

GUS DUR AND THE REINTERPRETATION OF SANTRI EPISTEMOLOGY: A STUDY ON THE INTEGRATION OF ISLAMIC TRADITION AND CONTEMPORARY THOUGHT

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Abstract

This study focuses on exploring the reinterpretation of santri epistemology through the perspective of Gus Dur, an influential Indonesian scholar and leader. Gus Dur is recognized not only as a president but also as a thinker who contributed to integrating Islamic traditions with modern dynamics. The aim of this research is to examine how Gus Dur reformulated santri epistemology to address contemporary demands and how he integrated classical Islamic values with modern ideas and ideologies. In this study, the author analyzes Gus Dur's contributions to the evolution of santri epistemology by assessing his innovative approaches to understanding knowledge. The research also evaluates the impact of this integration on pesantren education and its implications for the broader society, particularly in the context of pluralism and social reform. Through this examination, the author hopes to reveal the significant yet underexplored contributions of Gus Dur in bridging the gap between traditional and modern knowledge. The study aims to provide new perspectives on how Islamic traditions can adapt to contemporary changes without losing their essence. This research is expected to offer valuable contributions to the academic discourse on santri epistemology and provide fresh insights for the development of contemporary Islamic education and culture. (Abdullah, 2016)

Keywords: *Gus Dur, Santri Epistemology, Reinterpretation, Islamic Tradition, Contemporary Thought.*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini berfokus pada eksplorasi reinterpretasi epistemologi santri melalui lensa pemikiran Gus Dur, seorang ulama sekaligus umara yang berpengaruh di Indonesia. Gus Dur tidak hanya dikenal sebagai seorang presiden, tetapi juga sebagai pemikir yang berkontribusi terhadap integrasi tradisi Islam dengan dinamika modern. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji bagaimana Gus Dur mereformulasi epistemologi santri untuk memenuhi tuntutan zaman kontemporer, serta bagaimana ia mengintegrasikan nilai-nilai Islam klasik dengan pemikiran dan ideologi modern. Dalam kajian ini, penulis menganalisis kontribusi Gus Dur terhadap evolusi epistemologi santri dengan menilai pendekatan-pendekatan inovatifnya dalam memahami pengetahuan. Penulis juga mengevaluasi dampak dari integrasi ini terhadap pendidikan pesantren serta apa implikasinya bagi masyarakat luas, khususnya dalam konteks pluralisme dan reformasi sosial. (Abdullah, 2016). Melalui kajian ini, penulis berharap dapat mengungkapkan kontribusi signifikan Gus Dur, yang jarang dilirik, dalam menjembatani kesenjangan antara pengetahuan tradisional dan modern, serta menawarkan perspektif baru tentang bagaimana tradisi Islam dapat beradaptasi dengan perubahan zaman tanpa kehilangan esensinya. Penelitian ini diharapkan dapat memberikan sumbangan kontribusi terhadap diskursus akademik tentang epistemologi santri dan menawarkan wawasan baru bagi pengembangan Pendidikan dan kebudayaan Islam era kontemporer.

Kata kunci: Gus Dur, Epistemologi santri, Reinterpretasi, Tradisi Islam, Pemikiran kontemporer.

Intoduction

The integration of Islamic tradition with contemporary thought remains a significant issue in modern Islamic education. In Indonesia, a country with a diverse cultural heritage and a predominantly Muslim population, the challenge of reconciling Islamic teachings with local traditions and modern knowledge systems is particularly relevant. One key figure who has made substantial contributions to this discourse is Abdurrahman Wahid, known as Gus Dur, an influential Muslim scholar, former president, and advocate for pluralism. Gus Dur's intellectual journey focused on reconciling Islamic tradition with the demands of modernity, fostering a vision of Islam that is inclusive, tolerant, and deeply rooted in Indonesian culture. His work, particularly in the field of Islamic education, has had lasting implications for the development of *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) in Indonesia.

