

Integrating Curriculum Design, Implementation, and Evaluation to Strengthen Santri Literacy in Pesantren Education

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ABSTRACT

Although Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) are widely recognized as guardians of classical Islamic scholarship, literacy is often treated as an incidental by-product of kitab kuning recitation rather than a deliberately managed curricular outcome. This study analyzes how curriculum design, implementation, and evaluation operate as an integrated management cycle for strengthening santri literacy at Pondok Pesantren Queen Al-Falah, Ploso, Kediri, East Java. Using a qualitative case study design, the study involved pesantren leaders, senior teachers, curriculum coordinators, and santri selected through purposive and snowball sampling. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation, then analyzed inductively using Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's data condensation, display, and conclusion procedures. Credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability were strengthened through triangulation, member checking, and prolonged engagement. The findings indicate that curriculum design integrates religious, formal, and Qur'anic education through three educational pathways, positions literacy as an explicit cultural value, and accommodates diverse santri competence levels. Implementation translates this design into literacy-based pedagogy, co-curricular and extracurricular activities, daily habituation, intensive teacher and senior-student mentoring, and a supportive literacy environment. Evaluation combines teacher assessment, specialized review teams, integrated academic testing, leadership-level curriculum committees, and participatory feedback. The study contributes a context-sensitive model of integrative curriculum management that strengthens literacy while preserving pesantren's distinctive religious identity.

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1. Introduction.

Literacy remains one of the most persistent challenges in global education systems, and the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has only deepened a crisis that predates it. Even before 2020, an estimated 57 percent of ten-year-old children in low- and middle-income countries were unable to read and understand a simple text, a learning poverty rate that subsequently rose to roughly 70 percent following pandemic-related school closures (World Bank, UNESCO, UNICEF, FCDO, USAID, & Gates Foundation, 2022). This crisis is not confined to secular schooling systems; faith-based institutions across the Global South, including Indonesia's Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), face comparable pressure to ensure that religious instruction is matched by functional reading, writing, and critical thinking competence (Hanafi, 2021). Comparative policy analysis across European contexts similarly shows that religious and general literacy aims are frequently negotiated together within curricular structures rather than treated as separable domains (von Brömssen, Ivkovits, & Nixon, 2020). As pesantren continue to expand in scale and social influence, the question of whether their curricula deliberately cultivate literacy, or merely assume it as a by-product of religious recitation, has become a matter of considerable theoretical and practical urgency.

Pesantren occupy a distinctive position in Indonesia's educational landscape because they combine the transmission of classical Islamic scholarship with, increasingly, formal national curricula and contemporary skills training (Bustamam-Ahmad, 2015; Ma'arif, 2018). This dual character has deep historical roots: classical ethnographic accounts of Javanese Islam and the pesantren tradition have long documented the centrality of the kyai-santri relationship and oral textual transmission in shaping pesantren pedagogy (Dhofier, 1982; Geertz, 1976). Historically, pesantren literacy was cultivated almost exclusively through oral and manuscript-based traditions such as *bandongan*, *sorogan*, and *halaqah*, in which santri (students) listened to a kyai (religious teacher) read and explicate *kitab kuning* (classical Arabic religious texts) (Daulay et al., 2024). While these traditions remain pedagogically significant, contemporary pesantren are under growing pressure to formalize literacy outcomes, particularly as santri increasingly pursue dual educational tracks that combine *diniyah* (religious) and formal national schooling (Budiharso, Bakri, & Sujito, 2023; Suyadi & Widodo, 2023). This dual demand makes curriculum management, understood as the planning, organizing, implementation, and evaluation of the totality of a pesantren's learning experiences, central to whether literacy is strengthened systematically or left to incidental classroom practice.

