

# Between Tradition and Modernity: A Qualitative Inquiry into Teachers' Professional Learning in *Pesantren*

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## **Abstract**

Islamic boarding schools, as traditional Islamic educational institutions, face the challenge of integrating modern learning methods without neglecting deeply rooted values and traditions. Amidst this dynamic, teacher professional development is crucial to ensure that teachers can bridge the gap between tradition and modernity. However, there is still little research that examines the process of teacher professional development in depth within the *pesantren* environment. This study aims to qualitatively explore and understand the experiences, challenges, and strategies of teachers in developing their professionalism in *pesantren*, which are situated at the crossroads between tradition and modernity. This research employs qualitative methods, utilizing a case study approach. Data was collected using a thematic approach to identify patterns and meanings that emerged from the participants' narratives. The significance of this research is to provide a rich and contextual understanding of the professional learning process of teachers in the *pesantren* environment. The results of this study are expected to serve as a reference for policymakers and *pesantren* educational institutions in designing relevant and sustainable teacher development programs, thereby producing graduates who are competent in the modern era while still adhering to traditional values.

**Keywords:** *Islamic boarding school, Islamic education, teacher professional development, tradition, modernity*

## INTRODUCTION

Islamic boarding schools, or *pesantren*, have long been the cornerstone of Islamic education in Indonesia, nurturing generations through religious scholarship, discipline, and moral character. Traditionally centered on the study of *kitab kuning* (classical Islamic texts) and teacher-centered instruction, *pesantren* education has emphasized spiritual formation and community values. However, the challenges of modernization and globalization have increasingly required these institutions to adapt to new educational realities that demand pedagogical innovation, digital literacy, and professional learning for teachers<sup>1</sup>. This tension between preserving long-standing traditions and embracing educational reform places *pesantren* teachers in a pivotal role, as they must balance religious heritage with the demands of modern education<sup>2</sup>.

Professional development plays a critical role in this balancing process. Effective teacher learning enables educators to sustain *pesantren*'s religious and cultural mission while meeting national and global educational standards<sup>3,4</sup>. In a context where *pesantren* graduates are expected to participate in both faith-based and modern professional spheres, teachers' capacity for continuous learning becomes essential. The modernization of *pesantren* is reshaping teacher expectations by encouraging integration between traditional Islamic pedagogy and contemporary approaches to curriculum, leadership, and professional growth<sup>5</sup>. Thus, *pesantren* teachers serve not only as conveyors of religious knowledge but also as cultural mediators who embody Islamic values while adapting to modern educational frameworks.

Understanding teacher professional development in *pesantren* offers dual significance for theory and practice. Theoretically, it enriches knowledge about how professional learning operates in faith-based settings where pedagogy, identity, and spirituality are intertwined<sup>6,7</sup>. Practically, it provides insights for *pesantren* to design professional development programs that are contextually relevant and sustainable while preserving their distinctive traditions<sup>8</sup>. Yet, research on professional learning in *pesantren* remains limited. Most studies focus on macro-level modernization, such as curriculum reform and institutional governance, rather than on teachers' lived experiences of professional growth<sup>9</sup>. Meanwhile, existing literature on teacher

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<sup>1</sup> Ahmad Zakky Mubarak and Usmanul Khakim, "The Vision of Internationalization at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor: A Transnational Theory Perspective" 20, no. 1 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.21111/attadib.v20i1.14724>.

<sup>2</sup> Oksana Kharlay, Wei Wei, and Jeremy Philips, "How Do I Teach? Exploring Knowledge of Reflective Practice among in-Service EFL Teachers in Ukraine," *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice* 28, no. 2 (2022): 188–205, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2022.2062709>.

<sup>3</sup> Siti Halimah, Achmad Yusuf, and Khamdan Safiudin, "Pesantren Education Management: The Transformation of Religious Learning Culture in the Age of Disruption," *Nidhomul Haq: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam* 9, no. 3 (November 28, 2024): 648–66, <https://doi.org/10.31538/ndhq.v9i3.16>.

<sup>4</sup> Muhammad Anas Ma'arif et al., "Developing Pesantren Educator Resources through Optimizing the Learning Organization," *Nazhruna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 6, no. 3 (September 15, 2023): 475–91, <https://doi.org/10.31538/nzh.v6i3.4415>.

