

Religious Education and General Education in Islamic Boarding Schools: A Review of the Literature on the Perception of Students

Cut Asri

UIN Sunan Kalijaga

E-mail Correspondent: cutasri39@gmail.com

Article Information	Abstract
Keywords: <i>Religious Education, General Education, Islamic Boarding Schools, Perception of Students</i> Sub. 5th, Aug. 2025 Rev. 01th, sep. 2025 Pub. 23rd, march. 2026 Vol. 01, No. 02, May 2025 DOI: JIISR 	This study aims to examine santri's perspectives on religious education and general education in the pesantren environment by analyzing various available sources. The background of this study is the increasing demands from society today, which require pesantren to not only focus on the religious development of santri but also to equip them with knowledge and skills appropriate to the changing times. This study was conducted by collecting information from various sources, such as books, journals, undergraduate theses, master's theses, and articles related to how students view education in pesantren as well as the relationship between religious education and general education. The data obtained was then analyzed using content analysis, which involves collecting, categorizing, interpreting, and drawing conclusions from the findings at hand. Research findings indicate that religious education is still considered highly important in shaping the identity, morality, and spirituality of santri. However, social and technological progress, as well as the demands of the job market, have led many people to realize that general education is also crucial as a complement to religious education. Santri's perspectives on these two types of education are influenced by various factors, such as family background, the type of pesantren, access to information, and their aspirations for the future. Furthermore, various studies indicate a shift in educational philosophy from the traditional separation of religious and general subjects toward greater integration. However, the implementation of this integration still faces various challenges, such as a lack of facilities, human resources, and curriculum planning. This study demonstrates that education in Islamic boarding schools is currently striving to balance religious values with the need for modern skills without compromising its identity as an Islamic educational institution.

1. Introduction

Traditionally, pesantren have recorded various stories about the Indonesian nation, including the socio-cultural story of the Islamic community, the economy, and politics of this country. Since the beginning of Islam's entry, pesantren have been an important witness in the spread of the religion in Indonesia. Pesantren has led to a major change in the way people across the archipelago view the

importance of religion and education. This means, since then, people have begun to realize that in order to improve their religion, it is very important to take the process of learning and studying their religion seriously in the pesantren.

Today, Islamic boarding schools are known by the public as an Islamic-based place of learning and have an important role in increasing the nation's intelligence and becoming the center of Islamic development. In fact, along with the progress of the times, Islamic boarding schools have adapted a lot to meet the needs of the community in facing the challenges of the changing times. Practically, Islamic boarding schools face the current of globalization and modernization which is characterized by rapid developments in information and technology that ultimately affect the quality of education. This modernization process makes people's views of the world, traditions, and religion stronger. In their own view, a person becomes central in understanding reality. People see nature, other people, and God based on their view of themselves. They also feel free to live their lives without any influence from other forces outside of themselves. Modernity, which is a unique and better historical period, makes many people think that the present age is better, more advanced, and has more truth than the past. In addition, modernity also arouses a sense of optimism and various positive things about the future, and this is a major theme in the history of human civilization.

We all understand that pesantren have an important role in helping people become smarter and useful not only in this world but also for life after death. If we look at it from a religious perspective, most people in the area are Muslims, and the problem is that previously many parents sent their children to pesantren. After seeing many pesantren graduates who lacked various things, people began to think that education in pesantren was not good enough. This happened because of the lack of facilities and learning tools in pesantren. For example, the number of computers in pesantren is very small and their use is also rare. In addition, sports fields and libraries are also not comfortable to use. Many former students after graduation cannot use computers and the general lessons taught are very few, so only a small number are smart in general lessons. The community hopes that there will be a balance between Islamic religious education and general education, but it is not provided by the pesantren. This study aims to answer how students' perception of religious education and general education based on literature studies, including general descriptions, factors that affect them, and comparisons between literature.

2. Results and Discussion

2.1. General Description of Santri Perception Based on Literature

Education is not only seen as a way to impart knowledge and skills. But it is also an effort to help people realize what they want, need, and the abilities they have. That way, they can achieve a way

of life that makes them feel happy. Education is actually not a difficult thing to achieve. It is not only to prepare for the future, but also to help today's children who are growing towards adulthood. Islamic boarding school education in Indonesia has a very important role in shaping a person's character, morals, and spirituality. As one of the key elements in the national education system, pesantren not only serve as a place to learn, but also play an important role in teaching religious and cultural values. In the context of Islamic culture and tradition, pesantren is the main place for the younger generation to learn and apply Islamic teachings in daily life. Religious learning does not only revolve around theory, but also includes practices that explore the moral values that underlie the religious way of life.

Pesantren function not only as formal schools, but also as centers for developing culture and traditions. In pesantren, students not only learn academic lessons but also delve into the local traditions and values that are the basis of cultural diversity in Indonesia. Pesantren create an environment that respects differences and aligns formal education with noble values passed down from generation to generation. Despite having a background in the long history of education in Indonesia, pesantren have also been affected by technological advances and the digital era that raise new questions about how relevant pesantren are in the midst of an increasingly globally connected society.