Pondok Pesantren Queen Al-Falah in Ploso, Kediri, East Java, offers a particularly instructive case. As a branch institution of the long-established Pondok Pesantren Al-Falah, Queen Al-Falah has grown from a small cohort of 35 students at its founding to more than four thousand santri by the 2024/2025 academic year, while simultaneously operating three parallel educational pathways: the classical *diniyah* curriculum (Madrrasah Islamiyah Salafiyah Riyadlotul 'Uqul, or MISRIU), formal national education through SMP, SMA, and SMK, and a dedicated Qur'anic education institution (Muassasah Pendidikan Qur'an). This structural complexity, combined with the pesantren's explicit institutional commitment to producing santri who are simultaneously religiously grounded and intellectually competitive, makes it a productive site for examining how curriculum management can be deliberately oriented toward literacy strengthening rather than treating literacy as an unplanned consequence of religious schooling.

A growing body of scholarship has examined discrete dimensions of pesantren education relevant to this study. Several studies have documented the continued centrality of *kitab kuning* recitation methods such as *sorogan* and *bandongan* in cultivating textual literacy (Halimi, Ulya, & Rahmatillah, 2022; Hidayah & Asy'ari, 2022), while others have traced the gradual digitalization of these methods as pesantren respond to twenty-first-century information demands (Mujahidin & Anwar, 2024; Oktaviani & Setiawati, 2025). Separately, studies on pesantren institutional management have examined leadership styles, accreditation processes, and organizational transformation (Fatmawati, 2023; Hamdanah, Mardia, & Rusydi, 2025), while curriculum-focused studies have explored the integration of project-based and STEAM pedagogies into religious instruction (Pepilina et al., 2025) and the broader policy transformation of pesantren education in Indonesia (Nuryana, 2022). Studies specifically addressing literacy strengthening in pesantren contexts, meanwhile, have tended to focus on isolated interventions, such as

community mentoring programs (Munawara & Mughiroh, 2024), character-education outcomes associated with critical thinking skills (Hayah, 2017), teachers' digital literacy competence (Malla et al., 2023), or the experiences of specific groups such as female religious activists engaging digital media (Rusydiah, 2020), rather than on how literacy strengthening is governed through the full management cycle of curriculum design, implementation, and evaluation.

This pattern reveals a clear research gap. Although the literature on pesantren education is extensive, very few studies treat curriculum management itself, encompassing design, implementation, and evaluation as an integrated cycle, as the primary analytical lens for understanding literacy strengthening; most existing work instead isolates either a particular teaching method (such as sorogan or project-based learning) or a particular management function (such as leadership or institutional transformation) without connecting the two. Moreover, existing curriculum theories developed within Islamic educational philosophy, most notably the ta'lim-tarbiyah-ta'dib framework associated with Al-Ghazali, Ibn Khaldun, and al-Attas, were formulated primarily to explain moral and religious formation rather than literacy outcomes specifically, leaving a conceptual gap between classical Islamic curriculum theory and contemporary literacy strengthening frameworks. Finally, while general curriculum evaluation models such as CIPP (Context, Input, Process, Product) have been widely applied in mainstream education (Dizon, 2022), their application to literacy-focused evaluation within the religiously distinctive governance structures of pesantren remains underexamined empirically. (Mustajib; Agus Zaenul Fitri, 2023)

The novelty of this study lies in its integrative treatment of curriculum management, design, implementation, and evaluation as a single, mutually reinforcing cycle directed specifically at literacy strengthening within a large, multi-track pesantren. Rather than treating literacy as an incidental outcome of religious recitation or examining management functions in isolation, this study traces how a single institution deliberately embeds literacy values into curricular structure, operationalizes them through layered pedagogical and extracurricular mechanisms, and verifies their effectiveness through a multi-actor evaluation system involving teachers, specialized committees, institutional leadership, and santri themselves. In doing so, the study extends classical Islamic curriculum theory by demonstrating how ta'lim-tarbiyah-ta'dib principles can be operationalized into literacy-specific institutional practice, and it extends general curriculum evaluation theory by showing how participatory and CIPP-like evaluation logics manifest within a faith-based governance structure.

