



200 Years of *Pesantren*: Tradition, Reform, and the Institutional Trajectory of *Pesantren* Tremas

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Abstract

Pesantren Tremas has endured for more than 200 years. Amid dynamic socio-historical changes, the characteristics of a traditional *pesantren* remain firmly embedded as its distinctive identity. On this basis, this study aims to explore the traditions, reforms, and institutional trajectory of *Pesantren* Tremas. The study employs qualitative approach using a historical case study design, with the unit of analysis focusing on *Pesantren* Tremas, an Islamic educational institution that has developed historically. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis combined with historical analysis to identify transmission of knowledge and institutional development processes over a long period of time. The findings reveal that *Pesantren* Tremas responds to the challenges of changing times by maintaining consistency in its modes of knowledge transmission, such that this traditional legacy is not merely a form of unreflective repetition, but rather functions as a foundation and framework that ultimately shapes the *pesantren's* epistemology. *Pesantren* Tremas does not exhibit resistance to modernity. Instead, it serves as an example of how a traditional *pesantren* can endure in an increasingly interconnected era without losing its identity as a *salafiyah pesantren*. Furthermore, the openness demonstrated by the *pesantren* represents a form of responsiveness that does not isolate itself from emerging educational systems, whether introduced by the state or driven by broader global developments. This study contributes to the scholarship on Islamic education by offering a historically grounded and conceptually robust account of how traditional *pesantren* sustain epistemic continuity while engaging institutional change, thereby providing a critical reference for understanding the resilience and adaptability of *salafiyah* educational institutions in contemporary contexts.

Keywords: Tradition, Reform, Institutional Trajectory, *Pesantren* Tremas

Abstrak

Pesantren Tremas telah bertahan selama lebih dari 200 tahun, namun di tengah perkembangan zaman yang dinamis, karakteristik *pesantren* tradisional tetap melekat sebagai ciri khasnya. Berdasarkan hal ini, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi tradisi, reformasi, dan trajektori institusional *Pesantren* Tremas. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain *historical-case study* dimana unit of analysisnya berfokus pada *pesantren* Tremas sebagai institusi pendidikan Islam yang berkembang secara historis. Data dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik yang dikombinasikan dengan analisis historis untuk menemukan transmisi keilmuan dan proses

perkembangan kelembagaan dalam lintasan waktu yang panjang. Penelitian ini berhasil mengungkap bahwa Pesantren Tremas merespons tantangan zaman yang berubah dengan mempertahankan konsistensi dalam konteks transmisi pengetahuan sehingga warisan tradisional ini tidak sekadar pengulangan yang tidak bermakna, tetapi telah menjadi bantalan dan kerangka yang pada akhirnya membentuk epistemologi pesantren. Pesantren Tremas juga tidak menunjukkan penolakan terhadap zaman, melainkan menjadi contoh bagaimana pesantren tradisional bertahan di era yang saling terkait tanpa kehilangan identitasnya sebagai pesantren salafiyah. Selain itu, keterbukaan yang ditunjukkan oleh pesantren merupakan bentuk respons yang tidak menutup diri terhadap bentuk-bentuk sistem pendidikan baru, baik dari negara maupun perkembangan global. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada kajian pendidikan Islam dengan menghadirkan analisis yang berlandaskan sejarah dan kokoh secara konseptual mengenai bagaimana pesantren tradisional mempertahankan kesinambungan epistemik sekaligus bernegosiasi dengan perubahan kelembagaan, sehingga menyediakan rujukan kritis untuk memahami ketahanan dan adaptabilitas institusi pendidikan salafiyah dalam konteks kontemporer.

Kata Kunci: Tradisi, Reformasi, Trajektori Kelembagaan, Pesantren Tremas

INTRODUCTION

The *pesantren* system has emerged as an alternative model for fostering human capital development (Lin et al., 2025). This role positions *pesantren* as central institutions in producing knowledgeable and ethically grounded generations. However, alongside strong public trust in *pesantren* as centers of noble knowledge transmission (Rahmawati et al., 2023), skepticism toward these institutions has also emerged. Some critics argue that *pesantren* hinder children's development, while others associate certain *pesantren* with the proliferation of radical or conservative ideologies (Ayubi & Masruri, 2025; Fatah et al., 2025; Utama & Salim, 2024). In 2022 reports issued by the National Counter-Terrorism Agency (BNPT) alleged that several *pesantren* were affiliated with terrorist networks; however, these claims were later shown to be based on misinterpretations and incomplete assessments (Hergianasari et al., 2024). In reality, *pesantren* possess distinctive characteristics and internal logics that cannot be reduced to such generalizations. Unfortunately, sensationalized narratives have contributed to the stigmatization of *pesantren*, resulting in illogical and sweeping assumptions about these institutions as a whole (Ilyas et al., 2022; Miftahuddin et al., 2024; Triana et al., 2025).

Against this backdrop, the continued existence of long-established *pesantren* raises important questions regarding how such institutions have managed to survive amid the hegemony of modern development and the rapidly shifting challenges of contemporary society. One of the oldest *pesantren* in Indonesia that has demonstrated remarkable resilience is *pesantren Tremas* in Pacitan, which has endured for more than 200 years as of 2025. Throughout its long history, *pesantren Tremas* has produced prominent Islamic scholars who have significantly influenced Islamic thought and education in Indonesia (MFA, 2025). The survival of a *pesantren* for over two centuries thus warrants deeper scholarly inquiry to uncover the institutional dynamics, historical significance, and enduring values embedded within it.

