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Adaptive Continuity in the Educational Culture of Modern Pesantren: A Comparative Study of Rural and Urban Pesantren in South Sumatera

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Abstract

This research aims to identify the characteristics of continuity and change in pesantren culture and to analyze the factors influencing them. Globalization, urbanization, and the development of information technology are compelling pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) to adapt without losing their cultural identity, yet how this adaptation takes shape in rural and urban settings has received limited comparative attention. This research is a comparative study of the Nurussalam Sidogede Modern Pesantren in East OKU, which is situated in a rural setting and rooted in Javanese culture, and the IGM Al-Ihsaniyah Modern Pesantren in Palembang, which is situated in an urban setting. The study employed a descriptive qualitative approach in the form of field research, informed by ethnographic and phenomenological perspectives. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews with kiai, ustadz/ustadzah (teachers), and santri (students), and documentary study, and were then analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. The findings show that continuity occurs in fundamental aspects, namely the scholarly tradition based on classical texts (kitab), santri manners (adab) and discipline, the use of Arabic and English, the commemoration of Islamic holidays, and the values of sincerity, simplicity, and obedience to the kiai. Change is evident in the integration of the muadalah and national curricula, the use of digital technology, more open artistic expression and dress, a more familial kiai santri relationship, and the emergence of the values of professionalism, critical thinking, and entrepreneurship. The rural pesantren tends to preserve its traditional character selectively, whereas the urban pesantren is more open to innovation but faces weakening control over santri behavior. The influencing factors include the thought and role of the kiai, the objective conditions of the santri, kiai santri interaction, the development of science and technology, and the establishment of pesantren cooperatives.

Keywords: Continuity and Change, Pesantren Culture, Modern Pesantren, South Sumatra

INTRODUCTION

The pesantren is the oldest Islamic educational institution in Indonesia; it grew alongside the Islamization of the Indonesian archipelago (Nusantara) and is recognized as a distinctive cultural product (*indigenous*) (Majid, 1997). It has endured through various historical phases, from the colonial period and the independence era to the Reform era. This resilience is inseparable from the ability of pesantren to build a distinctive culture. Abdurrahman Wahid, better known as Gus Dur, described the pesantren as a subculture shaped by the leadership pattern of the kiai, a body of classical scholarly literature (kitab kuning) preserved over centuries, and a value system shared by its community (Wahid, 2001). Zamakhsyari Dhofier, meanwhile,

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asserted that the kiai, the santri, the pondok (dormitory), the mosque, and the teaching of classical texts are the basic elements that constitute the pesantren tradition (Dhofier, 2011).

Pesantren culture did not emerge suddenly; rather, it was formed through a long process of value transmission from the kiai to the santri. Sukamto explains that the kiai santri relationship is built on a patron client pattern bound by the value of sami'na wa atha'na (we hear and we obey) (Sukamto, 1999). All of the kiai's activities serve as examples that the santri follow, gradually forming a distinctive set of values, habits, and symbols. However, this culture is not a static entity. The kiai's interaction with society, state education policies, and the social changes that have taken place over time have also shaped the face of pesantren culture. In other words, pesantren culture is the outcome of an ongoing dialectic between efforts to preserve heritage and the need to adapt to changing times.

This dialectic has intensified in the era of globalization. Developments in information technology, urbanization, and the demands of national education standards pose new challenges for pesantren. On the one hand, pesantren are required to transform in order to remain relevant; on the other, they are expected to remain bastions of traditional values and Islamic morality. A number of recent studies show that pesantren have responded to these challenges in diverse ways, including through hybrid learning models that combine face-to-face and online religious instruction (Mustofa et al., 2023), the use of information technology to strengthen religious education (Saputro & Arif, 2025), and the transformation of traditional pesantren education models so that they can compete without abandoning their core values (Ilyas et al., 2022). At the same time, state policy toward Islamic education has shifted from a restrictive to an accommodative stance (Kosim et al., 2023), as marked, among other things, by Law Number 18 of 2019 on Pesantren, which opens up wider space for the role of pesantren education in human resource development (Khoirurrijal et al., 2023). In this context, pesantren have restructured their curricula by integrating religious sciences, the national curriculum, and digital literacy (Tanjung et al., 2025), while continuing to safeguard their traditional values through innovative educational management practices (Basori et al., 2023).

Studies on continuity and change in pesantren in fact have a long academic tradition. Dhofier found that traditional pesantren in Java underwent significant changes in response to social change, and that it was precisely through this capacity to change that pesantren were able to survive (Dhofier, 2011). Horikoshi positioned the kiai as a creative actor in social change (Horikoshi, 1987), whereas Ziemek (1986) regarded the pesantren as an agent of community development (Ziemek, Manfred, 1986). Lukens-Bull showed that tradition and modernity in pesantren education are two sides of the same coin rather than two mutually negating poles (Lukens-Bull, 2001). Zakaria asserted that pondok pesantren in the Malay world have remained well established and self-reliant amid socio-political, economic, and cultural change (Zakaria, 2010). Kadi revealed that the scholarly structure of Pesantren Lirboyo has persisted, while its teaching methods, curriculum, and teacher recruitment have changed under the influence of the kiai's views, the conditions of the santri, the national education system, and advances in science and technology (Kadi, 2017). More recent studies confirm a similar pattern. Kiai leadership that combines traditional and modern approaches has been key to modernizing pesantren educational management (Khamid, 2024), while Burhanudin formulated the Continuity-Adaptation-Transformation model to explain how pesantren leaders distinguish between the elements to be preserved, adapted, and changed (Burhanudin et al., 2025). Ubaidillah and Faiz likewise showed that traditionalist, modernist, and hybrid pesantren alike are able to transform their scholarly and institutional foundations without losing their traditional identity (Ubaidillah & Fauzinudin Faiz, 2025).