Accordingly, this study aims to analyze how curriculum management at Pondok Pesantren Queen Al-Falah Ploso strengthens santri literacy, guided by three research questions: (1) how is the curriculum designed to strengthen santri literacy; (2) how is the curriculum implemented to strengthen santri literacy; and (3) how is the curriculum evaluated to determine the effectiveness of literacy strengthening. Theoretically, the study contributes to the literature on Islamic education management by proposing a literacy-oriented elaboration of classical curriculum theory and contemporary evaluation frameworks; practically, it offers a transferable model that other pesantren, madrasah, and faith-based schools can adapt to make literacy strengthening a deliberate, governed outcome of curriculum management rather than an unplanned consequence of religious instruction.

2. Research Method

This study employed a qualitative case study design to obtain an in-depth, contextualized understanding of curriculum management practices oriented toward literacy strengthening. A case study approach was selected because the research problem required a holistic-contextual examination of a single, bounded institutional setting rather than a comparison across multiple sites or a statistical generalization across a population (Creswell, 2013). The design followed an instrumental single-case logic, in which Pondok Pesantren Queen Al-Falah Ploso, Kediri, served as the bounded case through which the broader phenomenon of literacy-oriented curriculum management could be examined in depth. Purposeful sampling was used to identify informants, followed by a holistic analysis of patterns, context, and the specific setting in which curriculum design, implementation, and evaluation occurred.

The research was conducted at Pondok Pesantren Queen Al-Falah, located in Ploso, Mojo, Kediri Regency, East Java Province, Indonesia, between August 2024 and June 2025. This site was selected for three substantive reasons. First, it is among the larger Islamic boarding schools in East Java, with a student population exceeding four thousand santri, providing a setting in which curriculum management

challenges are amplified by scale. Second, the institution has operated for more than a decade as a branch of the long-established Pondok Pesantren Al-Falah, allowing examination of how literacy-oriented curriculum management has matured over time. Third, the pesantren has retained its classical (salaf) religious character while simultaneously operating formal national education and a dedicated Qur'anic studies institution, making it a productive site for observing how literacy is negotiated across three coexisting educational tracks rather than within a single, homogeneous instructional model.

Informants were selected through purposive sampling, followed by snowball sampling to reach additional informants identified by initial key informants as possessing relevant knowledge (Mantja, 2003). Key informants included the pesantren's religious leadership (pengasuh), the head of the pondok, senior teachers (asatidz), the chairperson of the curriculum drafting team, the head of the diniyah madrasah, the principal and vice-principals of the formal senior secondary school (SMA), the coordinator of the Qur'anic education institution (Muassasah Pendidikan Qur'an), and a purposive sample of santri across different educational levels. Internal sampling and time sampling were also applied: internal sampling guided the focus of each interview, observation, and document review session, while time sampling determined when and under what institutional conditions data were collected, since classroom activities, religious schedules, and seasonal events (such as curriculum dissemination forums) shaped the availability and relevance of data at different points in the academic calendar.

Two broad categories of data sources were used. Human sources (informants) provided primary, "soft" data obtained through interviews and observed interaction, while non-human sources, consisting of institutional documents, photographs, curriculum maps, meeting minutes, and the pesantren's official digital archives, provided secondary, "hard" data used to corroborate and contextualize informants' accounts (Moleong, 2005). This dual-source strategy allowed the researcher to verify claims about curriculum design, daily implementation routines, and evaluation practices against documented institutional records rather than relying solely on self-reported accounts.

Following Bogdan and Biklen's (1998) framework, three complementary techniques were used to achieve holistic and integrative data collection.

Participant observation was conducted in three sequential stages: an initial broad descriptive stage to capture the general institutional context; a focused stage concentrating on activities directly related to curriculum design, implementation, and evaluation meetings; and a selective stage in which the researcher deliberately sought contrasts and exceptions relevant to the research focus. Observed activities included curriculum planning meetings, classical text recitation sessions (bandongan and sorogan), project-based literacy mentoring, technology literacy seminars, and periodic evaluation forums.