Many studies have been conducted on *Pesantren Tremas* in Pacitan. Previous studies have discussed the network of ulama, with a focus on Sheikh Mahfudz (Ratnasari, 2019). *Pesantren Tremas* has also been reviewed in terms of its *mu'adalah* program (Hidayat & Wahib, 2023; Muslih et al., 2020), women's empowerment at *Pesantren Tremas* (Ratnasari, 2016). Other studies also examine it historically and find that the Tremas boarding school has been a

resilient institution since before independence and after the PKI uprising (Ahfadh, 2015; Amrul Hakim, 2003). Then, the Tremas Islamic boarding school has also been studied from the perspective of modernization and culture (Muazim, n.d.; Mukodi, 2014; Mukodi et al., 2016). Furthermore, institutional reform has been highlighted with the development of the *mu'adalah* curriculum, character building, Islamic moderation, nationalism, and Pancasila values (Habibullah, 2020; Mukodi, 2020; Muslih et al., 2020; Shaifudin & Nafi'i, 2019; Solikhah, 2022; Zuhairi, 2020). Then, several studies also explored governance and socio-economic dimensions (S. Hadi, 2022; Ilmi, 2022). This means that various studies have examined Tremas Islamic boarding schools from various aspects and dimensions.

Although several studies have examined the transformation and reform of *pesantren* Tremas in Indonesia, these studies generally focus on structural adaptation, curriculum development, and educational policy within a contemporary timeframe. Research that approaches *pesantren* as long-term historical institutions, with particular attention to epistemic continuity and institutional trajectories, remains limited. Moreover, *pesantren* traditions in the existing literature are often understood as symbolic legacies or cultural identities rather than as active epistemological frameworks that shape institutional responses to change. Therefore, this study addresses this gap by exploring how *Pesantren* Tremas, as a *salafiyah pesantren* with a history spanning more than two centuries, sustains knowledge transmission while simultaneously negotiating institutional change across a long historical trajectory.

The position of this research is not merely to complement previous studies but to provide a broader perspective in uncovering the aspects that have enabled *Pesantren* Tremas to remain relevant to this day. This research rigorously explores the classical scholarly traditions upheld by the *pesantren's* authorities as the identity and characteristics of *Pesantren* Tremas. Building on this uniqueness, this research formulates the following research questions: How are the scholarly traditions upheld at *Pesantren* Tremas? Furthermore, how does *Pesantren* Tremas implement reforms within the *pesantren*? How is the institutional trajectory of *Pesantren* Tremas characterized in terms of continuity and change within its educational practices? Through these research questions, this study employs an analytical lens to examine the processes of knowledge transmission within the *pesantren* tradition, to uncover the patterns of relationships between *kyai* and *santri*, and to analyze the position of classical texts (*kitab kuning*) within the *pesantren* educational system. Furthermore, this study aims to reveal how *Pesantren* Tremas responds to the increasingly dynamic and diverse challenges of the contemporary era, particularly within an institutional context. In addition, the study explores various forms of reform undertaken in response to demands for formalization, alternative educational models, and institutional expansion, positioning the *pesantren* as a catalyst in shaping emerging trends in Islamic higher education.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach using a historical case study design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Widdersheim, 2018; Yin, 2012). The object of the research was *Pesantren* Tremas, located in Pacitan, East Java. The selection of the research object took into account the value of the *pesantren*, which has been in existence for more than 200 years, and the *pesantren* also demonstrates a long-standing continuity. *Pesantren* Tremas has maintained its

traditional learning style for more than two centuries while remaining open to developments of the times. In addition, its educational levels have a uniqueness rarely found in other *pesantren*, whereby, before entering *tsananiyah*, *santri* are placed in preparatory classes called *isti'dad* classes and *Mumtaẓ awal* and *Mumtaẓ sani* classes, intended to prepare prospective *santri* for the *Aliyah* level.

Furthermore, the number of *kitab kuning* studied is extensive and varied. For example, *Manhaj Dzaw Nadẓar*, *Syarab Waraqat*, *Tafsir Ayat Al Hakam*, *Al Irfan fi ulumil Qur'an*, and *Jawahir AlMaknun* are books commonly studied at the university level, but at Tremas they are taught at the high school level. Therefore, case study-based research is a relevant choice for exploring the unit of analysis of this study, which views *Pesantren* Tremas as an Islamic educational institution that has developed historically. The analysis is carried out through the practice of knowledge transmission, pedagogical structure, and the process of institutional development over a long period of time.

The instruments for data collection were developed as guidelines for interviews, observation, and documentary studies to identify historical data and institutional archives (Elangovan & Sundaravel, 2021). The data collection process was carried out through interviews, observation, and documentation. 16 informants were selected purposively based on their important positions at *Pesantren* Tremas and the relevant experiences they have in the *pesantren* (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Lim, 2024; Maxwell, 2009). Informants represented diverse institutional positions, including *pesantren* leadership (*kyai*), senior teachers, curriculum administrators, alumni from different generations, and active educators. This diversity ensured the inclusion of multiple perspectives on the *pesantren's* historical and contemporary development. Observation has been conducted directly at *Pesantren* Tremas, located in Pacitan. Additionally, the data collection process through documentation was conducted to verify the data and address any data gaps. The study was conducted from June to December 2025 using an iterative process.

The informants involved in providing information related to research data. Each informant was interviewed in their institutional capacity, and the data collected focused on factual descriptions of the institution's history, organizational arrangements, and educational practices relevant to the development of *Pesantren* Tremas. The list of informants includes individuals with various roles and backgrounds, ensuring the credibility of the data obtained. Detailed information about the informants involved in this study can be accessed at <https://bit.ly/Informan-details>.

The data found were analyzed using a thematic and historical-analytical approach that involved several processes, including transcription and familiarization of the data. Then, keyword selection is achieved by identifying recurring patterns, terms, or visual elements such as history, transmission of knowledge, reform, *pesantren* traditions, institutional development, and organizational continuity or change over time. The next step is the coding and theme development. Furthermore, the conceptualization step involved a process to understand and define several concepts that emerged from the data. Then, the culmination step involves developing a representation of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Naeem et al., 2023).