In the context of South Sumatra, Munir traced the transmission of the Javanese pesantren tradition through networks of kiai and alumni in East OKU and its development into a Javanese South Sumatran tradition in response to the demands of the local community (Munir, 2016). Subsequent studies have shown

that salafiyah pesantren in Indonesia and Malaysia maintain the same core system, namely kiai leadership, kitab kuning as the main curriculum, and the syawir (deliberative discussion) method (Munir & Nor, 2021), while even a transnationally networked pesantren in Palembang has developed an educational culture that accommodates local traditions (Munir et al., 2024). Studies on pesantren in South Sumatra have also begun to highlight the strengthening of pesantren organizational culture based on Islamic values (Rohmaniyah et al., 2026) and models of Islamic educational management derived from the intellectual heritage of the ulama of Palembang (Ramlan et al., 2026). Recent studies outside Java have further shown that alumni networks act as agents of social reproduction that both perpetuate and transform the traditions of their parent pesantren (Musa & Khairiyah, 2026). Nevertheless, these studies have generally focused on salaf pesantren or on a single site. Meanwhile, recent research on pesantren education tends to examine a single aspect in isolation, such as character education (Ma'arif & Arif, 2026), kiai santri relations (Pamungkas, 2023), or entrepreneurship education (Faturahman et al., 2023), so that the educational culture of pesantren has yet to be portrayed holistically. Comparative studies that compare a modern pesantren in a rural setting rooted in the culture of Javanese transmigrants with a modern pesantren in an urban Malay Palembang setting, while holistically portraying their cultural elements, remain very limited. Yet the number of pesantren in South Sumatra continues to grow, from 378 institutions in the 2020/2021 academic year to 543 institutions in 2023, making an understanding of their cultural dynamics an urgent need.

This study selected two pesantren that are both affiliated with the Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor model but have developed in different social environments. This model is known for its Kulliyatul Mu'allimin al-Islamiyah (KMI) curriculum, which integrates classroom learning with 24-hour boarding life (Rosyidah et al., 2025). The Nurussalam Sidogede Modern Pesantren in East OKU is located in a village formed by a community of transmigrants from Kebumen, Central Java, and thus represents rural Javanese culture. The Belitang area itself was opened during the colonial period as an agricultural colonization zone for settlers from Java and subsequently developed into one of the food granaries of South Sumatra (Ilham & Syawaludin, 2024); consequently, Javanese traditions, such as the Temu Manten wedding custom, remain alive and have undergone acculturation in this region (Rohmaniyah et al., 2023). Meanwhile, the IGM Al-Ihsaniyah Modern Pesantren developed in the city of Palembang and represents urban culture. This difference in setting provides an opportunity to examine how a relatively similar modern pesantren model is interpreted and lived out differently by different communities.

Theoretically, this study employs the framework of *continuity and change* proposed by Voll, which holds that Muslim societies entered the modern era by retaining certain civilizational elements while making adjustments in response to the challenges posed by changing conditions (Voll, 1994). This framework is complemented by Giddens's theory of structuration, which posits that social structures are continuously reproduced through the everyday practices of agents; hence, continuity and change are understood not merely as the result of external pressure but also as the outcome of the agency of the kiai, ustadz, and santri (Giddens, 1986). The cultural elements are specified, with reference to the concepts of culture advanced by Tylor (Tylor, 1871) and Koentjaraningrat (Koentjaraningrat, 2009), into eight elements: the systems of knowledge, behavior, art, language, law (rules and regulations), dress, tradition, and values.

Based on the foregoing discussion, this article aims (1) to identify the characteristics of continuity and change in pesantren culture at the Nurussalam Sidogede Modern Pesantren in East OKU and the IGM Al-Ihsaniyah Modern Pesantren in Palembang, and (2) to analyze the factors influencing cultural continuity and change in both pesantren. Theoretically, the findings are expected to enrich the study of the cultural dynamics of pesantren outside Java; practically, they may serve as a point of consideration for pesantren administrators in maintaining a balance between traditional heritage and the demands of modernity.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach, using *field research* with a *comparative study* design across two sites. The ethnographic perspective was used to describe in detail the cultural practices embedded in everyday pesantren life, while the phenomenological perspective was used to explore the meanings that the kiai, ustadz, ustadzah, and santri ascribe to the continuity and change they experience. The research was conducted at the Nurussalam Sidogede Modern Pesantren, East OKU Regency, and the IGM Al-Ihsaniyah Modern Pesantren, Palembang City. Field data were collected from July to August 2022 and were subsequently supplemented by document review up to the writing stage.

Informants were selected purposively based on their involvement in and knowledge of pesantren life, comprising pesantren leaders or caretakers (pengasuh), core administrators, ustadz/ustadzah, and santri. Details of the informants are presented in Table 1. To maintain confidentiality, interview excerpts in this article are identified by informant codes.

Table 1. Research Informants

Code	Role in the Pesantren	Location
N1	Founder and caretaker of the pesantren	Nurussalam
N2	Secretary to the leadership and language supervisor	Nurussalam
N3	Director of Kulliyatul Mu'allimin al-Islamiyah (KMI)	Nurussalam
N4	Director of student mentoring	Nurussalam
N5	Ustadzah (female teacher)	Nurussalam
I1	Founder of the pesantren	IGM Al-Ihsaniyah
I2	Deputy leader/caretaker of the pesantren	IGM Al-Ihsaniyah
I3	Arabic language ustadzah and mentoring supervisor	IGM Al-Ihsaniyah
I4	Male santri, Aliyah level	IGM Al-Ihsaniyah
I5	Female santri	IGM Al-Ihsaniyah

Source: Research data, 2022.

