements, the articulation of Islamic values, and the preservation of distinctive pesantren learning traditions. The study argues that pesantren policy should maintain a balance between state regulation, educational quality, religious values, and the cultural autonomy of pesantren. Therefore, future policy development needs to accommodate the distinctive characteristics of pesantren while ensuring their alignment with national educational principles and the broader goals of Islamic education.

Keywords: Islamic Education Policy; Pesantren; Education Policy Analysis; Islamic Boarding Schools; Minister of Religious Affairs Regulation.

INTRODUCTION

Islamic boarding schools (Pesantren) is one of the important Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia and has played a significant role in the transmission of Islamic knowledge and values within Indonesian society. Its educational function extends beyond the delivery of religious knowledge to include the development of students' character, independence, and social responsibility. As an institution that has developed within Muslim communities, pesantren has maintained distinctive educational traditions while continuously adapting to social and educational changes (Mahmud, 2011; Nata, 2012).

One of the distinctive characteristics of pesantren education is its emphasis on Islamic sciences and the study of classical Islamic texts. Traditional pesantren have developed learning traditions that emphasize religious knowledge, Arabic language studies, fiqh, tafsir, hadith, and other branches of Islamic scholarship. The study of kitab kuning has consequently become an important element of pesantren education. This tradition is not merely concerned with the transfer of textual knowledge but is also related to the formation of intellectual and religious traditions among students (Mochtar, 1999). In its historical development,

pesantren education has also experienced methodological transformation, particularly in its efforts to respond to broader social and educational developments (Qomar, 2007).

The development of pesantren has taken place alongside the growth of formal education in Indonesia. These educational traditions have different historical backgrounds and institutional characteristics, although they increasingly interact with one another. Some pesantren have maintained traditional forms of Islamic education, while others have integrated religious education with general education. This development demonstrates that pesantren are not static institutions but educational institutions that continue to respond to changing social conditions and the educational needs of society (Nata, 2012; Qomar, 2007).

The changing educational context has increased the importance of establishing an appropriate policy framework for pesantren. Government regulation needs to recognize the contribution of pesantren while also providing a clear basis for their institutional administration. In this context, the issuance of the Minister of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia Regulation Number 30 of 2020 concerning the Establishment and Administration of Pesantren represents an important development in the formal regulation of pesantren in Indonesia. The regulation provides provisions concerning the establishment, administration, values, and learning practices of pesantren (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2020).

The regulation is important because the formal recognition of pesantren also creates a relationship between state educational governance and the distinctive characteristics of pesantren. On the one hand, regulation can provide legal certainty and strengthen institutional administration. On the other hand, excessive standardization may create challenges for institutions whose educational traditions have historically developed through community-based practices. Therefore, the implementation of pesantren policy needs to consider both administrative requirements and the historical and educational characteristics of pesantren.

Accordingly, this study aims to critically analyze the policy concerning the establishment and administration of pesantren as stipulated in Minister of Religious Affairs Regulation Number 30 of 2020. The analysis focuses on selected provisions concerning the definition of pesantren, registration requirements, the values underlying pesantren administration, and learning methods. These provisions are examined from scientific, professional, and political perspectives to understand how the regulation accommodates the educational identity of pesantren while positioning pesantren within the broader framework of Indonesian education policy.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach using policy document analysis. The primary source was the Minister of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia Regulation Number 30 of 2020 concerning the Establishment and Administration of Pesantren. The regulation was examined as the main policy document, particularly its provisions concerning the definition of pesantren, establishment and registration requirements, the principles of pesantren administration, and learning methods. Secondary sources included books and relevant academic literature on pesantren, Islamic education, curriculum, and educational policy. This approach was selected to obtain a contextual understanding of the policy and its implications for the development and administration of pesantren.