To obtain credibility and truth worthiness of the research, this research was conducted carefully and the collected data were triangulated through several approaches, such as methods, sources, and time (Boeri, 2007). Furthermore, member checking is also conducted as a data confirmation technique to prevent misinterpretation when presenting research findings (Given, 2008; Barbour, 2014). The iterative interaction among thematic coding, data triangulation, and member checking helps achieve data saturation. Because these three strategies work simultaneously to build data coherence that reflects the institutional trajectory of *Pesantren* Tremas over more than two centuries, while ensuring that the resulting analysis is contextual and grounded in the *pesantren's* actual practices.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

The History and Scholarly Traditions of *Pesantren* Tremas

After studying in Mecca, *Kyai* Abdul Mannan established *Pesantren* Tremas in 1820. It has existed for more than 200 years, as explained by informant FHD (2025): "*Pesantren* Tremas has been running for about 200 years. During its history, it had experienced a period of vacuum, but later on it became increasingly prominent until now." A tradition that has been preserved is *salafiyah* as a characteristic of the *pesantren*, as stated that "*Salafiyah* must be preserved, but it does not mean that it cannot change. The *pesantren* teaches *kutub al-mu'tabar* and other *kitab kuning*." (LHD, 2025). The main orientation of the educational process at *Pesantren* Tremas is to produce a generation of *Ahlul Khair*, as stated by FHD (2025), "The curriculum here prioritizes preparing students to be *ahlul khair*. The indicator of goodness is seen in the students' behavior towards the *kiai*, teachers, guests, and all actions and words spoken by the students."

At a time when Indonesia had not yet achieved independence and access to education was limited, *Kiai* Abdul Mannan took the initiative to preserve the transmission of knowledge. Drawing on the intellectual traditions of Muslim scholars in Mecca, *Kiai* Abdul Mannan brought classical Muslim intellectual traditions and knowledge to shape the character of *pesantren* Tremas (Mukodi, 2020). The learning style developed at that time was the *talaqqi, musyafahah* method, which involved intimate meetings between students and their teachers. At that time, *Kiai* Abdul Mannan's students learned directly by meeting with their teachers in person (PondokTremas.com, 2025). Thus, there was no classroom-based learning system as implemented today (MFA, 2025).

Alongside the *pesantren* style that employs the *talaqqi, musyafahah* method, etiquette, morality, and ethics are highly valued in the acquisition of knowledge (MFA, 2025). This signifies a process of knowledge transmission accompanied by strong etiquette within the scholarly authority that emphasizes scholarly lineages. This learning system was the forerunner of the *Pesantren* Tremas learning. As seen in the traditions of *sorogan* and *bandongan*, the tradition of reading classical texts by renowned scholars from the Middle East and the intellectual works of Tremas itself is maintained (LHD, 2025). Furthermore, "At that time, many *santri* (student) began to study under *Kiai* Abdul Mannan, coming from various places, including Madura and other areas." The learning culture is also influenced by the al-Azhar

system, as reinforced by the statement from MFA (2025), which shows that “The learning style is inseparable from that of Al-Azhar, which prioritizes the *talaqqi* system, *musyafahah* between students and teachers, so that students and teachers face each other, which is now called *sorogan*.” The classical texts studied by students at *Pesantren* Tremas include not only those of classical Muslim intellectuals but also local texts. This was revealed by MM (2025), who said, “Yes, since long ago, we have continued to use classical *kitab kuning*, mostly the works of scholars from the archipelago, Indonesian scholars, and some from the Middle East, but mostly from the archipelago.”

One of them is the work of Sheikh Mahfudz at-Tarmasi, who is legendary for having followed in the footsteps of *Kiai* Abdul Mannan to study abroad in Mecca (Ratnasari, 2019). These works encompass various fields of knowledge, including Fiqh and Ushul Fiqh, Ulumul Hadith, Qira’at, and Sanad (Maknun et al., 2022). Despite its age, it remains a text with theological value and a scholarly legacy that has endured through the ages. The *pesantren*’s authority determines religious education at the *pesantren*, so it is not bound by the formal system established by the state. This can be seen from the academic calendar used, which employs the Hijri calendar and a four-month academic term system (*caturwulan*), rather than the semester system used by most schools (The Document of Pondok Tremas, 2025). *Santri* are taught to master foundational sciences such as grammar, morphology, and rhetoric, which are among the primary objectives of the educational process (MM, 2025). Additionally, students study Fiqh, Tafsir, and Tasawuf through classical texts adopted by the *pesantren*. The *kitab kuning* studied at various levels of *pesantren* education can be found via the following link: https://bit.ly/Kitabkitab_diPesantrenTremas (Document of Pesantren Tremas, 2025).

The intellectual network of teachers at *Pesantren Tremas*, including *Kiai* Abdul Mannan and Syekh Mahfudz, is widely recognized as a community of local scholars (*Ulama Jawi*) who are directly connected to classical scholars in the Middle East. As a result, this excellence became known in Indonesia, making *Pesantren Tremas* the top choice for many influential figures, especially religious scholars, to establish connections with its teachers, thereby forming mature scholarly connections (Ratnasari, 2019). Thus, it can be understood that the foundation of the scholars’ network, the chain of knowledge transmission, and the character of the *pesantren* have become the roots that strengthen Tremas *Pesantren*, enabling it to endure in this contemporary era.

Institutional Transformation and Reform

The *pesantren*, which previously did not recognize its graduates as formal graduates, has now received government recognition, allowing graduates to continue their studies even if they use a *mu’adalah*. *Pesantren Tremas* has also interacted with the developments of the times, leading to a phase where the boarding school experienced progress, a golden age, but also a period of decline. This is a natural process, as *pesantren Tremas* has stood firm and is one of the oldest *pesantren* in the archipelago.

Traditional Non-Formal Phase (1820-1894)

As previously explained, *Pesantren Tremas* was founded by *Kiai Haji* (KH) Abdul Mannan. In the early days of *Pesantren Tremas*, there was no formal system, such as learning in classrooms with other students or following a curriculum set by the

government. At that time, there were also no explicit educational levels like today's elementary, junior high, or high schools. The reason was that the teaching method relied directly on interaction between teachers and students. As stated in the interview, "In the past, students would directly engage in *musyafahah* with the kiai." This simplicity was brought by the founder of *Pesantren* Tremas. Despite its simplicity and lack of a structured curriculum, students flocked to this *pesantren* to seek knowledge (Mukodi, 2020). The *pesantren's* distinctive focus on deepening knowledge alongside character development is one of the reasons students seek education at *Pesantren* Tremas. This is further supported by *kitab kuning*, which serve as the scholarly foundation for the teachers at *Pesantren* Tremas. After KH Abdul Mannan's passing, KH Abdullah continued the leadership of the *pesantren*.