<sup>5</sup> Zulfikar Ali Buto Siregar et al., "TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND REINFORCEMENT AT INTEGRATED ISLAMIC SCHOOLS IN INDONESIA," *Jurnal Ilmiah Islam Futura* 25, no. 1 (February 1, 2025): 117–33, <https://doi.org/10.22373/jiif.v25i1.25068>.

development predominantly examines public schools, leaving *pesantren* educators underexplored<sup>10</sup>. This research gap is significant because *pesantren* teachers face unique challenges in maintaining Islamic values while mastering modern pedagogical methods and digital tools<sup>11</sup>.

Teachers in *pesantren* experience professional learning as a holistic and spiritually grounded process that unites intellectual, moral, and ethical development. Unlike teachers in secular schools, who tend to measure professionalism in technical or performance-based terms, *pesantren* educators perceive professional growth as an extension of their religious duty as *ustadz*. Furthermore, *pesantren* teachers view teaching not only as an act of instruction but also as a form of devotion that embodies Islamic ethics<sup>12</sup>. This intertwining of pedagogy and piety gives *pesantren*-based professional development a unique character, where the refinement of one's teaching practice cannot be separated from spiritual cultivation. At the same time, *pesantren* institutions are increasingly aware of the importance of structured, systematic training to respond to modern educational demands. Thus, *pesantren*-based training programs must integrate Islamic values with innovative pedagogical methods, ensuring that modernization enhances, rather than erodes, *pesantren* traditions.

Despite growing awareness, *pesantren* teachers face multiple barriers to developing professionalism. Limited infrastructure, lack of digital access, and scarce funding remain significant constraints<sup>6</sup> (Kholili 2021; Nurtawab and Wahyudi 2022). These material limitations are compounded by conceptual challenges: teachers often struggle to reconcile state-mandated curricula with the *pesantren*'s traditional emphasis on classical Islamic texts. Such tensions complicate the meaning of "professionalism" in *pesantren* settings, as teachers must navigate between maintaining religious authenticity and meeting external accountability standards. Digital literacy also presents dilemmas. While the integration of technology promises to enhance learning, many *pesantren* teachers approach it cautiously due to ethical concerns about exposure to content that may conflict with Islamic values. This cautious approach produces uneven adoption, some teachers embrace digital tools enthusiastically, while others resist due to moral or institutional reservations<sup>7</sup> (Lestari, Rahmayana, and Agustiana 2025). This divergence underscores the need for professional learning models that respect *pesantren*'s cultural integrity while equipping teachers with modern competencies.

In response to these challenges, *pesantren* teachers employ various strategies to harmonize tradition with modern pedagogy. One strategy is the contextualization of contemporary teaching methods within Islamic ethical frameworks. Teachers selectively adopt technological and pedagogical innovations, reinterpreting them

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<sup>6</sup> Yusroful Kholili, "Challenges for Pesantren in the Revolution Era of Society 5.0," *AMCA Journal of Religion and Society* 1, no. 1 (2021): 8–12, <https://doi.org/10.51773/ajrs.v1i1.33>.

<sup>7</sup> Tutik Lestari, Audia Rahmayana, and Fina Agustiana, "Transformation of Pesantren Education in the Digital Era: AI Innovation and Adaptation for Technology-Based Learning," *Electronic Integrated Computer Algorithm Journal* 2, no. 2 (April 11, 2025): 86–90, <https://doi.org/10.62123/enigma.v2i2.58>.

through religious principles so that modernization reinforces rather than undermines *pesantren* values <sup>8</sup>(Musaddad 2025). Other educators rely on traditional modes of collaboration, such as *halaqah* (study circles) and mentorship, to embed professional learning within familiar communal structures. Incremental digitalization is also evident as *pesantren* introduce online learning platforms, multimedia tools, and life skills training to enhance teaching relevance <sup>9</sup> (Ihsan Pratama 2025; Musaddad 2025). Collectively, these adaptive strategies illustrate the term “hybrid professionalism,” where *pesantren* teachers embody both spiritual authority and pedagogical innovation.