A central aspect of Gus Dur's intellectual project was the concept of *pribumisasi agama* (indigenization of religion), which aimed to integrate Islamic teachings with local Indonesian cultural practices. This idea is critical in the context of *pesantren* education, as it advocates for an approach that is both religiously authentic and culturally relevant, helping to address the challenges of globalizing and pluralistic societies. Through this approach, Gus Dur sought to counter the phenomenon of *Arabization* in Islam, where foreign practices and interpretations, often derived from the Middle East, overshadowed the rich cultural diversity of Indonesian Islam. This paper seeks to explore Gus Dur's perspective on the *pribumisasi agama* and its implications for *pesantren* education, focusing on the epistemological and pedagogical aspects of his vision.

In the broader context of Indonesian Islamic scholarship, Gus Dur's views on the integration of Islamic tradition with contemporary knowledge have been widely discussed and debated. Scholars such as Hasyim (2020) and War'i (2020) have emphasized the importance of merging religious knowledge with secular disciplines to prepare students for a rapidly changing world. However, Gus Dur's approach to indigenization is distinctive in its emphasis on *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) as a method for reconciling religious texts with local traditions. His ideas align with the work of other Indonesian intellectuals who have explored the role of Islamic education in modern society, but Gus Dur's insistence on maintaining a balance between tradition and modernity offers a unique framework for understanding the future of *pesantren* education in Indonesia.

Despite the growing body of literature on Gus Dur's thought, the integration of Islamic tradition and contemporary knowledge in the context of pesantren education remains underexplored, particularly in relation to Gus Dur's concept of *pribumisasi agama*. This paper seeks to fill this gap by offering a focused study on how Gus Dur's epistemological framework contributes to the broader discourse on Islamic education in Indonesia. By examining the intersection of religious tradition, local culture, and modern knowledge, this study aims to provide valuable insights into how pesantren can evolve without losing their spiritual and cultural roots.

The research will discuss Gus Dur's educational philosophy, his concept of *pribumisasi agama*, and its impact on pesantren curriculum and pedagogy. It will also explore how this approach has influenced the development of an inclusive, tolerant, and critically engaged generation of students who are equipped to navigate the complexities of the modern world while remaining grounded in their Islamic faith and Indonesian cultural identity. The expected contribution of this study is to enrich our understanding of Gus Dur's educational legacy and to offer a comprehensive perspective on how pesantren can integrate Islamic tradition with contemporary thought to meet the needs of today's society.

Method

Characteristics of Participants (Subjects) This study focuses on Gus Dur's contributions to the reinterpretation of santri epistemology through qualitative analysis of available texts and interviews. Since this study emphasizes theoretical analysis, the main subjects of this research are primary sources in the form of Gus Dur's writings, such as books, articles, speeches, and interviews. Additionally, this research utilizes secondary sources that discuss the influence of Gus Dur on santri epistemology and Islamic education.

1. **Primary Data Sources:** Gus Dur's written works (books, articles, speeches, interviews).
2. **Secondary Data Sources:** Academic articles, books, and interviews with figures influenced by Gus Dur's thought, particularly in the context of Islamic education and pesantren.

This study does not involve direct human participants as it focuses on text analysis. However, the selection of texts is done with consideration of their relevance to Gus Dur's views on epistemology and its application to contemporary Islamic education, especially within the context of pesantren.

Research Design

This research adopts a qualitative text analysis design to understand how Gus Dur's thought has influenced the reinterpretation of santri epistemology in contemporary Islamic education.

1. Design Type: Descriptive and Analytical — This study aims to explore and describe Gus Dur's contributions in integrating **Islamic** tradition with modern thought in the context of santri epistemology.
2. Sampling Method: Purposive sampling is used to select the most relevant works of Gus Dur (books, articles, speeches) and secondary sources that discuss his influence on santri epistemology and Islamic education. The selection of texts is based on their significance to themes related to epistemology, Islamic tradition, education, and modernity.

This study does not involve experimental manipulation or intervention, but rather analyzes existing materials that are publicly available for in-depth examination.