In-depth interviews were conducted with all key informants using a semi-structured protocol covering curriculum design rationale, implementation practices, and evaluation mechanisms. Interviews followed a structured sequence: identifying appropriate informants, preparing interview guides, opening the interview, conducting the interview, confirming responses with the informant, transcribing results, and identifying necessary follow-up. Each interview was audio-recorded with informant consent and supplemented with field notes.

Documentation was used to corroborate interview and observation data through institutional records, including curriculum documents for MISRIU, Riyadlotut Tholabah, and Ma'had Aly; meeting minutes from annual curriculum forums; entrance assessment results for incoming santri; semester evaluation reports; and the pesantren's official websites and published institutional histories.

Data were analyzed inductively, beginning during fieldwork and continuing after data collection concluded, following the interactive qualitative analysis model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2023), comprising three interrelated components.

Data condensation involved selecting, focusing, simplifying, and transforming raw field notes, interview transcripts, and documentary evidence into manageable analytic units organized around the three research questions (curriculum design, implementation, and evaluation), with conceptually irrelevant material set aside.

Data display organized condensed data into narrative text supported by matrices, thematic tables, and a visual diagram of the data-analysis cycle, allowing patterns across informants and data sources to be identified systematically rather than impressionistically.

Conclusion drawing and verification involved iteratively drawing provisional conclusions during data collection and refining them as additional, often contradicting or confirming, evidence emerged, until conclusions stabilized into the minor and major propositions presented in the discussion section. Because this was a single-case study, analysis proceeded concurrently with data collection and was finalized once all three research questions had been substantively answered through triangulated evidence.

Rather than applying the positivist criteria of validity and reliability, this study established trustworthiness using Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four criteria, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, which have remained the dominant framework for evaluating rigor in qualitative inquiry (Ahmed, 2024).

Credibility was established through source triangulation, comparing interview accounts from pesantren leadership against direct field observation and institutional policy documents; member checking, in which transcribed interview summaries were returned to key informants, including the head of the pondok, for verification and clarification; prolonged engagement, involving repeated visits across the research period to build rapport and reduce reactivity; peer debriefing with academic colleagues to challenge emerging interpretations; and continuous, in-depth observation to distinguish meaningful patterns from incidental occurrences.

Transferability was addressed through thick, detailed description of the research context, the three educational pathways, and the specific mechanisms of curriculum design, implementation, and evaluation, enabling readers to judge the applicability of findings to other pesantren or faith-based educational settings with broadly similar characteristics, since transferability in qualitative inquiry is itself a contextual judgment made by the reader rather than a statistical generalization (Ahmed, 2024; Riazi et al., 2023).

Dependability was maintained through a systematic audit of the research process from initial fieldwork to final reporting, ensuring that data pertaining to curriculum planning, implementation, and supervision were consistently and accurately documented across the data collection period.

Confirmability was achieved by organizing data systematically according to the research questions, maintaining a transparent chain of evidence from raw field notes and transcripts to thematic categories and final propositions, so that conclusions could be traced back to their empirical sources rather than reflecting unexamined researcher bias.

3. Results

3.1 Curriculum Design for Literacy Strengthening

3.1.1 Vision, Mission, and Literacy-Oriented Goal Setting

Curriculum design begins from an explicit institutional vision and mission rather than an ad hoc compilation of subjects. As the head of the pondok explained:

"Vision and mission are not merely administrative guidelines, but also spiritual and ideological drivers that direct the entire educational and formative activity of the pesantren. Without a clear vision and mission, the pesantren would struggle to determine the direction of its development." (Interview, Head of Pondok, 20 January 2025)

The pesantren's vision commits to preparing "a resilient and high-quality generation in religious knowledge, with an up-to-date outlook, while consistently observing adabiyah norms," and documentary evidence confirms that the three educational pathways (diniyah, formal, and Qur'anic) are explicitly framed as joint instruments for realizing this vision rather than as independent programs.