Data were collected using three techniques. *First*, direct observation of learning activities, worship, artistic activities, kiai santri interaction, and the organization of dormitory life. *Second*, *in-depth interviews* guided by a protocol developed on the basis of the eight cultural elements and their influencing factors, while still allowing room for improvisation according to the informants' circumstances. *Third*, documentary study of the institutional profiles, the handbook of the *Khutbatul 'Arsy* Orientation Week, the santri rules and regulations, data on santri and teachers, organizational structures, and photographs of activities (Moleong, 2018).

Data trustworthiness was tested through source triangulation (comparing the accounts of the kiai, ustadz, and santri), technique triangulation (comparing interview results with observations and documents), and time triangulation (Sugiyono, 2021), accompanied by checks of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles et al., comprising data collection, data condensation or reduction, data display in the form of narratives and matrices, and conclusion drawing and verification (Miles et al., 2014). At the display stage, the findings from the two pesantren were organized

into a comparative matrix based on the eight cultural elements to identify patterns of continuity, patterns of change, and the similarities and differences between them.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Historical and Social Context of the Two Pesantren

The roots of the Nurussalam Modern Pesantren can be traced back to the colonization program of the Dutch East Indies government in 1937, which brought people from Prembun, Kebumen, Central Java, to Sidogede Village. The settlers, some of whom were religious figures, established a surau (prayer house) for diniyah (religious) instruction, followed by a Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (Islamic primary school) in 1967. Upon the return of KH. Drs. Makinuddin from Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor in 1992, the institution was reorganized through the formation of the Nurussalam Islamic and Social Education Foundation (Yayasan Pendidikan Islam dan Sosial Nurussalam) in 1993 and the establishment of the Nurussalam Modern Pesantren in 1995 with 25 male santri from 25 regions. The name Nurussalam is itself an abbreviation of Nur Darussalam, "the light of Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor," which underscores its cultural orientation. The pesantren began admitting female santri in 1997, was endowed as a waqf for the Muslim community in 2015, has operated a Satuan Pendidikan Muadalah (Muadalah Education Unit) under the name Kulliyatul Mu'allimin al-Islamiyah (KMI) since 2020, and established the Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Tarbiyah (STIT) Nurussalam in 2022.

The IGM Al-Ihsaniyah Modern Pesantren has a very different historical trajectory. It was initiated in 2002 by Ustadz Syofwatillah Mohzaib in the space beneath a stilt house in the 35 Ilir area of Palembang, prompted by concern for underprivileged and orphaned children who were unable to attend Qur'anic lessons. Support from benefactors enabled the pesantren to acquire its own land and buildings in the Gandus area of Palembang, which is also the site of the Bayt Al-Qur'an Al-Akbar religious tourism attraction. In 2019, the pesantren transformed itself by adopting the KMI Gontor management system and curriculum, integrated with the 2013 Curriculum, and was accordingly renamed Pondok Modern IGM Al-Ihsaniyah. At the time of the study, the pesantren operated a Madrasah Tsanawiyah (Islamic junior secondary school) and a Madrasah Aliyah (Islamic senior secondary school) with 181 santri, 19 caretakers, and 24 teachers from outside the pesantren.

The difference in scale between the two pesantren is striking. Nurussalam has grown into a large pesantren with consistent growth in santri enrollment, as shown in Table 2, and is supported by 177 teachers, most of whom are alumni of Nurussalam and Gontor. This alumni-dominated composition of the teaching staff is itself an important mechanism of cultural transmission, as these teachers have directly experienced the value system they now teach.

Table 2. Growth in the Number of Santri at the Nurussalam Modern Pesantren

Academic Year	Level	Male	Female	Total
2014/2015	MI, MTs, MA	397	418	815
2019/2020	MI, MTs, MA	524	565	1,066
2021/2022	MI, KMI Wustha, KMI Ulya	480	612	1,200

Source: Administrative office documentation, Nurussalam Modern Pesantren, 2022.

Characteristics of Continuity and Change in Pesantren Culture

The characteristics of cultural continuity and change in the two pesantren were analyzed based on the eight cultural elements. The following discussion presents the findings for each element, while a comparative summary is presented in Table 3.

a. Knowledge System

At Nurussalam, continuity is evident in the preservation of the classical pesantren scholarly tradition. Texts such as Fathul Qarib, Tafsir Jalalain, and Imrithi continue to be taught, and Islamic sciences such as fiqh, tawhid, nahw, and balaghah remain at the core of daily learning. The change lies in the way this knowledge is organized. The curriculum, originally in the form of dirasah Islamiyah, has now become a Satuan Pendidikan Muadalah (SPM) with a mu'allimin pattern structured in graded levels. Informant N2 described the difference as follows.

> *"In salaf pesantren, the fiqh text is taken from Safinatun Najah; once one text is finished, students move on to another until it is completed. At Nurussalam it is not like that; the curriculum has already been set. In the first grade, fiqh uses this text and tawhid uses this text, and they must be completed within one year; then students move on to the second grade, and so on up to the sixth grade. So it has been made systematic." (N2, interview, 14 August 2022)*

This shift indicates an epistemological change from a teaching system based on the completion of individual texts toward a structured and formal curriculum, without severing the chain of classical scholarly transmission (sanad). State recognition of the muadalah certificate, which is issued with a serial number from the Ministry of Religious Affairs in line with Law Number 18 of 2019 on Pesantren, shows that this change is at the same time a strategy for obtaining formal legitimacy. Informant N3 emphasized, "We still make kitab kuning the foundation, but we also do not close ourselves off from general subjects, because santri also need formal certificates" (N3, interview, 10 July 2022). However, the integration of information technology into learning at Nurussalam remains very limited.