The *pesantren* context profoundly shapes how teachers understand professionalism. Within this environment, professionalism is inseparable from moral leadership and spiritual integrity. *Pesantren* educators equate professionalism not merely with technical mastery but with sincerity, humility, and ethical conduct. This holistic conception distinguishes *pesantren* teachers from their secular counterparts, whose professionalism is often defined by measurable standards of efficiency and accountability <sup>10</sup>. Modernization, however, has introduced new dimensions to this understanding. The institutional reforms and teacher training initiatives have encouraged *pesantren* educators to align with national education policies while retaining their spiritual mission <sup>11,12</sup>. These dynamics produce a fluid sense of professional identity, where teachers constantly negotiate between the pressures of modernization and the preservation of religious authenticity.

In this evolving landscape, *pesantren* teachers’ professional development reflects a dynamic negotiation between faith and pedagogy. Their experiences demonstrate that modernization and tradition are not inherently opposing forces but can coexist through thoughtful adaptation. By exploring how *pesantren* teachers interpret and practice professionalism within this intersection, the present study aims to fill the existing research gap and contribute to a deeper understanding of professional learning in Islamic educational institutions. It also offers practical insights for policymakers, teacher educators, and *pesantren* leaders seeking to design professional development models that uphold *pesantren* values while preparing educators to thrive in the modern era.

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<sup>8</sup> Ahmad Musaddad, “Synthesizing Tradition and Technology in Pesantren Curriculum: A Case Study at Pesantren Al-Falah Situbondo,” *Jurnal Al Burhan* 5, no. 2 (October 12, 2025): 392–411, <https://doi.org/10.58988/jab.v5i2.630>.

<sup>9</sup> Arizqi Ihsan Pratama, “Integration of Pesantren Curriculum with Digital Technology: Challenges and Opportunities in Islamic Education,” 2025.

<sup>10</sup> Bradhiansyah Tri Suryanto, Slamet Setiawan, and ul Anam, “Negotiating Faith and Pedagogy: A Systematic Review on the Professional Identity of English Teachers in Islamic Boarding Schools” 6, no. 1 (2025): 117–26, <http://conference.unisma.ac.id/index.php/ICON/ICON-ELT>.

<sup>11</sup> Jemmy Harto et al., “Reconfiguring Pesantren Education,” *Mozaic : Islam Nusantara* 11, no. 2 (October 31, 2025): 147–60, <https://doi.org/10.47776/mozaic.v11i2.1818>.

<sup>12</sup> Mubarak and Khakim, “The Vision of Internationalization at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor: A Transnational Theory Perspective.”

## METHOD

This study employed a qualitative single case study design focusing on one modern *pesantren* in East Java, selected purposively for its integration of Islamic education with contemporary curricula and efforts to balance tradition with modernization. The case study approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of how *pesantren* teachers negotiate professional development within their unique institutional culture. Participants consisted of nine English teachers with varied teaching experience and educational backgrounds, all actively engaged in professional learning. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations to capture teachers' perceptions, challenges, and strategies in balancing Islamic values with modern pedagogical demands.

Interviews with five teachers explored their understanding of professionalism, integration of Islamic values, and adaptation to technological and pedagogical change, while classroom observations across nine classes provided insights into teaching behaviors and professional practices. Data were analyzed thematically through a narrative-descriptive approach, revealing three key themes: professional development as moral and spiritual growth, barriers to pedagogical and technological integration, and reconciliation of Islamic traditions with modern educational practices.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Teachers' Professional Learning Experiences within the Intersection of Tradition and Modernity

This study collected qualitative data through interviews administered to five junior high school teachers from a *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) in West Java, Indonesia. The respondents coded as T1 through T5 had between one and three years of teaching experience and were actively involved in both religious and general education subjects. The digital questionnaire consisted of 15 open-ended questions focusing on four core areas: (1) teachers' perceptions of professional learning, (2) challenges in developing professionalism, (3) integration of Islamic values in teaching, and (4) adaptation to technological and pedagogical changes.

All participants responded in Indonesian, and their statements were translated and analyzed thematically. The qualitative analysis followed a narrative-descriptive approach, allowing patterns and meanings to emerge organically from their reflections. Three dominant themes were identified: (1) professional development as moral and spiritual growth, (2) barriers to pedagogical and technological integration, and (3) reconciling Islamic tradition with modern educational practice.