3.1.2 Mapping Santri Literacy Needs

Before designing literacy-specific content, the curriculum team conducts a systematic needs assessment combining observation, diagnostic testing, and teacher consultation. A senior teacher explained:

"To map santri's literacy needs, we conduct direct observation while santri actively participate in diniyah and formal educational activities, as well as extracurricular activities. The results give us a clear picture of santri's literacy level, which becomes the basis for mapping their needs." (Interview, Senior Teacher, 23 August 2024)

This is complemented by a structured entrance assessment:

“We conduct an entrance test to determine the ability of prospective santri. From the test results, we see considerable variation in reading, writing, and text comprehension ability. The literacy-strengthening curriculum must be tailored to actual conditions in the field.” (Interview, Curriculum Team Chairperson, 23 August 2024)

Documentary analysis of the 2025 entrance assessment results corroborated substantial variation in incoming santri’s Qur’anic reading fluency, classical Arabic comprehension, and writing competence, and also revealed a digital-literacy gap, as reflective and analytical writing skills and effective use of digital information tools remained underdeveloped relative to religious-text literacy.

3.1.3 Integrating Literacy Values into Curriculum Structure

Curriculum design unifies three strands, classical religious instruction (kitab kuning), the national Kurikulum Merdeka, and pesantren-specific local content, around an explicit literacy objective. Table 1 summarizes the religious curriculum delivered through the Madrasah Islamiyah Salafiyah Riyadlotul ‘Uqul (MISRIU), the foundational literacy-bearing track for the diniyah pathway.

Table 1.

Subject Structure of MISRIU at Pondok Pesantren Queen Al-Falah Ploso, by Class Level

Class Level	Core Subjects (Dual/Formal Track Santri)	Core Subjects (Diniyah Only Track Santri)
1st Ibtidaiyah	Hidayatus Shibyan, Qur’anic recitation, Mabadi Fiqhiyah (vol. 1–2), Aqidatul Awam, Akhlaq, ‘Izzul Adab, History of the Prophet	Akhlaq, Aqidatul Awam, Hidayatus Shibyan, Mabadi Fiqh (vol. I–III), History of the Prophet, Qur’anic recitation
2nd Ibtidaiyah	Mabadi Fiqhiyah (vol. 3–4), Nurul Yakin (vol. 1), Tuhfatul Athfal, Akhlaq, Tauhid, Khoridatul Bahiyyah	Tanbihul Muta’allim, Khoridatul Bahiyah, Tajwid, Mabadi Fiqh (vol. III–IV), Nurul Yaqin (vol. 1), Qur’anic recitation
3rd Ibtidaiyah	Nurul Yaqin (vol. 2), Hidayatul Mustafid, Washoya, Bad’ul Amali, basic Nahwu, Safinatun Najah	Washoya, Bad’ul Amali, Hidayatul Mustafid, Tanwirul Hija, Nurul Yaqin (vol. 2), basic Nahwu, morphology drills, Qur’anic recitation
1st Tsanawiyah	Jurumiyah (grammar), Qowaidus Shorfi, Qowaidul I’lal, Tijan al-Durori, lexical rules	Jurumiyah, Qowaidul I’lal, Qowaidus Shorfiyah, lexical rules, morphology drills, Tijan al-Durori, Jawahirul Kalamiyah, syntax exercises
2nd Tsanawiyah	Jauharotut Tauhid, Al-Imriti, Sullamut Tauhiq, Maqsud	Al-Imriti, Maqsud, morphology drills, Jauharotut Tauhid, Sullam al-Taufiq, prosody
3rd Tsanawiyah	Risalatul Mahid, Alfiyah Ibn Malik, syntax analysis, Fathul Qorib, legal-methodology rules, Faraidh	Alfiyah Ibn Malik, syntax analysis, al-Baiquniyah, Fathul Qorib (vol. I), Risalatul Mahid, Rohabiyah
4th Tsanawiyah (diniyah-only continuation)	-	Jauharul Maknun, Sullam al-Munauroq, al-Waroqot, Faraidh al-Bahiyah, Fathul Qorib (vol. II), astronomical calculation and applied falak practicum