At IGM Al-Ihsaniyah, continuity is visible in the teaching of classical texts such as Tafsir Jalalain, Bulughul Maram, Taqrib, and Tuhfatul Athfal, which remain part of the santri's routine. Change in this pesantren has been faster and more extensive. The curriculum is divided into dirasah Islamiyah (tawhid, fiqh, akhlaq, usul al-fiqh, tarikh), dirasah lughawiyah (Arabic, nahw, sarf, English), and dirasah 'ammah, which comprises general subjects in accordance with the regulations of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The curriculum is enriched with co-curricular activities such as hajj ritual practice (manasik), the handling of funeral rites, and sermon delivery (khutbah), as well as training in digital literacy, computing, and entrepreneurship. Digital media are actively used in learning. This pattern is similar to the findings of Tanjung (Tanjung et al., 2025) on pesantren that combine the national curriculum with the salaf curriculum and add instruction in digital literacy and entrepreneurship. This finding is consistent with Kadi (Kadi, 2017), who showed that the core scholarly structure of pesantren tends to persist, while methods and curricula are the areas most amenable to change.

b. Behavioral System and Kiai Santri Relations

Reverence toward teachers (*ta'dzim*) is the foundation of santri behavior that has persisted in both pesantren. At Nurussalam, santri display a sense of reticence and deference when walking in front of the kiai or the ustadz. This respect is understood as a form of obedience to discipline, as explained by informant N2.

> *"The benchmark of pesantren culture is that the young respect the old and the old care for the young. The respect of a santri for the kiai, and of junior santri for senior santri, is*

obedience to discipline. When the kiai makes a policy, that policy is not discussed; it must be implemented." (N2, interview, 10 July 2022)

Continuity is also evident in religious observance: santri perform the five daily prayers in congregation and on time, and habitually perform supererogatory (sunnah) prayers such as tahajjud and duha on their own. This pattern reflects a balance between collective orientation and personal awareness in worship (Dhofier, 2011). On the other hand, the approach to character development at Nurussalam has remained relatively unchanged; neither psychological counseling services nor modern non-academic skills training has yet been implemented structurally.

At IGM Al-Ihsaniyah, the culture of greeting fellow santri, senior students, the ustadz, and the kiai continues to be fostered, and every problem involving santri is resolved through the structural channels of the mentoring system. However, there are signs of a shift that warrant attention. Informant I3 recounted:

"From the changes I have observed, the children have increasingly declined, especially in their manners. From the first year to the fourth year there has indeed been a decline, perhaps due to holidays, playing on their phones, and meeting friends who attend junior and senior high schools (SMP and SMA) ... Not long ago, a junior even got into a fight with a senior." (I3, interview, 15 August 2022)

The decline in manners and the conflicts between junior and senior santri signal a weakening of the social integration that should be built through a hierarchy characterized by respect and guidance. This condition is triggered by suboptimal supervision, the santri's open access to gadgets and social media while at home, and the more individualistic backgrounds of the santri. Similar challenges were reported by Nurhaida and Asdiqoh (Nurhaida & Asdiqoh, 2026), namely the santri's strong attraction to social media trends and the clash between pesantren rules and formal school policies regarding gadget use. At the same time, the kiai santri relationship at IGM Al-Ihsaniyah has shifted from one laden with fear to a familial one. Informant I2 stated that santri in the past "were very careful in acting and speaking in the presence of the kiai, and were even afraid just to walk past the kiai's house," whereas today respect remains but is no longer accompanied by excessive fear (I2, interview, 15 August 2022). This shift indicates that the patron client pattern described by Sukamto has begun to transform into a more dialogical relationship in the urban environment (Sukamto, 1999). This finding is in line with Pamungkas (Pamungkas, 2023), who showed that kiai santri relations have shifted from a rigid hierarchy toward a more open and two-way relationship, although the moral authority of the kiai remains central. Yasin and Khasbulloh (Yasin & Khasbulloh, 2022) noted that the patron client pattern does foster mutual respect but also has the potential to engender fatalistic and less critical attitudes; therefore, a shift toward dialogical relations may open up space for the growth of the santri's critical reasoning.

c. Language System

Both pesantren maintain Arabic and English as the official languages of daily communication, a hallmark of KMI-based modern pesantren. At Nurussalam, new santri are given an adaptation period of about six months, after which the use of Arabic and English becomes compulsory, alternating weekly. From the second year onward, texts are taught in Arabic, and teachers are not permitted to use Indonesian except in general subjects. Informant N2 emphasized that "Arabic in our pondok is not merely a slogan, nor is it merely a subject; Arabic is its very spirit" (N2, interview, 10 July 2022). Language instruction employs the *direct method*, which emphasizes the ability to use the language actively rather than the mere memorization of grammar.

Interestingly, when interacting with the surrounding community, Nurussalam santri adapt to the language of their interlocutors, including Javanese, which is the everyday language of the Sidogede community.

This flexibility shows that language discipline in the pesantren is not exclusive but goes hand in hand with an awareness of the need to maintain harmony with the local culture. This harmony is consistent with the religious life of the multiethnic society of East OKU, where religious study traditions such as the Tri Wulan Muslimat NU gatherings serve to strengthen ties among residents across ethnic lines (Nashihah et al., 2023). The observable change is a relaxation regarding the use of Indonesian in certain informal situations, especially for new santri. At IGM Al-Ihsaniyah, new santri are given leeway for about three months, after which they undergo ilqa' mufradat (vocabulary provision) every morning and evening. This pesantren also develops its language environment (*bi'ah lughawiyah*) more actively through Arabic and English language days, debate competitions, and bilingual journalism. Creating a language environment through vocabulary provision, language games, drama, and conversation practice has been shown to encourage santri to use Arabic in daily communication (Setiyadi et al., 2023). The founder of the pesantren stated that English was deliberately made a compulsory language in order to "create a bilingual environment that supports the global development of santri" (I1, interview, 15 August 2022).

d. Art and Tradition Systems

Artistic activities at Nurussalam include calligraphy, trilingual muhadharah (speech practice), diba'an, martial arts, music, sewing, scouting, and the annual Panggung Gembira performance, the entire preparation of which is carried out by the santri and which is staged for the community as a means of religious outreach (syiar). Calligraphy and muhadharah are common traditions in the pesantren world, whereas diba'an is a continuation of the Javanese pesantren tradition brought by the founders. The most prominent element, however, is the drum band, an art form that is not a pesantren tradition in either Java or Sumatra. This shows that Nurussalam not only preserves classical arts but also adopts modern arts as part of its tradition. The underlying principle was expressed by informant N3: the pondok "does not merely teach knowledge, but teaches life" (N3, interview, 10 July 2022).