#### Professional Development as Moral and Spiritual Growth

The first major finding concerns how teachers in the *pesantren* context perceive professional development. Rather than viewing it solely as a means of acquiring new pedagogical or technological skills, the respondents described it as a moral and spiritual journey of self-improvement. For instance, one teacher (T2) wrote:

*“Every day in the pesantren is a form of professional learning because we are constantly learning to improve ourselves and to educate students guided by Islamic values.”*

This statement indicates that professional learning is understood as an ongoing process embedded within the *pesantren*’s communal and religious life. Another teacher (T4) echoed this idea, stating:

*“Professional development means becoming a better teacher and a better person.”*

These reflections show that teachers frame professionalism through the dual lens of ethical conduct (*akhlak*) and pedagogical competence, emphasizing that the true purpose of learning lies in nurturing both the intellect and the soul.

### **Barriers to Pedagogical and Technological Integration**

The second theme reveals a set of challenges teachers encounter in their pursuit of professional growth. The most recurrent issues include limited pedagogical mentoring, time constraints, and difficulty integrating technology into instruction. Several respondents noted that their teaching responsibilities within the *pesantren*’s 24-hour environment leave little time for formal learning or structured mentoring. As one teacher (T1) explained:

*“The challenge is managing time and reading students’ different characters while fulfilling the pesantren’s daily schedule.”*

Another teacher (T3) pointed to the gap between technological familiarity and effective application:

*“We know about Google Classroom or Kahoot, but we do not know how to use them deeply for teaching.”*

Respondents also expressed difficulty in balancing the dual curriculum, national academic standards and the *pesantren*’s religious education. One teacher (T5) remarked:

*“The national curriculum is not fully aligned with the pesantren curriculum, especially in general subjects like mathematics and science.”*

### **Reconciling Tradition and Modernity**

A recurring and deeply meaningful theme is how teachers attempt to reconcile Islamic educational values with modern pedagogical practices. Rather than rejecting modernity, participants described an adaptive approach in which modern tools and techniques are reinterpreted through Islamic ethics. One teacher (T2) wrote:

*“Islamic values are relevant to every era; it is only the way of delivering them that must adapt.”*

Another explained:

*“Technology is used as a means of da’wah (religious communication), not as an end in itself. Islamic values remain the foundation.”*

These statements demonstrate a pragmatic yet principled stance, suggesting that *pesantren* teachers are neither passive recipients of modernization nor strict traditionalists. Additionally, collaboration and mentorship emerged as central to teachers' professional learning. Participants emphasized the importance of *halaqah* (study circles) as informal professional communities that facilitate peer learning and moral reflection. As one teacher (T3) mentioned:

*"Collaboration is important because we can evaluate each other and improve together."*

The role of collegial dialogue is pivotal in fostering reflective and sustainable teacher professionalism, as it provides educators with structured opportunities to critically examine their practices, share expertise, and collaboratively develop more informed and enduring approaches to teaching.

### **Looking Forward: Professional Growth through Contextualized Support**

The teachers expressed optimism about their professional future, yet they consistently highlighted the need for long-term, contextually grounded professional development programs. They emphasized that growth requires both technological and moral guidance. As one teacher summarized:

*"Professionalism will develop if there is continuous mentoring and the willingness to learn guided by akhlak."*

This finding underscores the importance of designing TPACK-based professional development that integrates technological, pedagogical, and ethical dimensions. For *pesantren* contexts, professional learning must not only improve teachers' digital and pedagogical skills but also align with their moral and religious mission.

Hence, the results of this study suggest that the success of professional learning in Islamic educational institutions depends on three interrelated conditions: holistic understanding of professional growth as moral and intellectual advancement, sustained mentoring and collaboration, and contextual adaptation of PD frameworks to local values and realities.

The interview data reveal that teachers in *pesantren* navigate a complex professional landscape situated "between tradition and modernity." Their professional learning is deeply moral in nature, challenged by structural and pedagogical constraints, yet enriched by adaptive strategies rooted in Islamic culture. These findings reinforce the need for professional development models that not only transfer skills but also respect and build upon the moral and communal identity of *pesantren* education.

### **Professional Challenges and Adaptive Strategies among *Pesantren* Teachers**

The observation results indicate that *pesantren* teachers face multifaceted challenges in developing their professionalism, primarily related to technological, infrastructural, and curricular constraints. Limited access to teaching facilities and digital tools emerged as a consistent issue across respondents, particularly among T2, T3, T4, and T7, who scored low (1–3) in the "Challenges in professionalism" domain.