KH Abdullah is the son of KH Abdul Manan, who had pursued his studies in Makkah al-Mukaromah. His leadership at the *pesantren* was not as significant as in the previous period. Still, he laid the foundation for the development of *Pesantren* Tremas, which began to be recognized by people in areas outside Pacitan. The growing number of students who came to study there led to the construction of a dormitory called "*Pondok Wetan*." Furthermore, *Pesantren* Tremas became increasingly well-known when KH Abdullah sent his son, now known as Syekh Mahfudz, to study in Makkah al-Mukaromah under the guidance of Syekh Abu Bakar Syatha. This marked the beginning of the term "Attarmasie," which became the identity of students from Tremas in the Middle East (Ratnasari, 2021).

Golden Age I and Strengthening of Identity (1894-1934)

During this period, *Pesantren* Tremas was led by KH Dimiyathi, which also marked a new era for *Pesantren* Tremas. It was the first golden age because the number of students reached around 3,000 (Document Pondok Tremas, 2025). The expansion of the meaning of *pesantren* into an Islamic college gave *Pesantren* Tremas an identity as a religious educational institution with authority in the context of knowledge and academics. One of the highlights of his leadership was the involvement of senior students in the teaching process. This was a new development, as previously, no students were considered capable of becoming teachers (MFA, 2025). The teaching system still used sorogan and wetonan. The number of *kitab kuning* studied also increased to include *Fath al-Mu'in*, *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*, *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*, *Shahih al-Bukhari*, *Shahih Muslim*, and *Al-Minhaj al-Qawim*.

In 1924, the *Ibtidayah madrasah* was established and began implementing the classical method, but it lasted only a few months due to a lack of student interest and because it was considered a new concept. This was revealed in an interview: "This phase had already begun to enter the modern phase and learning had begun to be systematized, although it did not last long because he passed away." (MFA, 2025). KH Hamid Dimiyathi developed the *Salafiyah madrasah*, which later became one of the educational systems implemented in *pesantren*. During this period, students also studied general subjects such as Indonesian language, earth science, arithmetic, and earth history (Ratnasari, 2021).

The Vacuum Phase (1934-1948)

At that time, the *pesantren* was still led by KH Hamid Dimiyathi. *Pesantren* Tremas faced challenges that led to difficult times for the institution. These difficulties became

obstacles that caused the *pesantren* to become inactive (Mukodi et al., 2016). Between 1942 and 1952, various challenges emerged that marked the beginning of a period of decline at *Pesantren* Tremas. At that time, the Japanese army (Dai Nippon) arrived in Indonesia, which affected the learning process at the *pesantren*. Eventually, many *santri* returned to their respective regions (MFA, 2025).

This period was also marked by the PKI tragedy that struck Indonesia at the time. KH Hamid was a victim who died as a result of this tragedy (FHD, 2025). The G30SPKI incident caused widespread fear and concern, prompting students to return to their respective regions amid the tense situation (MFA, 2025).

The Reorganization and Golden Age II Phase (1948-1997)

After setbacks in development, especially during tense periods, *pesantren* were reorganized. During this period, the reorganization of the *pesantren* was structured through the mapping of task divisions. Through three key figures during this time, the *Pesantren* Tremas experienced its Golden Age II (MFA, 2025). LHD (2025) revealed that “Tremas' golden age was during the era of KH Habib, KH Haris, and KH Hasyim. After that, leadership was continued and redirected by the next generation of leaders.” This reorganization was reflected in the different roles assigned to the three figures: KH Habib Dimyathi oversaw the institutional framework under the *Pesantren* Tremas, KH Haris Dimyathi focused on developing educational methods and teaching, and KH Hasyim Ihsan concentrated on creating and managing spiritual aspects, both internally and externally within the surrounding community (Dokumen Pondok Tremas, 2025).

Achievements across education, facilities, infrastructure, and organization marked the revival of the *Pesantren* Tremas during this period. At that time, Attarmasie Kindergarten, TPA, *Madrasah Diniyah*, *Tsanawiyah*, and *Aliyah* were established as systematic educational units. Then, learning system such as *wetonan* and *sorogan* were reactivated. In fact, additional activities, such as *takbassus*, *bahsul masail*, *takerar*, and *kitab kuning* teaching, were also provided during Ramadan to expand students' learning space. At the same time, infrastructure, including dormitories, prayer rooms, and other facilities, was built and renovated. Opportunities to develop students' interests and abilities were also fostered through organizational activities such as PHBI, *dżibaiyah wa al-khitabah*, sports, arts, libraries, and many more.

Structural and Administrative Consolidation Phase (1997-Currently)

This period was marked by KH Fuad Habib Dimyathi and KH Luqman Haris Dimyathi, who initiated this phase as a period of physical reform. There was a renovation of the mosque, which previously served as the center of educational activities and the *pesantren* for the *pesantren* community and the local village community. This period also saw the construction of other infrastructure supporting academic development at the *pesantren*, including a *madrasah*, a cooperative, training rooms, computer and language laboratories, and other facilities supporting student learning. The curriculum also underwent revision, particularly to align with contemporary developments. Nowadays, the number of *Pesantren* Tremas enthusiasts has increased significantly, as shown in the following data on the development of students at *Pesantren* Tremas. Details on student

enrollment trends can be found at the following link:
<https://bit.ly/TheNumberofStudent>.