The analysis was conducted through content interpretation and critical analysis of selected provisions in the regulation. The relevant provisions were identified, described, and examined in relation to the educational characteristics and institutional identity of pesantren. The analysis focused on four main aspects: Article 1 concerning the definition of pesantren, Article 4 concerning registration, Article 17 concerning the principles and values of pesantren administration, and Article 24 concerning learning methods. These provisions were then discussed from scientific, professional, and political perspectives to identify their

strengths, potential concerns, and implications for pesantren education. The findings were presented descriptively and supported by relevant literature to develop a critical interpretation of the policy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The analysis of Minister of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia Regulation Number 30 of 2020 concerning the Establishment and Administration of Pesantren identified several provisions that are directly related to the institutional and educational characteristics of pesantren. The regulation consists of five chapters covering general provisions, the establishment of pesantren, the administration of pesantren, transitional provisions, and closing provisions. The regulation contains 28 articles that collectively establish the legal and administrative framework for the establishment and administration of pesantren (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2020).

The document analysis identified four provisions as particularly relevant to the focus of this study. First, Article 1 provides a substantive definition of pesantren as a community-based institution that develops faith, piety, noble character, and Islamic values through education, Islamic preaching, exemplary conduct, and community empowerment. Second, Article 4 establishes a registration requirement for pesantren, stating that the establishment of a pesantren requires registration with the Minister. Third, Article 17 requires pesantren to develop the values of Islam rahmatan lil-'alamin and to operate based on Pancasila, the 1945 Constitution, the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia, and Bhinneka Tunggal Ika. Fourth, Article 24 recognizes several learning methods used in pesantren, including muhafadzah, muhadharah, munazharah, mudzakah, and bahtsul masail (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2020).

Overall, the results show that the regulation addresses three major dimensions of pesantren administration: institutional recognition, normative orientation, and educational practice. Institutional recognition is reflected in the provisions concerning the establishment and registration of pesantren. Normative orientation is reflected in the formulation of Islamic and national values that pesantren are expected to uphold. Meanwhile, educational practice is represented by the recognition of learning methods associated with the pesantren tradition. These findings provide the basis for further critical examination of the regulation from scientific, professional, and political perspectives.

Table 1. Main Findings from the Analysis of Regulation Number 30 of 2020

Provision	Main Content	Analytical Dimension
Article 1	Definition and characteristics of pesantren	Institutional and normative
Article 4	Registration of pesantren	Institutional and administrative
Article 17	Islamic and national values	Normative and political
Article 24	Recognition of pesantren learning methods	Educational and professional

DISCUSSION

1. The Definition of Pesantren: Between Religious Identity and Policy Formulation

Article 1 of Minister of Religious Affairs Regulation Number 30 of 2020 provides a relatively comprehensive definition of pesantren. The definition places pesantren as community-based institutions that develop faith, piety, noble character, and Islamic values through education, Islamic preaching, exemplary conduct, and community empowerment. This formulation demonstrates that pesantren are understood not merely as educational institutions but also as institutions that have religious and social functions (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2020).

From a scientific perspective, the definition provides several dimensions that describe the educational functions of pesantren. However, the extensive formulation may make the definition less concise because institutional characteristics, educational objectives, religious values, and social functions are incorporated into a single provision. A policy definition ideally needs to be sufficiently comprehensive while maintaining conceptual clarity. In this regard, the concept of religious moderation may be relevant as an overarching concept for describing values such as tolerance, balance, humility, and moderation that are already reflected in the regulation.

From a professional perspective, a clear definition is important because it determines how pesantren are identified and subsequently administered within the regulatory system. A definition that contains clear and measurable characteristics can assist both pesantren administrators and government authorities in implementing the regulation. At the same time, the definition needs to remain sufficiently inclusive to accommodate the diversity of pesantren traditions that have developed in different regions of Indonesia.

From a political perspective, the definition reflects the effort to position pesantren within the framework of the Indonesian state. The reference to Pancasila, national values, and the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia indicates that pesantren are recognized as part of the national educational landscape. Therefore, the use of the concept of religious moderation can be considered as an effort to strengthen the role of pesantren in promoting an inclusive and socially harmonious form of Islamic education. Nevertheless, any revision to the definition should avoid reducing the diversity of pesantren or imposing a uniform institutional model.

2. Registration of Pesantren and the Relationship between Regulation and Institutional Autonomy

Article 4 requires the establishment of pesantren to be registered with the Minister. This provision provides an administrative basis for the government's recognition of pesantren. From the perspective of educational governance, registration can facilitate institutional identification, legal recognition, and the implementation of government programs related to pesantren education (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2020).