Procedure

The following are the steps taken in this research:

1. Selection and Review of Texts The research begins with reviewing Gus Dur's works (books, articles, speeches, and interviews). These sources are selected through academic databases, libraries, and online repositories. The chosen texts are those that are relevant to themes of epistemology, Islamic education, and pluralism, as well as those that reflect Gus Dur's views on the integration of Islam with modernity.
2. Content Analysis Thematic analysis is employed to extract key concepts related to epistemology from the selected texts. Thematic coding is used to identify recurring ideas about traditional knowledge, the integration of modern thought, and pluralism. The analysis is done manually, aiming to identify major themes related to epistemology and Islamic education.
3. Synthesis of Secondary Sources Secondary sources discussing Gus Dur's influence on pesantren education and Islamic epistemology are reviewed to provide a deeper understanding of the impact of his thought. These secondary sources help contextualize Gus Dur's ideas in the broader field of Islamic education in Indonesia Interviews with experts and testimonies from figures

familiar with Gus Dur's thought are included when relevant, to enrich the interpretation of Gus Dur's impact on Islamic education.

4. **Comparative Analysis** This research compares Gus Dur's epistemological contributions with traditional santri epistemology and modern educational paradigms. This comparison is done to identify changes and adaptations brought about by Gus Dur in the field of Islamic education.

Measurement Approach Since this research focuses on qualitative text analysis, standard psychometric instruments are not used. Instead, measurement is done through:

- a. Thematic coding of Gus Dur's writings to identify major ideas related to epistemology.
- b. Contextual analysis of how Gus Dur's thought has influenced pesantren education and its impact on society at large.
- c. Interpretation of academic discourses that discuss Gus Dur's influence on Islamic education and epistemology.

Data Analysis and Interpretation Data analysis is conducted using an inductive qualitative approach, which involves the following steps:

1. **Coding and Identification of Themes:** Gus Dur's texts are coded to identify major themes related to epistemology, education, and pluralism.
2. **Interpretation of Themes:** Each theme is interpreted within the context of Gus Dur's thought and applied to his influence on pesantren and Islamic education.
3. **Synthesis:** The analysis of primary and secondary texts is synthesized to provide a holistic view of Gus Dur's contributions to santri epistemology and Islamic education.
4. **Research Design and Limitations**
 - a. The research design is qualitative and descriptive, aiming to explore Gus Dur's thought on the reinterpretation of santri epistemology, rather than testing hypotheses or conducting experiments.
 - b. **Limitations:** As this research depends on existing texts, interpretations may vary depending on the availability and accessibility of sources. Moreover, the lack of direct empirical data regarding the practical impact of Gus Dur's

thought on pesantren education limits the ability to draw more concrete conclusions about its implementation.

Result and Discussion

The findings reveal how Gus Dur worked to integrate traditional Islamic teachings with modern knowledge systems, ensuring that pesantren could address contemporary challenges while preserving their religious integrity. This section also delves into Gus Dur's broader vision for education, with a strong emphasis on values such as tolerance, inclusivity, and critical thinking.

Epistemology in Pesantren Education: A Synthesis of Tradition and Modernity

Gus Dur proposed an epistemological approach to pesantren education that emphasizes a harmonious integration between traditional Islamic knowledge and modern secular disciplines. According to Hasyim (2020), Gus Dur believed that pesantren should not limit their curriculum to religious subjects such as fiqh, hadith, and tafsir, but should also embrace knowledge from other fields, such as philosophy, science, and literature. This belief stemmed from his view that the division between religious and secular knowledge is artificial, restricting students' full intellectual potential. War'i (2020) further supports this view, stating that Gus Dur's epistemological approach aimed at fostering both spiritual growth and intellectual curiosity in pesantren students.

In Gus Dur's view, Islamic teachings are foundational to students' moral and ethical development, providing guidance on how to live a good life. However, modern knowledge serves as a tool to engage with and understand the complexities of the contemporary world. By merging these two streams of knowledge, Gus Dur's framework ensures that students develop critical thinking skills while maintaining their Islamic identity. The synthesis of traditional and modern knowledge provides a comprehensive educational model that equips students not only with religious wisdom but also with the ability to navigate and contribute to a modern, globalized society.

The Modernization of Pesantren: Evolving Without Abandoning Tradition

For Gus Dur, modernization in the context of pesantren did not mean abandoning the institution's traditional values. Instead, he advocated for an adaptive approach where pesantren could incorporate new secular subjects while remaining true to their core spiritual and educational mission. According to Hasyim (2020), Gus Dur emphasized the need to update the curriculum to include subjects such as mathematics, science, and social

studies, recognizing their growing importance in the modern world. However, Gus Dur argued that these subjects should complement, not compete with, Islamic teachings.