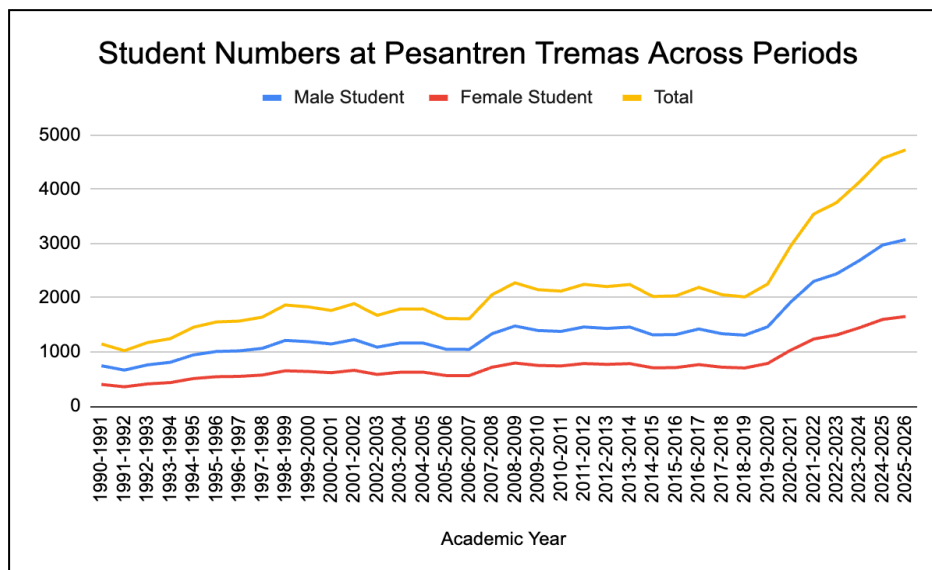


Figure 1. summary of the number of students at *Pesantren* Tremas.

The development of the education system is evident in the educational units that are divided into various levels, as observed on June 30, 2025, which proves RHH's (2025) statement that “Now *Pesantren* Tremas provides education from kindergarten, then MTs *Pondok* Tremas, MA *Salafiyah Mu'adalah*, and two higher education levels.” At each level of learning, students are guided by a learning pattern tailored to their ability and the academic targets to be achieved. HJH (2025), a student at the MTs level, shared his learning experience, saying, “Students study all the *kitab kuning*, unless there are additional lessons in the formal school system.” Meanwhile, ANL (2025) stated that “in the learning process, the books are usually interpreted, explained, and there is a question and answer session.”

Similarly, the author's observations show that, apart from the aforementioned education levels, there are also *Taman Pendidikan al-Quran* and *Madrasah Diniyah*. Apart from the formal education system, the *pesantren* also provides preparation classes for prospective students who will study at the Junior High School (SMP) level and at the Aliyah level, as stated in the interview that “For MTs, there is an *isti'dad* class as a preparation class for prospective students for the Junior High School level, then there is a *mumtaḥ* class for two years to adjust their abilities before entering the Aliyah level.” (RHH, 2025). Based on the experiences of students when studying in the *isti'dad* class, the learning pattern is “the teacher reads, the students follow.” (HK, 2025). In the *isti'dad* class, the teaching methods used by the teachers or ustadz vary. The learning methods can include interpreting the *kitab kuning*, translating it, having it explained by the *ustadz*, or reading and memorizing it. Students are also expected to have reading skills, be able to read *Pegon* script, complete notes, and memorize short surahs (AIM, 2025).

Meanwhile, in the *mumtaḥ* class, based on students' experiences, learning methods have improved. “Usually, students are asked to give presentations, interpret, explain the material

from the *kitab kuning* they are studying, and memorize certain material.” Another student, UBS (2025), also revealed that “sometimes he gives assignments and tells stories. Then he prompts questions about what the students have explained.” (IN, 2025). The difference with the Aliyah level lies in the increasingly advanced level of the *kitab kuning* (SNN, 2025). While at the MTs level, students are still learning the basics, at the Aliyah level, they move on to the next level. Students even have a schedule for reciting the Quran outside of school hours (ISS, 2025).

In addition, there is a change in the status of *pesantren*. Referring to the Director General of Islamic Education’s Decision No. DJ.II/DT.II.II/507/2006, the status of the *pesantren* was officially recognized as a “*Pesantren Mu’adalah*.” If this status does not apply, it will limit students’ access to continue their studies to the next level, as stated in the interview that “Before *mu’adalah*, Tremas certificates cannot be used directly to enter college. After the *mu’adalah* decision is accepted, *pesantren* certificates become equivalent” (LHD, 2025). This is supported by the statement of LHD (2025) that “*Pesantren* are open to the developments of the times. For example, in the past, there were *muallimat* and *muallimin*, who trained people to become teachers. Now, the name has changed to *MTs Salafiyah* and *MA Salafiyah*.” However, the material taught has not decreased. In fact, they now study more general subjects, such as science.

With the official recognition, graduates of the *Pesantren* Tremas can continue their education and have the same rights as graduates from formal educational institutions. The existence of *mu’adalah* status has led to the addition of subjects taught, as expressed in the statement that “Since the existence of *mu’adalah*, the *pesantren* must teach general subjects such as mathematics and science.” (AN, 2025). The entire policy-making mechanism always involves the *masyayikh* council in discussing and analyzing the decisions to be made. This strategy is one of the management systems implemented at *Pesantren* Tremas, as stated in the interview results, “Every *pesantren* policy must first be discussed with the Council of *Masyayikh*” (AT, 2025).

Another reform step during this phase was the institutional transformation of *Pesantren* Tremas by establishing higher education levels like *Ma’had Aly*. The orientation is aimed at addressing the challenges of the times and meeting students’ needs after graduation. Most students studying at *Ma’had Aly* graduated from *Aliyah* at *Pesantren* Tremas. In fact, *Ma’had Aly* was originally established to facilitate teachers at *Pesantren* Tremas in obtaining bachelor’s degrees. However, “For *Pesantren* Tremas graduates, we do not require them to study at *Ma’had Aly*. It’s just that most of our students at *Ma’had Aly* are graduates of *Pesantren* Trema. Still, many are graduates of other Islamic boarding schools or general educational institutions, such as *Aliyah* and some high schools in a *pesantren* environment.” (RHH, 2025).