These material constraints often restrict teachers’ ability to apply contemporary pedagogical methods learned through professional development programs.

Another significant challenge lies in the tension between the *pesantren*’s traditional curriculum and modern educational standards. Several teachers (notably T3 and T4) perceived misalignment between classical Islamic subjects (*kitab kuning*) and the expectations of modern pedagogical frameworks. This curricular dualism occasionally leads to uncertainty in selecting teaching methods that satisfy both institutional and modern academic expectations.

Despite these challenges, the observations show that teachers actively address these limitations through adaptive and reflective strategies. They rely heavily on *halaqah* (mentoring circles) and peer discussions to share teaching innovations that remain consistent with Islamic values. Many teachers consciously use technology as a supportive tool rather than a replacement for tradition, ensuring that digital resources reinforce, rather than dilute the *pesantren*’s moral and spiritual objectives. Moreover, teachers demonstrate personal resilience and moral motivation, rooted in the *pesantren* ethos of sincerity (*ikhlas*) and self-improvement (*islah al-nafs*).

In essence, *pesantren* teachers respond to professional challenges not merely through technical solutions but by reframing professionalism as a moral-spiritual endeavor, balancing limitation in resources with ethical dedication and adaptive pedagogical creativity.

**Table 1.** Analytical Summary

Type of Challenge	Observation Evidence (T1–T9)	Adaptive Response
Technological & infrastructural limitations	Reported by T2, T3, T4, T7 (scores 1–3)	Use of minimal technology creatively; reliance on non-digital strategies rooted in Islamic values.
Curricular misalignment between <i>pesantren</i> and modern education	Mentioned by T3, T4, T7	Integration through selective adoption of modern techniques consistent with traditional pedagogy.
Institutional and student-related barriers to innovation	Minor mentions by T1, T2, T3	Engagement through <i>halaqah</i> mentoring, discussion, and adaptive improvisation.
Moral-professional self-doubt or lack of exemplarity	Reflected in notes from T2, T3	Addressed through reflection, self-evaluation, and ethical reinforcement from <i>pesantren</i> culture.

Thus, the findings suggest that professional challenges in *pesantren* are less about resistance to modernity and more about contextual adaptation within moral constraints. Teachers negotiate professionalism within a framework that values ethics, spiritual maturity, and institutional loyalty. The professional identity of a *pesantren* teacher is therefore resiliently adaptive, anchored in the balance between maintaining tradition and embracing educational innovation.



## Balancing Traditional Islamic Educational Values and Contemporary Pedagogical Demands in Shaping Teacher Professionalism

### Professional Development Experience and Interpretation

The observations reveal a strong overall commitment to continuous professional growth among teachers (T1–T9) at *Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor*. Teachers T1, T5, T6, T8, and T9 consistently achieved the highest rating (score = 5) across all indicators, demonstrating deep engagement with professional learning processes. These teachers actively implemented pedagogical methods gained from professional development training, showed a reflective attitude toward classroom improvement, and seamlessly integrated Islamic values into teaching. Their practices exemplify a holistic model of teacher professionalism that merges technical competence with moral-spiritual consciousness.

Teachers T2, T3, T4, and T7 displayed moderate to high levels of professional engagement (scores 3–4). Although their teaching reflected aspects of innovation and reflection, occasional inconsistencies were noted in adapting professional learning outcomes to daily practice. Collectively, this domain indicates that professionalism within the *pesantren* context extends beyond technical mastery, encompassing spiritual, ethical, and intellectual refinement aligned with the institution's values.

### Professional Challenges

Professional challenges varied in intensity but were primarily associated with technological adaptation and limited infrastructural support. Teachers T2 and T7 reported the lowest availability of teaching facilities and faced the greatest difficulty in harmonizing *pesantren* and modern educational curricula (scores 1–3). These findings reflect systemic challenges common to traditional boarding school environments, where resources are often prioritized for moral and religious formation over technological infrastructure.