At IGM Al-Ihsaniyah, the distinctive art forms that have been preserved are pencak silat and calligraphy. Pencak silat is regarded as a medium for cultivating discipline, courage, and sportsmanship, while calligraphy serves as a means of fostering love for the Qur'an and for Islamic aesthetics. In keeping with the creative demands of the younger generation, the pesantren provides space for contemporary Islamic arts such as modern nasyid and religiously themed acoustic music, alongside hadrah, painting, drama, and dance, which are performed during *Khutbatul 'Arsy*, Porseni, Pidato Akbar, and Panggung Gembira.

With respect to the tradition system, both pesantren maintain the commemoration of Islamic holidays such as Maulid Nabi, Nuzulul Qur'an, and Isra' Mi'raj. Nurussalam gives a religious character to the Independence Day commemoration by holding an istighasah (collective supplication) on the eve of 17 August to pray for the independence fighters, followed by a ceremony and inter-santri competitions. This pesantren also accustoms santri to supererogatory worship, such as rawatib and tahajjud prayers, as though it were obligatory, as a form of habituation. The change lies in the expansion of santri activities into modern extracurricular activities, such as computing, journalism, and sports, from a pattern of activities that was previously focused on the religious sciences. At IGM Al-Ihsaniyah, old traditions deemed good have been continued, with adjustments to their orientation and timing after the pesantren adopted the Gontor system. Informant I2 stated, "There are several old cultural traditions that do not violate ethics, social norms, or akhlakul karimah, and we continue to maintain them" (I2, interview, 15 August 2022). A new tradition that has developed is the trilingual Pidato Akbar held before the Eid al-Fitr holiday.

e. Legal System (Rules and Regulations) and Dress

Both pesantren apply strict and tiered rules and regulations. The Nurussalam regulations set out obligations, prohibitions, and sanctions, including prohibitions on leaving without permission, carrying

mobile phones, and smoking, with sanctions that are educational in nature and do not involve physical punishment. The most important policy is the requirement for all santri to reside in the pesantren, which arose from the experience of non-resident santri bringing in outside influences that were difficult to control.

> *"In the past, santri were not required to board, so discipline was in disarray. We also screen the outside influences that enter the pondok. By requiring them to board, we fence them in, so that the discipline we set becomes more orderly." (N4, interview, 10 July 2022)*

IGM Al-Ihsaniyah has more detailed regulations, with violations classified as minor, moderate, serious, and language violations, along with graduated sanctions. Discipline is monitored around the clock by the mentoring staff through weekly and monthly reports. Nevertheless, observations show that the santri's awareness of congregational prayer remains low and that supervision has not been effective. Changes in the system and in management patterns have led to a decline in the firmness of rule enforcement. This finding reveals a gap between written rules and practice, while also underscoring that culture cannot be built through regulations alone but requires role modeling, habituation, and consistent enforcement. This is consistent with Ma'arif and Arif (Ma'arif & Arif, 2026), who identified role modeling, habituation, and pesantren culture functioning as a *hidden curriculum* as the principal models of character education in pesantren. Rohmaniyah (Rohmaniyah et al., 2026) also found that pesantren organizational culture in Palembang is formed through the stages of expression in daily activities, formalization in rules and structures, and internalization in santri behavior, with kiai leadership, role modeling, and consistent habituation as its main drivers.

With respect to dress, both pesantren maintain attire that covers the aurat, is modest, and is not ostentatious. Male santri wear baju koko, trousers, and a peci during religious activities, while female santri wear a gamis, a long headscarf, and socks. Modern formal-style school uniforms, with colors that change according to the day, and scout uniforms at the end of the week have also been maintained since the beginning. The observable change is the shift in female santri's attire toward the jubah (robe), such as the green jubah at IGM Al-Ihsaniyah. The caretaker of Nurussalam interprets the jubah as a reflection of scholarly identity, modesty, and submission to Islamic values (N1, interview, 10 July 2022). From the perspective of pesantren history, this practice represents a new form of the santri dress culture of traditional Javanese pesantren.

f. Value System

The basic values of the pesantren, namely sincerity, simplicity, and obedience to the kiai, remain the foundation in both pesantren. At Nurussalam, these values are expressed emphatically: "Without sincerity, knowledge will not be beneficial. We are taught not to be pampered; eating whatever is available and sleeping on a mat are not a problem" (N3, interview, 10 July 2022), and "When there is guidance from the kiai, it is like a parent's command" (N2, interview, 10 July 2022). IGM Al-Ihsaniyah adds ukhuwah Islamiyah (Islamic brotherhood) and worship as the spirit of the pesantren. The change that has occurred is the growth of new values such as professionalism, entrepreneurship, critical thinking, inclusivity, and technological mastery. The founder of IGM Al-Ihsaniyah stated that santri are trained "not only to become spiritually pious individuals, but also to be productive, innovative, and solution-oriented in society" (I1, interview, 15 August 2022). The old values have not been replaced but expanded, resulting in a layered value system. This expansion remains grounded in the Panca Jiwa (Five Spirits) of the pondok; Rosyidah (Rosyidah et al., 2025) showed that the values of sincerity, simplicity, self-reliance, ukhuwah Islamiyah, and freedom are integrated into both the KMI curriculum and boarding life.