The development of *Pesantren* Tremas through the establishment of *Ma’had Aly* has added a new dimension to education, encouraging various segments of society to pursue knowledge at P *Pesantren* Tremas. The learning orientation continues to focus on studying the *kitab kuning*, and students are required to participate in *pesantren* activities, as mentioned in an interview: “*Ma’had Aly* continues to study the same *kitab kuning* in the *pesantren* and requires *pesantren* activities” (RHH, 2025). The same informant also emphasized that the

study program covers topics ranging from the Qur'an and hadith to tafsir and so on. So, the main sources of reference are indeed drawn from classical books popular in the archipelago. Furthermore, he also revealed that “in *pesantren*, books are studied classically, with the *kyai* or *ustadz* reading *kitab kuning* in front of the *santri*.”

In contrast, at the *Ma'had Aly* level, we focus more on exploring the contents of the *kitab kuning* through discussion and deliberation, with a learning system that prioritizes study and exploration.” (RHH, 2025). Additionally, the study program focuses on the Qur'an, hadith, tafsir, and related subjects. So, the main reference sources are indeed taken from classical texts popular in the archipelago (RHH, 2025). “The main objective of *Ma'had Aly* is to produce religious scholars and thinkers, while IAIT is more focused on professionalism and employment.” (RHH, 2025).

Additionally, the Attarmasi Islamic Institute or Institut Agama Islam Attarmasi (IAIT) was inaugurated in 2025. “IAIT is a higher education institution that offers general study programs such as education, Arabic language, educational management, Islamic family law, business management, and finance.” (AM, 2025). With this institutional expansion, *Pesantren* Tremas has greater opportunities to preserve the roots of its scholarly traditions, which serve as a center for the development of Islamic scholarship grounded in knowledge, etiquette, and the noble traditions of *Pesantren* Tremas itself. This demonstrates that *Pesantren* Tremas is expanding its educational mandate toward more developed directions.

DISCUSSION

Scholarly Tradition as the Foundation of Education at *Pesantren* Tremas

The scholarly tradition at *Pesantren* Tremas cannot be understood merely as a practice that persists out of habit; rather, it constitutes the educational foundation that actively shapes the direction and practice of learning within the *pesantren*. The tradition of teaching classical Islamic texts, the modes of knowledge transmission, and the structures of scholarly authority function as a framework that governs how education is conducted and how change is accommodated. By positioning tradition as its foundation, *Pesantren* Tremas constructs an educational system rooted in continuity rather than rupture with the past. In this context, scholarly tradition serves not only as a source of educational legitimacy but also as a point of departure for institutional development.

Pesantren tradition is perseverance in the context of knowledge transmission, so this tradition is not merely a meaningless repetition but has become a support and framework that ultimately shapes the *pesantren's* epistemology (Asyibli et al., 2025). The knowledge that has been preserved from generation to generation is more than just an intellectual legacy; it has become the foundation for the *pesantren* to act (Baihaqi et al., 2023; Fatah et al., 2025; Hadiyanto et al., 2022). This is evident in the process of regenerating educators in the *pesantren*, which is open to any individual who meets the standards of *Pesantren* Tremas. Tremas opens opportunities from outside to teach at the *pesantren*, and similarly, in becoming a *santri*. *Santri* are not limited to those from Java but are open to all regions of the archipelago, including Sumatera, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Papua, and other parts of Indonesia (PondokTremas.com, 2025). There are classes for prospective students to facilitate their readiness to continue their

pesantren education at the next level. For example, the *Isti'dad* and *Mumtaẓ* classes are designed to help students develop their memorization skills and study other subjects as a foundation for advancing to the next level.

Pesantren evaluates the needs of students from diverse backgrounds and abilities since the high demand for enrollment at the boarding school necessitates monitoring students' capabilities. It is because the reason of the implementation of *Isti'dad* and *Mumtaẓ* systems, the purpose is to prepare students in memorization, language, and other relevant skills so they can advance to higher-level classes (Mukodi, 2020). This means that the *Isti'dad* and *Mumtaẓ* classes are outside the formal class system. These classes are intended for students who do not yet have a strong foundation and capital to study classical texts or *kitab kuning*. The implementation of this system is also a response to the pedagogical needs that vary among students.

After graduation, students have the opportunity to serve at the *pesantren*. *Pesantren* provided the opportunity for them but still selective in terms of selecting the candidate such as the necessary of full filling the qualifications and mastery of knowledge, is a unique system maintained at the *pesantren*. This practice embodies the philosophy that a student is not only a teacher but also a servant, one of whose roles is to develop knowledge and share it with others through the *pesantren*.

Pesantren Tremas conceptualizes education as a long-term process rooted in the mastery of knowledge and service. The opportunity for *santri* to serve the *pesantren* after graduation, through a selection process based on scholarly competence, demonstrates that tradition shapes not only the content of education but also its educational ethos. Education is not directed merely toward producing graduates, but toward ensuring the continuity of knowledge transmission through individuals who have undergone a rigorous formative process (Ma'arif et al., 2025). This pattern affirms that the foundation of *pesantren* education lies in the continuity of scholarly relations rather than in administrative systems alone.

Scholarly tradition as the foundation of education explains why *Pesantren* Tremas has been able to endure and develop across generations (Athoillah et al., 2025). This tradition provides normative stability that enables the *pesantren* to respond to change without losing its fundamental orientation (Ismail et al., 2024; Putra et al., 2025). Accordingly, the institutional trajectory of *Pesantren* Tremas cannot be understood as the outcome of reforms detached from the past, but rather as a continuous process grounded in the foundation of its scholarly tradition.