Teachers T1, T6, T8, and T9 rated these challenges slightly higher (score = 2), suggesting the presence of obstacles but also the ability to mitigate them through adaptive teaching strategies. Meanwhile, T3 and T4 highlighted curricular misalignments and partial institutional constraints (score = 3), showing sensitivity to the broader pedagogical tensions between classical and contemporary education models. Overall, none of the teachers demonstrated aversion to technological innovation; rather, the observed limitations stem from structural factors and the effort to maintain pedagogical coherence with Islamic identity.

### Strategies for Balancing Tradition and Modernity

All nine teachers exhibited distinctive strategies to bridge classical Islamic educational practices (*tafaqquh fi al-din*) with modern pedagogical techniques. Teachers T1, T5, T6, T8, and T9 were exemplary in this regard, scoring between 4 and 5 in all indicators. They demonstrated flexibility in contextualizing modern methods within the framework of Islamic values, utilizing mentoring or *halaqah* for peer learning, and employing technology as a supportive not substitutive instrument in instruction.

Teachers T2 and T7 exhibited a more selective application of modern methods (scores 3–4), emphasizing pedagogical alignment with Islamic ethics rather than structural modernization. By contrast, T3 and T4 reflected a more cautious approach (score = 2), prioritizing tradition and spiritual formation while maintaining minimal engagement with digital pedagogical innovations. This domain highlights the *pesantren*'s adaptive duality, where teachers act as mediators between traditional epistemology and contemporary educational reform, ensuring that modernization occurs without compromising religious authenticity.

### **Teacher Attitudes and Behaviors**

All respondents displayed commendable affective and behavioral engagement with their teaching roles. Teachers T1, T5, T6, T8, and T9 scored the highest (5) across this domain, indicating strong enthusiasm, moral integrity, and consistent demonstration of *uswah hasanah* (exemplary conduct). Their teaching demeanor embodies Gontor's ideal of the teacher as a role model, disciplined, sincere, and spiritually grounded.

Teachers T2, T3, T4, and T7 also demonstrated genuine commitment (scores 3–4), though occasionally marked by lower confidence or self-perceived limitations in embodying ideal role-model standards. Nevertheless, their perseverance and reflective awareness signify moral growth and professional resilience. Collectively, this domain underscores that the moral and spiritual dimensions of teaching are inseparable from professional practice in *pesantren* education.

The collective analysis of T1–T9 reveals a mature, reflective, and ethically grounded professional culture among teachers in the *pesantren* context. Most participants exhibited advanced professional competence and high moral dedication, with observable integration of Islamic ethics into pedagogical practice. While technological and infrastructural challenges remain, they are outweighed by teachers' intrinsic motivation, adaptability, and commitment to moral leadership.

### **Discussion**

The findings of this study reveal that teachers in *pesantren* interpret professional development not merely as a technical endeavor but as a process of moral and spiritual refinement integrated with their religious vocation. This interpretation aligns with earlier studies suggesting that in Islamic educational settings, professionalism is inseparable from personal piety, moral integrity, and devotion to teaching as a form of worship (*ibadah*)<sup>13</sup>. Teachers' understanding of professionalism as moral growth reflects the *pesantren*'s traditional emphasis on character formation (*akhlaq*) as the foundation of education. Such moral orientation distinguishes *pesantren* teachers from those in secular institutions, where professional development is often framed around performance standards and measurable competencies<sup>21</sup>. This finding highlights the

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<sup>13</sup> Siregar et al., "TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND REINFORCEMENT AT INTEGRATED ISLAMIC SCHOOLS IN INDONESIA."

need for professional learning models that recognize the spiritual and ethical aspects of teaching within faith-based institutions.

The second major finding shows that teachers' difficulties in integrating pedagogical and technological innovations reflect a broader pattern of resistance and cautious adaptation in Islamic schooling contexts. Despite recognizing the potential of digital tools, many teachers expressed concerns about the cultural and ethical implications of online learning, fearing that it might expose students to unfiltered content inconsistent with Islamic values. This finding resonates previous study that found that teachers in *pesantren* often adopt selective strategies when engaging with digital technology, prioritizing cultural appropriateness over rapid adoption<sup>14</sup>. Previously, the study emphasized that technology integration in Islamic schools often requires contextual adaptation to align with religious norms<sup>15</sup>. Hence, the issue is not merely a technological limitation but value negotiation; teachers must ensure that innovation does not compromise spiritual authenticity.