A summary of the characteristics of continuity and change in the two pesantren is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Matrix of Cultural Continuity and Change in the Two Pesantren

Cultural Element	Nurussalam Modern Pesantren (Rural)	IGM Al-Ihsaniyah Modern Pesantren (Urban)
Knowledge	C: the teaching of classical texts remains central. Ch: the dirasah Islamiyah curriculum has become an SPM with a mu'allimin pattern; the use of IT remains limited.	C: classical texts and diniyah studies are maintained. Ch: integration of the KMI curriculum, K-13, digital literacy, computing, and entrepreneurship.
Behavior	C: ta'dzim toward the kiai and teachers; punctual congregational prayer. Ch: no significant change in the approach to character development.	C: culture of greeting; adab toward teachers. Ch: declining manners, junior senior conflict, a more familial kiai santri relationship.
Language	C: Arabic and English as daily languages. Ch: relaxation regarding the use of Indonesian in informal situations.	C: Arabic as the main language of instruction. Ch: active bi'ah lughawiyah; bilingual debate and journalism.
Art	C: calligraphy, muhadharah, diba'an. Ch: adoption of the drum band and Panggung Gembira.	C: pencak silat and calligraphy. Ch: modern nasyid and religious acoustic music.
Law (rules and regulations)	C: strict rules; compulsory residence. Ch: rules tightened as a filter against outside influences.	C: strict and tiered rules. Ch: suboptimal supervision; declining firmness.
Dress	C: modest attire covering the aurat; formal uniforms. Ch: shift in female santri's attire toward the jubah/gamis.	C: formal uniforms since its founding. Ch: green jubah for female santri.
Tradition	C: Maulid Nabi, Nuzulul Qur'an, 17 August istighasah. Ch: modern extracurricular activities (computing, journalism).	C: Maulid Nabi, Nuzulul Qur'an, Isra' Mi'raj. Ch: trilingual Pidato Akbar; strengthening of foreign languages.
Values	C: sincerity, simplicity, obedience to the kiai. Ch: entrepreneurship, professionalism, a critical-adaptive attitude.	C: sincerity, obedience, simplicity, ukhuwah. Ch: critical thinking, professionalism, economic self-reliance.

Note: C = continuity; Ch = change. Source: Results of research data analysis, 2022.

Factors Influencing Continuity and Change

a. The Thought and Role of the Kiai

The kiai is the holder of supreme authority and, at the same time, the "cultural architect" of the pesantren (Dhofier, 2011; Wahid, 2001). At Nurussalam, the cultural direction of the pesantren has been largely determined by the vision of KH. Makinuddin, who brought the Gontor model to Sidogede. His attitude toward renewal is selective yet responsive: he accepted community proposals to open a pesantren for female santri (1997) and to establish a higher education institution (2022), while also imposing compulsory residence to maintain discipline. The pesantren has a mechanism in the form of a study and discussion forum to examine whether a "new tradition" is in line with the values and principles of the pesantren before it is accepted. The outcomes of this forum serve as the kiai's main consideration in decision-making. This mechanism shows that continuity at Nurussalam is not the result of rejecting new things but rather the result of deliberate selection,

consistent with the portrayal by Horikoshi (Horikoshi, 1987) of the kiai as a creative actor in change. This finding also corroborates Khamid (Khamid, 2024), who argued that a kiai capable of combining the roles of spiritual guide and institutional manager enables the pesantren to operate more efficiently without losing its religious foundations. In the South Sumatran context, Ramlan (Ramlan et al., 2026) showed that Islamic educational management that is effective in shaping santri character rests on value-based planning and exemplary leadership.

b. Objective Conditions of the Santri

The relationship between the kiai and the santri is reciprocal: the kiai's policies shape santri behavior, but the conditions of the santri also influence the kiai's policies. The growth of Nurussalam's santri population from 815 in 2014/2015 to 1,200 in 2021/2022 (Table 2), with diverse regional backgrounds, has called for more systematic educational management. The responses adopted include the restructuring of the curriculum into graded levels, the use of the direct method in language learning, and the application of the principles of active, innovative, effective, efficient, and enjoyable learning. At IGM Al-Ihsaniyah, the condition of santri exposed to gadgets and outside social circles during holidays has triggered the behavioral shifts described earlier, thereby calling for a stronger mentoring system.

c. Kiai Santri Interaction

At IGM Al-Ihsaniyah, the change in interaction patterns has been an important factor in cultural change. The relationship, once hierarchical and sacred, with santri bowing their heads, walking with a stoop, and keeping their distance, has now developed into a warm, familial relationship. The kiai provides psychological attention, motivation, and material assistance, especially to orphaned and underprivileged santri, in keeping with the original mission of the pesantren's founding. Practices such as kissing the kiai's hand are still performed but are no longer accompanied by excessive fear (I3, interview, 15 August 2022). This shift strengthens emotional bonds but, at the same time, has the potential to diminish the authority of discipline if it is not balanced by a strong mentoring system.