However, the registration requirement also raises questions concerning the relationship between state regulation and the autonomy of community-based educational institutions. Pesantren have historically developed through community initiatives and have maintained strong relationships with local communities. Consequently, administrative requirements should be implemented proportionately and accompanied by clear procedures and institutional assistance. The requirement should not be understood merely as a mechanism for controlling pesantren, but also as an opportunity to provide legal certainty and institutional support.

From a professional perspective, registration can contribute to better institutional administration. Government authorities can obtain more systematic information concerning the existence and development of pesantren, while registered institutions may obtain clearer access to government programs and forms of institutional recognition. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of this provision depends on the accessibility and transparency of the registration process.

The concern that unregistered pesantren could potentially face administrative consequences should therefore be addressed through an appropriate implementation mechanism rather than by rejecting the registration requirement itself. A balanced approach would maintain the regulatory function of the state while providing sufficient opportunity for pesantren to fulfill administrative requirements gradually and according to their institutional capacity.

3. Islamic Values, National Principles, and the Orientation of Pesantren Education

Article 17 requires pesantren to develop the values of Islam rahmatan lil-'alamin while being based on Pancasila, the 1945 Constitution, the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia, and Bhinneka Tunggal Ika. This provision demonstrates the state's expectation that pesantren education should contribute not only to religious learning but also to the development of values compatible with Indonesia's constitutional and pluralistic context (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2020).

From a scientific and educational perspective, the formulation is consistent with the understanding that education involves not only the transmission of knowledge but also the development of values and social attitudes. Pesantren therefore have an important role in developing students who possess religious knowledge while also demonstrating tolerance, social responsibility, and respect for diversity.

The original proposal in the manuscript suggests adding the expression *ala Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah* to Article 17. This proposal can be understood as an attempt to emphasize a particular theological orientation and to strengthen the role of pesantren in preventing radicalism, exclusivism, and intolerance. However, from a policy perspective, such an addition requires careful consideration. Pesantren in Indonesia have diverse historical, organizational, and intellectual traditions. Consequently, incorporating a specific theological designation into a national regulation may potentially narrow the scope of institutional recognition.

A more inclusive policy approach would be to emphasize substantive educational values—such as moderation, tolerance, respect for diversity, peaceful religious practice, and commitment to national principles—rather than defining the legitimacy of pesantren primarily through a particular theological label. In this respect, the concept of Islam rahmatan lil-'alamin already provides a broad normative framework that can accommodate the development of Islamic education within Indonesia's pluralistic society.

4. Recognition of Traditional Pesantren Learning Methods

Article 24 is particularly important because it recognizes learning methods associated with pesantren traditions, including muhafadzah, muhadharah, munazharah, mudzakah, and bahtsul masail. The inclusion of these methods indicates that the regulation acknowledges the distinctive pedagogical practices that have developed within pesantren (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2020). These practices are closely connected to the longstanding tradition of Islamic learning in pesantren, particularly the transmission and interpretation of classical Islamic texts (Dhofier, 2011; Bruinessen, 1995).

From a professional perspective, the recognition of these methods is important because pesantren should not be required to completely abandon their traditional educational practices in order to comply with national educational regulations. Learning through memorization, discussion, presentation, deliberation, and problem-solving can provide different learning experiences for students. In particular, munazharah, mudzakah, and bahtsul masail provide opportunities for students to examine issues, exchange arguments, and formulate conclusions based on Islamic sources. Such learning practices are consistent with the intellectual tradition of pesantren, in which learning involves not only the acquisition of religious knowledge but also the development of students' ability to interpret and discuss religious texts (Bruinessen, 1995).

These methods can also be viewed from a scientific perspective because several of them provide opportunities for active learning and analytical engagement. The traditional pesantren learning environment has historically involved intensive interaction between teachers, students, and Islamic texts, creating a distinctive process of knowledge transmission and intellectual formation (Lukens-Bull, 2001). However, their effectiveness should not simply be assumed from their traditional status. The educational value of these methods depends on how they are implemented, the competence of teachers, the learning materials used, and

the opportunities provided for students to engage actively in the learning process. Therefore, further empirical research would be required to determine their actual effects on students' academic or cognitive outcomes.