The physical environment in pesantren also plays an important role in shaping the feelings and spiritual experiences of students. They feel serenity in mosques, courtyards, or study rooms, which reinforces the idea in environmental psychology that a comfortable place can enhance emotional feelings and deepen the meditation or spiritual experience. In Islamic boarding schools, physical space is not only a place to perform rituals, but also a symbolic space that helps them reflect, meditate, and connect with Allah. The relationship between the physical environment and spiritual experiences is an interesting finding and adds a new perspective to the study of Islamic education.

Islamic boarding schools as one of the places of learning are recognized as having a very important role in enlarging and developing education. Islamic boarding schools are also considered to be a solution to various educational problems that exist today. They must be ready to understand various ideas about life problems so that the results can become smart, productive, creative, and religious people. You see, people will feel disappointed if education only produces people who are lazy, old-fashioned, lack sensitivity, and like to consume excessively.

Based on various existing researches, students' views on religious education and general education show quite diverse variations. In general, religious education is still considered very important for students because it is related to character formation, understanding of Islam, and the

identity of pesantren as a place to learn about religion. In the traditional perspective of pesantren as expressed by Zamakhsyari Dhofier, the main goal of education in pesantren is to create people who can understand and practice Islamic teachings well, so that religious science has a very important place in the learning process.

However, the development of modern society has brought a new awareness among students about the importance of general education. Several studies show that students are beginning to see general education as something that cannot be separated from daily life today. The understanding of science, technology, science, and professional skills is considered an important capital to continue education to a higher level or to enter the world of work. Signs of this change can be seen in many modern Islamic boarding schools that have begun to combine religious curriculum with general curriculum. A study conducted at the Darul Ulum Agung Islamic Boarding School in Malang revealed that combining religious knowledge with general knowledge can create students who are balanced between spiritual and intellectual abilities. Students are not only taught to understand Islamic books, but also to gain academic knowledge that is in accordance with the progress of the times.

In addition, a study on the merger of religious and science learning at the Al Yasini Integrated Islamic Boarding School shows that students see this in a good way. This merger is considered to be able to overcome the differences that often arise between religious science and general science in Islamic education. The literature shows that most students still consider religious education to be the most important thing. However, nowadays more and more students are beginning to realize that general education is also very necessary to face various challenges in modern times.

2.2. Factors That Affect the Perception of Students

Family is the first thing that shapes the way students view education. Parents who are very religious usually want their children to learn religion as the main provision in life. On the other hand, families who have a good educational background usually encourage children to study religion and also general lessons so that they have more opportunities in the future. Often, the decision to send children to Islamic boarding schools is also based on parents' expectations that children will get good character and moral education. Therefore, the values instilled by the family before the child enters the Islamic boarding school affect the way students see the importance of these two types of education.

The perception of the students is also influenced by the characteristics of the Islamic boarding school where they study. Traditional Islamic boarding schools usually emphasize more on the teaching of the yellow book, jurisprudence, interpretation, hadith, and various other fields of Islamic science. Here, religious science is often considered the most important thing. On the other hand, modern Islamic boarding schools and integrated Islamic boarding schools have begun to create curricula that

combine religious education with general education. This learning model invites students to understand that religious science and general science are equally important in life.

Advances in information technology have made students more aware of what is needed in this day and age. With the internet, social media, educational seminars, and association with people outside the pesantren, students have become more aware of the importance of mastering knowledge and technology. Books and research show that access to information helps students understand that success does not only depend on religious knowledge, but also on learning abilities and skills obtained from general education. The perception of students about education is also influenced by what they want to achieve in life. Students who want to become kiai, ustaz, religious teachers, or pesantren caregivers are usually more focused on learning religious science. Meanwhile, students who want to continue to college, become academics, work in the government, become entrepreneurs, or professionals in various fields usually consider general education to be very important. So, what they want to do in the future is one of the main factors that affect how students see religious education and general education in their lives.

2.3. Comparison Between Literature and Others

The results of research from various sources show that there is a change in the way of looking at the relationship between religious education and general education in the pesantren environment. This change can be seen from the difference in results between old sources and newer research. In a work entitled *Pesantren Tradition*, Zamakhsyari Dhofier (2011) explained that pesantren is an Islamic educational institution that prioritizes the mastery of religious knowledge as the main goal. The main purpose of education in pesantren is to form students who understand the teachings of Islam correctly, can master classical books, and have good behavior. In this view, general science has not been the main focus because education is more directed to create religious experts and prospective scholars who can preserve the tradition of knowledge in Islam.

In contrast to Dhofier's opinion, research conducted by Hopid (2021) shows that the direction of education in pesantren has changed in modern times. He argues that pesantren can no longer clearly separate religious lessons from general lessons. Today's increasingly complicated society requires students to have more skills, not only in terms of religion, but also in the fields of science, technology, and social skills. Therefore, combining religious science and general science is beginning to be seen as very important so that pesantren graduates can adjust to the development of the times without losing their identity as Muslims. This research shows that general education is now not considered contrary to religious values, but instead becomes a way to help students play a better role in society.