The third finding demonstrates that *pesantren* teachers adopt *hybrid professionalism*, merging traditional Islamic values with modern teaching practices. Similar patterns were identified by a study, it mentioned that *pesantren* educators integrate innovation into established moral frameworks, creating continuity rather than rupture between tradition and modernity<sup>16</sup>. By embedding modern methods in traditional structures like *halaqah* (study circles) and mentoring, teachers maintain the communal learning ethos that has long characterized *pesantren* education. These practices reflect contextualized professional learning, in which teachers' growth is shaped by local culture, institutional norms, and shared moral purpose.

The teachers' negotiation between Islamic values and modern professionalism also highlights the dynamic nature of identity construction in *pesantren*. Reforms in *pesantren* have created a fluid professional identity, where teachers must continuously reconcile external policy demands with internal moral commitments<sup>17</sup>. This mirrors findings from broader research on teachers' professional identity, which emphasizes that identity is not static but constructed through ongoing reflection and adaptation<sup>18</sup>. The *pesantren* context amplifies this dynamic because teachers simultaneously inhabit dual roles, as spiritual guides and modern educators. Therefore, professional

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<sup>14</sup> Halimah, Yusuf, and Safiudin, "Pesantren Education Management: The Transformation of Religious Learning Culture in the Age of Disruption."

<sup>15</sup> Khoiri and Aryati, "THE PROBLEMS OF PESANTREN EDUCATION IN IMPROVING HUMAN ACADEMIC QUALITY IN THE GLOBAL-MULTICULTURAL ERA."

<sup>16</sup> Asikin Nor, Muhammad Yusuf, and Ibnu Arabi, "Strategies for Improving the Professionalism of Islamic Education Teachers at University," *Tafkir: Interdisciplinary Journal of Islamic Education* 5, no. 1 (2024): 40–61, <https://doi.org/10.31538/tijie.v5i1.774>.

<sup>17</sup> International Conference et al., "EXPLORING TEACHER PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY: POSITIONING AND CONTRIBUTION IN AN EMI PREPARATORY ENGLISH COURSE Pham V. Khanh 1 Faculty of Foreign Languages, Ho Chi Minh City University of Technology and Education," 2025.

<sup>18</sup> Douwe Beijaard, Paulien C. Meijer, and Nico Verloop, "Reconsidering Research on Teachers' Professional Identity," *Teaching and Teacher Education* 20, no. 2 (2004): 107–28, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2003.07.001>.

development programs that seek to modernize *pesantren* teachers must avoid imposing external standards and instead foster reflective spaces that allow teachers to integrate new competencies with their religious mission.

Taken together, these findings suggest that professional development in *pesantren* cannot be separated from the institutions' moral and cultural foundations. Teachers' professional learning is best supported through models that combine reflective pedagogy, value-based mentoring, and gradual integration of technological and pedagogical innovation. Such an approach aligns with global frameworks of culturally responsive professional development, emphasizing that effective teacher learning honors the cultural and spiritual identities of educators<sup>19</sup>. In the *pesantren* context, this means situating modern training within the language of *adab* (ethics), *niyyah* (intention), and communal responsibility, ensuring that professionalism grows organically from within the *pesantren* tradition.

Ultimately, the results reaffirm that modernization and tradition are not opposing forces but complementary dimensions in the evolution of *pesantren* education. Teachers' hybrid professionalism demonstrates that pedagogical innovation can coexist with religious authenticity when professional learning is context-sensitive and values-driven. Thus, the development of *pesantren* teachers should move beyond skill acquisition toward a model of *integrative professionalism*, one that harmonizes faith, ethics, and modern competence as interdependent elements of the educator's identity.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that professional development for *pesantren* teachers is a dynamic and context-dependent process shaped by the interplay of faith, culture, and modern educational demands. Teachers in *pesantren* perceive professionalism not only as the acquisition of pedagogical or technological skills but as moral and spiritual growth aligned with their religious mission. Despite challenges such as limited infrastructure and tensions between tradition and modernization, teachers demonstrate adaptive strategies that merge Islamic values with contemporary teaching practices, forming a hybrid model of professionalism. These findings highlight the importance of designing professional learning programs that are culturally grounded, value-driven, and contextually relevant. Ultimately, modernization within *pesantren* education need not conflict with tradition; rather, it can enrich it, fostering educators who embody both spiritual integrity and modern pedagogical competence.

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