From a political perspective, the recognition of pesantren learning methods represents an important form of policy accommodation. The state does not simply impose a uniform educational model but provides formal recognition for educational practices that have historically developed within pesantren. This recognition can strengthen the position of pesantren within the national education system while allowing them to maintain their distinctive institutional identity. Such recognition is important because the modernization of pesantren does not necessarily require the elimination of traditional educational practices; instead, traditional and contemporary approaches can develop alongside one another (Lukens-Bull, 2001).

5. Synthesis: Balancing Regulation and the Distinctiveness of Pesantren

The four provisions analyzed above demonstrate that the regulation attempts to balance two important interests: state recognition and regulation on the one hand, and the distinctive identity of pesantren on the other. Articles 1 and 17 emphasize the religious and national orientation of pesantren, Article 4 establishes an administrative mechanism for institutional recognition, while Article 24 provides space for traditional pesantren learning methods. This regulatory approach is consistent with the broader development of pesantren as educational institutions that have maintained their religious and cultural identity while responding to changes in the national education system (Dhofier, 2011; Azra, 2015).

From the scientific, professional, and political perspectives, the regulation can therefore be understood as an effort to integrate pesantren more firmly into Indonesia's formal educational governance without completely eliminating their distinctive characteristics. Nevertheless, the implementation of such regulation requires sensitivity to the historical diversity and institutional autonomy of pesantren. Regulation should provide legal certainty, quality assurance, and institutional recognition while avoiding unnecessary standardization. As Lukens-Bull (2001) argues, the development of pesantren involves a continuing process of negotiation between traditional Islamic educational values and broader social and educational change.

Overall, the policy would be more effective if government regulation were accompanied by facilitation, institutional support, and meaningful dialogue with pesantren stakeholders. Such an approach would allow pesantren to comply with national educational requirements while continuing to develop their religious, cultural, and pedagogical traditions. In this sense, the regulation should not only function as an administrative instrument but also as a framework for strengthening the contribution of pesantren to the development of Indonesian education. The institutional development of pesantren should therefore be understood not simply as a process of formalization, but also as an effort to maintain the educational and social capital that has historically enabled pesantren to remain relevant within Indonesian society (Dhofier, 2011; Azra, 2015).

Implication

The findings of this study have several implications for the development of pesantren education policy in Indonesia. The regulation provides an important basis for strengthening the legal recognition and administration of pesantren while maintaining several distinctive aspects of their educational tradition. In practice, policy implementation should therefore be accompanied by clear administrative procedures, institutional assistance, and sufficient flexibility to accommodate the diversity of pesantren. The recognition of traditional learning methods also suggests that quality improvement in pesantren does not necessarily require the replacement of established educational traditions, but rather their adaptation to contemporary educational needs. For policymakers and pesantren administrators, maintaining a balance between regulatory

compliance, educational quality, religious values, and institutional autonomy is important for ensuring the sustainable development of pesantren within the national education system.

Limitation

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. First, the analysis is based primarily on a qualitative examination of Minister of Religious Affairs Regulation Number 30 of 2020 and selected literature, without empirical data from pesantren administrators, teachers, students, or policymakers. Consequently, the discussion reflects a policy-level interpretation rather than direct evidence of how the regulation is implemented in different pesantren. Second, the study focuses on selected provisions, particularly Articles 1, 4, 17, and 24, and therefore does not provide a comprehensive evaluation of all provisions contained in the regulation. Future studies could complement this analysis through field research, interviews, or comparative studies involving different pesantren to examine how the regulation is understood and implemented in practice.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Minister of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia Regulation Number 30 of 2020 provides an important legal framework for the establishment and administration of pesantren in Indonesia. The analysis of Articles 1, 4, 17, and 24 shows that the regulation addresses three important dimensions of pesantren policy: institutional recognition, normative orientation, and educational practice. At the same time, several provisions require careful implementation to ensure that state regulation does not reduce the distinctive characteristics of pesantren as community-based Islamic educational institutions. From scientific, professional, and political perspectives, pesantren policy should maintain a balance between educational quality, administrative accountability, Islamic values, national principles, and institutional diversity. The recognition of traditional pesantren learning methods in particular demonstrates the possibility of integrating regulatory requirements with the preservation of pesantren educational traditions. Therefore, future policy development should emphasize not only regulation and institutional control but also facilitation, dialogue, and support for pesantren in responding to contemporary educational challenges.

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