Almost the same view was also found in the 2019 study by Qadariyah and Subhan on the merging of knowledge in Islamic boarding schools. This study emphasizes that the separation between religious science and general science is no longer suitable for Islamic education today. They argue that all science basically comes from the same source, namely Allah Swt., so there should not be a strict boundary between religious science and general science. Students who understand religion well and also master modern science will be better prepared to face various social, economic, and cultural problems that are constantly changing. So, education in Islamic boarding schools should be able to combine these two types of knowledge in a balanced way.

Meanwhile, research conducted by Anwar and Anam in 2024 on educational changes at the Darul Ulum Agung Islamic Boarding School shows that modern Islamic boarding schools are starting to use teaching methods that combine religious subjects and general lessons in accordance with the national curriculum. In this study, it was found that students view general education in a positive way because it is considered to provide more opportunities to continue their education at university or to work. However, religious education is still considered the main basis that shapes the character and morals of students. The results of this study show that there are efforts to balance the mastery of religious science and general science without eliminating the characteristics of pesantren as Islamic educational institutions.

The latest findings come from a study conducted by Kamaliyah, Parmujianto, and Tharaba in 2025, regarding the combination of religious and science learning at the Al Yasini Integrated Islamic Boarding School. This research reveals that students are now more open to the importance of science and technology. The combination of religious learning and science is considered to be able to produce graduates who are not only rich in spirituality, but also have sufficient academic abilities to compete in the global era. However, this study also found several problems, such as the lack of study time due to the large number of religious activities, the need for teachers who are experts in both fields, and the importance of curriculum development that is more in line with the changing times.

Based on a comparison of various writings, we can see that there is a change in the perspective of general education in Islamic boarding schools. In older writings, religious education is usually considered the most important thing, while general science is placed in a less important place. However, recent writings show that there is now a tendency to balance and combine these two types of knowledge. This change occurs due to increasingly complex social challenges, advances in information technology, and the need for students to be actively involved in various aspects of people's lives. Even so, all the writings discussed emphasize that religious education remains the main basis

that cannot be separated from the identity of the Islamic boarding school. What is different is the way we see the position of general education, from what was once considered not so important to be increasingly considered necessary to help students in the future.

Based on research on various writings that discuss students' views on religious and general education, it can be concluded that students' opinions about these two types of education are very diverse and influenced by many social and institutional factors. Religious education remains very important for students because it is considered the basis for shaping morals, morals, and understanding of Islam that are characteristic of education in Islamic boarding schools. Therefore, many students still think that mastering religious knowledge is the main goal when studying at Islamic boarding schools.

Even so, the progress of society today has changed the way students view general education. Many studies show that more students now understand the importance of knowing general science to face various difficulties in the future. General education is no longer considered as something different from religious education, but as an addition that can help students to develop themselves better. This awareness arises because students see the social reality that requires academic skills, technological skills, and professional skills that cannot be obtained by studying religion alone.

Literature studies also show that the views of students are influenced by various things, such as family origin, type of pesantren, access to information, and the future plans of each student. Students who come from very religious families usually emphasize the importance of religious education more. On the other hand, students who want to continue their studies at a university or work in a modern field usually focus more on general education. In addition, the type of pesantren also influences the perspective of students. Salaf pesantren usually emphasize more on mastery of religious knowledge, while modern pesantren and integrated pesantren encourage a balance between religious education and general education.

From the analysis of various writings that have been researched, it appears that there is a change in the perspective in the education system in Islamic boarding schools. In the past, the main focus of education was religion, but research that emerged between 2015 and 2025 shows that there is now a stronger idea to combine religious science with general science. This merger is considered a way to overcome the differences between these two types of knowledge and prepare students to be able to keep up with the times without losing their Islamic identity. In other words, pesantren is expected to not only be able to produce people who are spiritually good, but also those who have knowledge and skills that are in accordance with the needs of today's society.

However, many writings also show that the merger of religious education and general education still encounters several problems. The lack of educational facilities, the lack of teachers who are experts in various fields, and the number of religious activities in Islamic boarding schools often hinder the achievement of a balance between these two types of education. In addition, there are still some people who think that increasing the allocation of general education can distract students from learning religious science properly.

Overall, this study shows that students' views on religious education and general education continue to change in line with the changes that occur in society. From the latest research, it can be seen that students are increasingly aware of the importance of general education, but still consider religious education as the main basis in the process of self-development. Therefore, it is important to develop an education system in pesantren that can combine these two types of education in a balanced manner. This is necessary so that graduates can have a balance between spiritual, intellectual, and social intelligence. With this kind of education, pesantren is expected to remain an Islamic educational institution that can also answer the needs and challenges that exist in today's society.

3. Conclusion

This research shows that students' views on religious education and general education have changed over time and the demands of today's society. Religious education is still the main basis in shaping the identity and character of students, but general education is now increasingly considered an important need to support life in the future. These findings show that pesantren now not only plays a role as a place to convey religious knowledge, but also begins to adapt to the needs of abilities relevant to today's times. Therefore, the main challenge of pesantren is not to choose between religious education or general education, but to create a good balance so that students can maintain Islamic values while actively participating in the life of modern society.

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