The teaching of *kitab kuning* remains firmly preserved. This stands in contrast to previous studies on educational change and organizational modernization at *Pesantren* Tebuireng, particularly regarding educational quality and governance systems (Hakim et al., 2025). where modernization is perceived as necessary for sustaining institutional existence in response to contemporary developments. Other studies similarly emphasize the adaptation of *pesantren* institutions to social and educational change, particularly in governance, curriculum, and organizational practices, including responsiveness to educational autonomy and the integration of traditional and modern educational systems (Malisi et al., 2024; Muttaqin, 2025; Nurkhin et al., 2024). In this regard, *Pesantren* Tremas possesses a distinct credibility in maintaining the foundational role of its scholarly tradition.

The findings of this study indicate that the resilience of *Pesantren* Tremas cannot be adequately explained solely through the paradigm of institutional modernization. Instead, it is more accurately understood through a perspective of tradition-based institutional continuity. Within the framework of institutional theory, Scott (2014) argues that institutions with strong normative and cultural pillars are more likely to adapt without losing their core identity (Scott, 2017). The scholarly tradition at *Pesantren* Tremas functions as a normative anchor that stabilizes the direction of change, rendering adaptation selective and controlled. This distinguishes Tremas from *pesantren* that position modernization as the primary strategy for institutional sustainability, as illustrated by Hakim et al. (2025) in their study of *Pesantren* Tebuireng, which emphasizes governance reform and formal educational systems as prerequisites for institutional survival in the modern era.

This difference points to the existence of two broad patterns of *pesantren* adaptation to changing times: structural adaptation and epistemic adaptation. Previous studies Malisi et al., (2024), Muttaqin, (2025), & Nurkhin et al., (2024) tend to portray *pesantren* as institutions that must adjust their organizational structures, curricula, and governance to align with national education systems and global demands. By contrast, *Pesantren* Tremas demonstrates that institutional sustainability can be achieved through the preservation of classical epistemological foundations, particularly the teaching of *kitab kuning* as the core curriculum.

Thus, *Pesantren* Tremas offers an alternative model of *pesantren* sustainability that challenges the dominant narrative of Islamic educational modernization. *Pesantren* resilience does not necessarily require radical structural transformation; rather, it can be realized through the strengthening of scholarly tradition as a source of legitimacy, orientation, and direction of change. In this context, tradition is not positioned as a residue of the past, but as a living tradition that is continuously reinterpreted to respond to contemporary challenges (Ratnasari, 2019). The contribution of this study lies in its affirmation that *pesantren* sustainability can be achieved through epistemic continuity, enabling institutions to endure across generations without being confined within the dichotomy of tradition versus modernity.

The Developmental Trajectory of *Pesantren* Tremas within its Institutional Continuum

Pesantren Tremas has established its identity as an *pesantren* with a *salafiyah* orientation by adhering to and preserving classical text-based learning. Additionally, it has been open to aligning its administrative structure, recognizing that such alignment also brings benefits for the institution and its graduates. Previously, the survival of *Pesantren* Tremas for more than two hundred years has been accompanied by various challenges as times have changed. The success demonstrated by *Pesantren* Tremas is in maintaining traditional *pesantren* traditions despite globalization and changing times forcing the *pesantren* to adapt (Mukodi et al., 2016). To a certain extent, *Pesantren* Tremas has undergone a transformation that can be seen as a response to global dynamics. A number of changes that have taken place at *Pesantren* Tremas are considered to be a response to develop the *pesantren* itself, as seen from the institutional developments of the boarding school (Wijayanti, 2017).

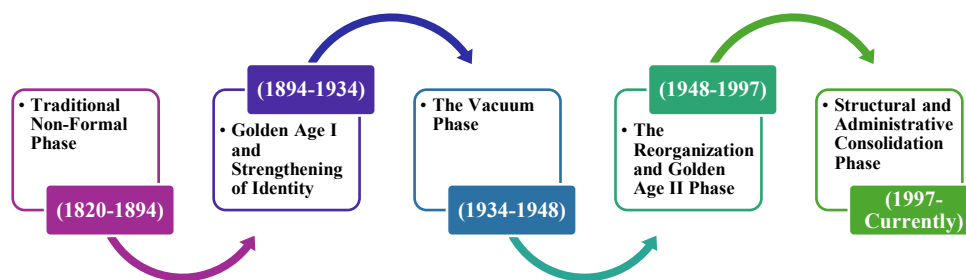


Figure 2. The Historical Phase of Institutional Transformation.

Based on the results of previous data analysis, changes have indeed been found in *pesantren*, especially in terms of administration (R. H. Hadi, 2023). These changes can be identified as reforms because the reason behind them is to maintain the identity of *pesantren* and enable their graduates to have the same rights to develop themselves in the academic world, such as continuing their education to the next level, just like graduates of other formal institutions.

If we see through leadership perspective, there have been various changes that initially were unstructured but have evolved into more structured institutional frameworks (Wijayanti, 2017). Furthermore, expansion into higher education also signifies a form of articulation rooted in traditional values. *Mahad Aly* was developed as a center for the development and study of Islamic heritage but in a higher education format, namely a university based on the *pesantren* model (Taufiq, 2024). Furthermore, they are open to develop the institution into a formal institution such as *LAIT*, indicating that the institution participates and contributes by becoming part of the national higher education system with national legal status.

Pesantren Tremas does not shy away from the challenges of the times but negotiates and adapts to the needs of the *pesantren* itself. For example, Tremas *Pesantren* still maintains its *Mu'adalah* status, which involves a series of administrative processes (Muslih et al., 2020). It is crucial to maintain the legality of students' graduation certificates because there are a lot of challenges of the times require certainty of identity and institutional accountability to ensure the authenticity of *pesantren* graduates (Surip, 2022). This can be interpreted as a process where *Pesantren* Tremas does not aim to develop into a “school with an *pesantren* style” but rather maintains its traditional and simple scholarly roots while selectively adapting to the developments and demands of the times. As a result, the reform of *Pesantren* Tremas as a boarding school with *salafiyah* characteristics is carried out to preserve the existence of the boarding school itself by making changes that do not eliminate the essence of the *pesantren* itself.