Gus Dur's vision of modernization required pesantren to remain dynamic and responsive to contemporary developments while safeguarding the traditions that had defined them for centuries. As Alnashr (2020) explains, Gus Dur proposed that pesantren integrate practical skills such as technology, trade, and services, which would prepare students to engage with various sectors of society. However, he underscored that these practical skills should be taught in a way that does not dilute the spiritual foundation of pesantren education.

The introduction of secular knowledge into pesantren was controversial, particularly among more traditionalist groups. Despite this, Gus Dur argued that the modernization of the curriculum was crucial for ensuring the relevance of pesantren education in the globalized world. As highlighted by Hasyim (2020), this approach enables pesantren to meet the evolving needs of Indonesian society and contributes to addressing the challenges of a rapidly changing world.

Curriculum and Pedagogy: Encouraging Active Learning and Moral Development

Gus Dur's contribution to pedagogy focused on transforming traditional methods of teaching. He rejected the passive, rote memorization approach that had long been the hallmark of pesantren education. Instead, he promoted a more interactive learning approach that encouraged students to engage with material critically and creatively. Alnashr (2020) notes that Gus Dur's vision of education aimed to empower students to think for themselves, analyze information, and apply their knowledge to solve real-world problems. Additionally, Gus Dur believed that moral education should be a central component of the pesantren curriculum. According to Sa'diyah and Nurhayati (2020), Gus Dur emphasized that the goal of Islamic education should not be limited to the acquisition of knowledge but should also focus on the cultivation of noble character. His educational philosophy underscores values such as honesty, integrity, and tolerance, which he saw as essential for the development of responsible, ethical citizens.

This moral dimension is closely aligned with Gus Dur's broader educational philosophy, which encourages the development of both intellectual and ethical capacities. In Gus Dur's view, the ultimate goal of education in pesantren is not only to produce knowledgeable individuals but also individuals who are morally responsible and socially engaged.

Peacebuilding and Social Harmony Through Pesantren Education

Gus Dur's educational philosophy also placed a strong emphasis on social harmony and peacebuilding. In a pluralistic society like Indonesia, where diverse religious and ethnic communities coexist, Gus Dur saw pesantren as an institution capable of promoting tolerance and mutual understanding. War'i (2020) highlights that Gus Dur envisioned pesantren as playing an active role in interfaith dialogue and conflict resolution. He argued that pesantren could serve as a forum for fostering respect and understanding between different religious and cultural groups.

In Gus Dur's model, the process of peacebuilding within pesantren involved three stages: peacekeeping, peacemaking, and peacebuilding. According to Sa'diyah and Nurhayati (2020), peacekeeping involves creating a stable environment where different groups can coexist without violence. Peacemaking focuses on resolving conflicts and bridging divides between communities, while peacebuilding addresses the root causes of conflict and works to build long-term harmony.

By educating students to value diversity and mutual respect, Gus Dur believed that pesantren could contribute to building a more peaceful and just society. He saw pesantren as potential agents for national unity and religious tolerance, both locally and global

Contemporary Implications for Pesantren Education

The educational ideas of Gus Dur remain highly relevant today, especially in the context of globalization and the challenges facing Islamic education. His emphasis on integrating secular knowledge with religious teachings, alongside his focus on active learning and moral development, provides a valuable framework for modern pesantren education. According to Hasyim (2020), in today's globalized world, where education must adapt to technological advances and cultural diversity, Gus Dur's ideas offer a path forward for pesantren to remain relevant and impactful.

His emphasis on peacebuilding and interfaith dialogue is particularly significant in a world marked by religious conflict and cultural tensions. As noted by Sa'diyah and Nurhayati (2020), integrating peace education into pesantren curricula would empower students to play an active role in resolving conflicts and promoting social harmony, making them key contributors to building a more just and peaceful society.

Character Education Based on Local Wisdom: Gus Dur's Vision for Pesantren

Another key aspect of Gus Dur's educational vision was his focus on character education, particularly in the context of pesantren as a representation of local wisdom.