d. Development of Science and Technology

The development of science and technology has been a factor influencing both pesantren. At Nurussalam, technology is accommodated at the institutional level through the computerization of student and financial administration, an official website, and social media such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram for publicizing activities. However, santri are prohibited from using the internet except during holidays. This pattern may be termed controlled accommodation, whereby technology is accepted for managerial purposes but restricted in the sphere of santri life. At IGM Al-Ihsaniyah, accommodation has gone further. Computer and language laboratories, audio equipment, and online learning platforms such as *Google Classroom* and *Zoom* are used in certain situations. Informant I3 recounted, "We used to prohibit the use of laptops or gadgets. But now we direct their use toward completing assignments, making presentations, and managing the pesantren's digital library" (I3, interview, 15 August 2022). This finding is in line with Mustofa (Mustofa et al., 2023) and Saputro and Arif (Saputro & Arif, 2025), who showed that digitalization can strengthen pesantren learning as long as it is integrated with traditional values. Meanwhile, restrictions on gadgets accompanied by supervision and educational sanctions, as applied at Nurussalam, have also been adopted by other pesantren as a strategy for building the santri's digital discipline (Nurhaida & Asdiqoh, 2026).

e. Establishment of the Pesantren Cooperative

The establishment of the pesantren cooperative (koperasi pondok pesantren, or kopontren) at Nurussalam originated from an internal need to meet the santri's needs independently and affordably. The process was carried out gradually through deliberation (musyawarah) among the caretakers and the board of

teachers. The cooperative not only meets logistical needs but also serves as a vehicle for economic education and the instillation of the value of self-reliance, thereby fostering the emergence of entrepreneurial values within pesantren culture. Nevertheless, the management of the cooperative still faces constraints, including the limited skills and professionalism of its managers, the availability of raw materials, and inactive communication between the board and the members. Similar constraints were reported by Ramadhan (Ramadhan et al., 2024) in the cooperative of Pondok Pesantren DDI Mangkoso, namely limited resources and gaps in managerial and technological skills, although the cooperative proved to support the economic independence of the pesantren. Faturahman (Faturahman et al., 2023) also showed that entrepreneurship education can be integrated into the curriculum, daily routines, and santri projects. This economic factor shows that cultural change in pesantren is also driven by the need for institutional self-reliance, not merely by educational factors.

Adaptive Continuity: The Cultural Pattern of Modern Pesantren in South Sumatra

The above findings show that continuity and change do not proceed as two separate processes but are intertwined. In both pesantren, the elements located in the core layer of culture, namely values, adab, and the classical scholarly tradition, tend to persist, whereas elements in the outer layer, such as curriculum structure, learning media, artistic expression, and dress, are more amenable to change. This pattern reinforces the thesis of Voll (Voll, 1994) that Muslim societies enter modernity by retaining the civilizational elements deemed essential while adjusting other elements. This pattern is also consistent with the view of Lukens-Bull (Lukens-Bull, 2001) that tradition and modernity in pesantren are complementary. Basori (Basori et al., 2023) and Ubaidillah and Faiz (Ubaidillah & Fauzinudin Faiz, 2025) demonstrated the same pattern: pesantren gradually renew their curricula, facilities, and institutions while safeguarding their core values and traditional identity. Munir and Nor (Munir & Nor, 2021) likewise emphasized that kiai leadership and kitab kuning are the core elements most strongly preserved by pesantren, even across national borders.

Nevertheless, the two pesantren display different modes of adaptation. Nurussalam, set in a rural area and rooted in the culture of Javanese transmigrants, exhibits a pattern of selective continuity. Renewal is accepted only after passing through a selection forum, technology is accommodated in a controlled manner, and compulsory residence functions as a cultural "fence." As a result, the traditional character is relatively well preserved and the santri's obedience and adab are strong, but pedagogical innovation and the use of technology in learning have progressed slowly. This pattern reinforces the finding of Munir (Munir, 2016) that the Javanese pesantren tradition transmitted to East OKU has undergone development in response to the needs of the local community while preserving its roots. In contrast, IGM Al-Ihsaniyah, set in an urban area, exhibits a pattern of accommodative change. This pesantren has rapidly adopted an integrated curriculum, digital literacy, and new values, but has had to pay a price in the form of weakened control over santri behavior and discipline in religious observance. This difference indicates that the social environment, whether a communal rural setting or a more open and individualistic urban one, helps determine how the same pesantren model, namely the Gontor model, is lived out. A similar pattern of selection is also evident in the response of Malay Muslim communities to globalization, in which values that are in harmony with custom (adat) and Islamic teachings are accepted, while those that contradict them are rejected (Nilawati et al., 2025). Indeed, even a transnationally networked pesantren in Palembang displays an educational culture that accommodates local traditions (Munir et al., 2024), underscoring that the urban social environment of Palembang demands a capacity for cultural negotiation from every pesantren.

From the perspective of Giddens's structuration theory (Giddens, 1986), both pesantren demonstrate that the cultural structure of the pesantren is simultaneously reproduced and modified through

the practices of its agents. The kiai acts as the principal agent who interprets change and determines the limits of its acceptance; the santri and their objective conditions exert pressure from below; and the state, through muadalah regulations and the national curriculum, together with technology, exerts pressure from outside. This pressure from the state is part of a policy direction in Islamic education that has become increasingly accommodative toward pesantren (Kosim et al., 2023). Thus, cultural change in pesantren is bidirectional: structures influence individuals, and individuals in turn reshape structures. This finding also confirms the categories of internal and external factors identified by Kadi (Kadi, 2017), while adding two factors that are salient in the South Sumatran context, namely the shifting kiai santri relationship in urban settings and economic self-reliance through cooperatives.

Based on this synthesis, the study formulates a cultural pattern of modern pesantren in South Sumatra that rests on four pillars. *First*, creative figures, namely kiai who are able to select and integrate new elements without sacrificing core values. *Second*, a progressive curriculum that combines classical texts, the muadalah or national curriculum, and twenty-first-century skills. *Third*, eco-entrepreneurship (*eco-entrepreneur*), namely the strengthening of the pesantren's economic self-reliance through cooperatives and business units. *Fourth*, social adaptiveness, namely the pesantren's ability to adapt to the culture of the surrounding community, as exemplified by the linguistic flexibility of Nurussalam santri in interacting with the Javanese community in Sidogede. These four pillars explain why continuity in the modern pesantren of South Sumatra is more aptly understood as adaptive continuity, that is, the ability to maintain identity while selectively absorbing new elements. This concept is consistent with the *Continuity-Adaptation-Transformation* model formulated by Burhanudin (Burhanudin et al., 2025); however, this study adds a rural urban comparative dimension, which shows that the social environment helps determine the degree of such adaptation. Continuity of this kind is not stagnation but an active process that requires strong leadership and a strong mentoring system, for without both, openness to change may lead to the erosion of values, as is beginning to be observed in the urban pesantren environment.