The Council of Scholars retains a central role in overseeing the direction of higher education development for both *Mahad Aly* and the higher education institution. Institutional expansion is carried out cautiously to maintain the continuity of the *pesantren* tradition itself. The internal community of *Pesantren* Tremas Foundation retains the authority to determine the institutional direction as a form of consensus within *Pesantren* Tremas community itself. This expansion emphasizes the strong roots of *pesantren* culture. Based on the above discussion, it can be identified that *Pesantren* Tremas does not form a *pesantren* as a classical exclusive

pesantren or in another form such as a modern institution with traditions, but rather maintains a balance between the main pillars, namely values and traditions, reform strategies, and direction. The long journey of *Pesantren* Tremas from time to time shows that there is a trajectory with integrity as described as an educational institution that is steadfast and consistent with the values rooted since its establishment.

Table 1. Direction of *Pesantren* Tremas’ Institutional Development

Dimension of	Indications from the Findings
Educational Impact	
Continuity of Scholarly Tradition	The tradition of teaching classical Islamic texts (<i>kitab kuning</i>) remains a defining characteristic of <i>pesantren</i> education and continues to be preserved to the present day.
Institutional Stability	The expansion of educational levels has strengthened the <i>pesantren</i> ’s position as a sustainable educational institution.
Regeneration of Educational Authority	Scholarly authority does not rest with a single figure but is regenerated through individuals considered competent and capable of responding to the <i>pesantren</i> ’s needs. One visible pattern of regeneration occurs through lineage-based succession.
Adaptation to Change	The <i>pesantren</i> demonstrates the capacity to adapt to the demands of formal education without abandoning its distinctive scholarly identity.
Consistency of Educational Orientation	The findings indicate a coherent relationship between tradition, institutional development, and the overall direction of the <i>pesantren</i> ’s evolution.

The developmental trajectory of *Pesantren* Tremas is shaped by a consistent interplay between the continuity of its scholarly tradition and gradual institutional adaptation. The tradition of teaching classical Islamic texts remains firmly preserved as the defining feature of *pesantren* education and functions as a form of continuity that sustains both institutional identity and scholarly legitimacy. At the same time, the expansion of educational levels strengthens institutional stability, enabling the *pesantren* to endure and operate within a broader educational landscape. The regeneration of educational authority, including lineage-based patterns of succession, serves as a mechanism for maintaining continuity in educational orientation while simultaneously allowing change to occur without disrupting established traditions. Adaptation to the demands of formal education is not understood as a replacement of tradition, but rather as an effort to maintain the relevance of the *pesantren* without compromising its distinctive scholarly character (Karyono et al., 2025; Ma`arif et al., 2024). Accordingly, these findings demonstrate that the institutional trajectory of *Pesantren* Tremas evolves through a balance between continuity and reform, in which change is undertaken to support educational sustainability rather than to alter its fundamental orientation.

Building on these findings, this study demonstrates a distinctive pattern of resilience at *Pesantren* Tremas that differs from the dominant trends identified in previous *pesantren* studies. While research on *Pesantren* Tebuireng and other modern *pesantren* emphasizes organizational

modernization, governance reform, and curriculum transformation as primary strategies for institutional sustainability (Hakim et al., 2025; Nurkhin et al., 2024). *Pesantren* Tremas reveals an alternative pathway in which scholarly tradition remains the central orientation of educational continuity. The sustained practice of teaching classical Islamic texts is not positioned as an obstacle to change, but rather as a source of epistemic legitimacy that stabilizes the institution's educational direction. In contrast to *pesantren* that prioritize structural adaptation as the main driver of transformation, *Pesantren* Tremas illustrates how the preservation of scholarly tradition can function as the principal foundation of institutional resilience.

Furthermore, these findings extend existing discussions on *pesantren* adaptation, which commonly frame change as the integration of traditional and modern educational systems through formal curricula and managerial reforms (Malisi et al., 2024; Muttaqin, 2025). In the case of *Pesantren* Tremas, institutional adaptations such as the expansion of educational levels and state recognition through *mu'adalah* status are not understood as epistemological shifts, but as strategic and instrumental measures that enable the *pesantren* to operate within the broader national education framework. These adjustments primarily serve administrative and functional purposes, while the core scholarly orientation remains anchored in the transmission of *kitab kuning* and traditional pedagogical practices (Annisa & Jumari, 2024; Bruinessen, 1995). This suggests that adaptation does not necessarily entail substantive transformation of intellectual traditions, but may instead reinforce their continuity under changing external conditions.

Moreover, the regeneration of educational authority at *Pesantren* Tremas highlights a resilience mechanism that has received limited attention in prior research. Studies on *pesantren* modernization often emphasize leadership professionalization and organizational rationalization as key factors of sustainability (Hariadi et al., 2024; Nurkhin et al., 2024; Widiana et al., 2023). By contrast, this study shows that authority regeneration grounded in scholarly legitimacy, genealogical continuity, and collective recognition plays a crucial role in maintaining institutional coherence. Such a model allows for gradual change without disrupting established traditions of authority and knowledge transmission. Consequently, the institutional trajectory of *Pesantren* Tremas contributes to the broader discourse on Islamic educational resilience by demonstrating that a balance between continuity and incremental reform can serve as an alternative model for the long-term sustainability of *pesantren*.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the institutional resilience of *Pesantren* Tremas, which has endured for more than two centuries, is grounded not in resistance to modernity but in the strength of its scholarly tradition as an epistemological foundation of education. Rather than undergoing disruptive reform, Tremas has responded to socio-historical changes through selective institutional adaptation that preserves its *salafiyah* identity while remaining relevant within a broader educational context. The expansion of educational structures, including the establishment of *Ma'had 'Ally* and Islamic higher education institutions, reflects epistemically driven innovation aimed at sustaining knowledge transmission and scholarly lineage rather than pursuing institutional prestige. Although limited by its single-case focus, this study offers

an alternative model of *pesantren* sustainability, showing that continuity of tradition can function as a stabilizing force that enables transformation without severing ties to the past, thereby challenging dominant narratives that frame Islamic educational development as a dichotomy between tradition and modernization.

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