According to Alnashr (2020), Gus Dur viewed pesantren as an ideal space to nurture character education based on local cultural traditions and Islamic teachings. This approach emphasizes the importance of respecting local wisdom and using it as a moral foundation for students' development. Gus Dur's belief was that education should be comprehensive and integrative, incorporating not only formal education but also informal and non-formal education to develop a well-rounded character (Alnashr, 2020).

In Gus Dur's view, character education was not just about acquiring knowledge but about instilling moral values in students that would guide their actions in the real world. Alnashr (2020) further notes that Gus Dur's approach to character education in pesantren involved fostering respect for both Islamic teachings and local traditions, which serve as an important moral compass for students in their everyday lives.

Pribumisasi Agama: Gus Dur's Perspective

The concept of *pribumisasi agama* (indigenization of religion) proposed by Gus Dur is a key element of his vision to integrate Islamic teachings within the Indonesian cultural context. Gus Dur's approach to Islam was deeply rooted in the belief that religion must not be a foreign imposition, but rather something that reflects the local traditions, values, and customs of the society it addresses. This concept, as articulated by Gus Dur, directly counters the phenomenon of *Arabization*, where certain practices and interpretations of Islam, heavily influenced by Arab culture, were imposed on local Indonesian Muslims, often to the detriment of their cultural heritage.

According to Mustofa (2021), Gus Dur's notion of *pribumisasi Islam* involved a creative and dynamic integration of Islamic teachings with the cultural and social practices unique to Indonesia. At the core of this concept was the idea of *ijtihad* (independent reasoning), a key Islamic principle that allows for flexibility and contextualization of religious texts. Gus Dur used *ijtihad* to argue that Islamic practices could, and should, be adapted to fit the Indonesian context, drawing from the rich local wisdom and cultural diversity without compromising the core tenets of Islam. He encouraged Muslims to find ways to practice their faith that were both authentically Islamic and relevant to the Indonesian way of life, acknowledging the local values, social structures, and traditions that shaped everyday life.

This effort to integrate local culture with Islam was also a response to the perception that foreign interpretations and practices—especially those that emerged from the Middle East—were often seen as more "authentic" than local Indonesian traditions. By

promoting *pribumisasi agama*, Gus Dur sought to reclaim Islamic identity in Indonesia and challenge the notion that true Islam had to be a mirror image of Arab practices and norms. This indigenization of religion aimed to help Indonesian Muslims feel more connected to their faith, as it would be grounded in the local social and cultural fabric, rather than imposed from the outside.

Through this approach, Gus Dur's vision of *pribumisasi agama* can be seen as a call for reform within the Islamic world, urging Muslims to engage in a rethinking of their religious practices in order to make them more in tune with the local context, while remaining faithful to the core ethical and spiritual principles of Islam. His ideas sought to create a version of Islam that was not a rigid set.

Conclusion

This research highlights the significant contributions of Gus Dur to the evolution of pesantren education in Indonesia, emphasizing his vision of integrating traditional Islamic teachings with modern knowledge systems. Gus Dur's educational philosophy advocates for a balanced synthesis of religious and secular disciplines, ensuring that pesantren can address contemporary societal challenges without sacrificing their core spiritual and ethical values. His approach to modernization, which encourages the inclusion of subjects like science, mathematics, and social studies, provides a comprehensive educational model that equips students with the intellectual tools needed to navigate the complexities of a globalized world, while maintaining their Islamic identity.

In addition to intellectual development, Gus Dur's emphasis on active learning and character education, grounded in both Islamic teachings and local wisdom, promotes the cultivation of moral and ethical values in students. His vision for pesantren education also includes fostering social harmony and peacebuilding, with a focus on interfaith dialogue and conflict resolution, which remains highly relevant in today's pluralistic and often polarized society. Gus Dur's concept of "*pribumisasi agama*" or the indigenization of religion, further underscores his commitment to integrating local cultural traditions with Islamic teachings, ensuring that pesantren education remains relevant and deeply rooted in the Indonesian context.

Overall, Gus Dur's educational philosophy provides a valuable framework for contemporary pesantren, offering a path toward an inclusive, modern, and socially responsible education that can contribute to a more just and harmonious society.

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