IMPLICATION

This study has theoretical, practical, and policy implications. Theoretically, the findings extend Voll's framework of continuity and change (Voll, 1994) by showing that continuity in modern pesantren is neither passive preservation nor resistance to modernity, but a form of adaptive continuity produced through the agency of the kiai, the santri, and external actors, as explained by Giddens's structuration theory (Giddens, 1986). The distinction between a core cultural layer (values, adab, and the classical scholarly tradition) and an outer layer (curriculum structure, learning media, artistic expression, and dress) offers an analytical lens for explaining why some elements of pesantren culture persist while others change. In addition, the rural urban comparison demonstrates that the social environment is a significant variable in determining the degree of adaptation, even among pesantren that adopt the same Gontor model. This adds a contextual dimension to the categories of internal and external factors identified by Kadi (Kadi, 2017) and to the Continuity-Adaptation-Transformation model (Burhanudin et al., 2025), and enriches the study of pesantren cultural dynamics outside Java.

Practically, the findings provide a reference for pesantren administrators in managing the balance between tradition and modernity. For rural pesantren such as Nurussalam, the selection forum that examines new traditions can be retained as a mechanism of cultural filtering, while being complemented by a more open approach to pedagogical innovation and the use of technology in learning. For urban pesantren such as IGM Al-Ihsaniyah, the findings underline that openness to innovation and a more familial kiai santri relationship must be accompanied by a strong mentoring system, consistent supervision, role modeling, and

digital literacy, so that adab and discipline are not eroded. In terms of policy, the findings imply that the Ministry of Religious Affairs and local governments should support pesantren not only through curriculum recognition, such as the muadalah scheme, but also through capacity building for mentors and for the managers of pesantren cooperatives, since economic self-reliance has proven to be one of the drivers of cultural change in pesantren.

LIMITATION

This study has several limitations. First, the research covered only two sites, both of which are Gontor-affiliated modern pesantren; the findings therefore cannot be generalized to salaf (traditional) pesantren, to pesantren with other affiliations, or to modern pesantren in other regions of South Sumatra and Indonesia. Second, field data were collected over a relatively short period, from July to August 2022, so the observations capture the cultural condition of the two pesantren at a particular moment and cannot fully trace long-term cultural dynamics, including developments after the data collection period. Third, the number of informants was limited to ten, dominated by caretakers, administrators, and teachers, while the perspectives of santri were represented only by informants from IGM Al-Ihsaniyah; the views of santri at Nurussalam, alumni, parents, and the surrounding community were therefore not explored in depth. Fourth, as a qualitative study, the findings depend heavily on the interpretation of the researchers and on the openness of informants, some of whom hold leadership positions and may tend to present the institution favorably. Although source, technique, and time triangulation were applied, these limitations should be taken into account when interpreting the findings.

FUTURE AND SUGGESTION RESEARCH

Building on these limitations, future research is recommended to broaden the scope of inquiry by comparing modern and salaf pesantren, as well as pesantren with different affiliations, in various regions of South Sumatra and Indonesia, so that the concept of adaptive continuity can be tested in more diverse contexts. Longitudinal studies are also needed to capture how the cultural patterns of pesantren change over time, particularly in response to the accelerating use of digital technology and changes in national education policy. Future researchers may also employ mixed or quantitative methods to measure the degree of adaptation in each cultural element and to examine the relative influence of the factors identified in this study. In addition, further studies should give greater voice to santri, alumni, parents, and the surrounding community, and should examine more specifically the effectiveness of mentoring models, santri digital discipline, and the management of pesantren cooperatives as drivers of cultural change.

For practitioners, it is suggested that pesantren administrators strengthen the mentoring system, role modeling, and the santri's digital literacy so that openness to innovation does not weaken adab and discipline; that rural pesantren gradually open space for pedagogical innovation and the use of technology in learning without abandoning their mechanisms of cultural selection; and that policymakers support training in management, entrepreneurship, and technology for the managers of pesantren cooperatives so that they can function optimally as a vehicle for economic education and institutional self-reliance.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the culture of modern pesantren in South Sumatra develops through a pattern of adaptive continuity. Continuity occurs in fundamental elements, namely the scholarly tradition based on classical texts, adab and ta'dzim toward the kiai and teachers, the use of Arabic and English, the commemoration of Islamic holidays, strict rules and regulations, attire that covers the aurat, and the values of

sincerity, simplicity, and obedience. Change occurs in curriculum structure (from dirasah Islamiyah to an SPM with a mu'allimin pattern and the integration of the national curriculum), the use of digital technology, artistic expression and dress, a more familial kiai santri relationship, and the emergence of the values of professionalism, critical thinking, and entrepreneurship. The rural pesantren (Nurussalam) tends to preserve its traditional character through rigorous selection, whereas the urban pesantren (IGM Al-Ihsaniyah) is more open to innovation but faces a decline in santri manners and discipline owing to weak supervision.

The factors influencing this continuity and change are the thought and role of the kiai, the objective conditions of the santri, patterns of kiai santri interaction, the development of science and technology, and the establishment of the pesantren cooperative. These factors operate simultaneously from within and outside the pesantren, with the kiai serving as the principal agent who determines the limits of acceptable change.

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