Literacy progression in the diniyah track moves from basic script writing (khot), Qur’anic recitation, and elementary Arabic grammar at the Ibtidaiyah level, through intensive grammatical study (Nahwu and Shorof) at the Tsanawiyah level, to advanced rhetoric (Balaghah), logic (Mantiq), and jurisprudential methodology before santri proceed to Riyadlotut Tholabah and Ma’had Aly (Table 2), demonstrating that classical literacy is structured developmentally rather than left to incidental exposure.

Table 2.
Subject Structure of Riyadlotut Tholabah and Ma’had Aly

Level	Primary Reference Text Studied	Duration
Fraksi I	Fathul Qorib (introductory jurisprudence)	5 years (combined)
Fraksi II	Fathul Mu’in (intermediate jurisprudence)	
Fraksi III	Fathul Wahhab (advanced jurisprudence)	
Ma’had Aly	Takhasus al-Fiqh wa Ushuluhu (specialized jurisprudence and legal methodology)	

The formal track, operated through SMA Queen Al-Falah (“A”-accredited), mandates literacy-bearing local content regardless of national curriculum changes:

“SMA Queen was established from, and grew out of, the parent pesantren, so it has compulsory programs distinctive to the school, including memorizing 1,000 verses of Nadhom Alfiyah Ibn Malik and fiqh-of-worship instruction that all students must follow and that cannot be removed even when the formal curriculum changes.” (Interview, Vice-Principal for Curriculum, SMA Queen Al-Falah, 20 May 2025)

This illustrates a deliberate design decision to integrate literacy values into curriculum structure rather than treating literacy and formal academic achievement as separate tracks. Documentary evidence further shows that in tafsir, hadith, and fiqh subjects santri produce summaries in their own words, while a dedicated “religious literacy journal” institutionalizes daily reading and writing as a curricular requirement used directly by teachers as an evaluation instrument.

3.1.4 Flexibility and Stakeholder Involvement

The needs-mapping data is operationalized through a tiered structure: documentary review confirmed santri are grouped into basic (reading comprehension), intermediate (descriptive writing), and advanced (argumentative and scholarly writing) literacy levels, with materials adjusted to each tier and senior santri mentoring junior santri in smaller groups. Curriculum design is also deliberative rather than unilateral: annual planning meetings convene pesantren leadership, senior teachers, and the curriculum team, refined further through an annual musyawarah (consultative forum) involving santri guardians. As the curriculum team chairperson explained:

“We wanted to make sure that the curriculum to be developed would genuinely reflect the pesantren’s vision and mission while also meeting santri’s needs. That is why the presence of teachers and the curriculum team in this meeting is essential.” (Interview, Curriculum Team Chairperson, 20 April 2025)

3.2 Curriculum Implementation for Literacy Strengthening

3.2.1 Implementation Through Three Pathways and Classroom Pedagogy

Implementation operationalizes design through three parallel pathways scheduled to avoid competing for santri’s time: formal education in the morning (06:30–13:30) and diniyah instruction in the evening. A senior teacher explained the rationale:

“The curriculum combines religious knowledge with general education relevant to contemporary needs through three educational pathways... the primary focus of integrating these three pathways is to strengthen santri’s literacy.” (Interview, Senior Teacher, 13 December 2024)

Within the diniyah pathway, pedagogy is method-specific:

“We use the bandongan and sorogan methods, which we consider highly effective for strengthening santri’s literacy. In bandongan, santri mostly practice writing and expanding vocabulary, while sorogan is more intensive in mentoring and correcting reading and comprehension.” (same interview)

Observation confirmed santri consistently record translations and reflective notes during recitation, exercising listening, note-taking, and paraphrasing simultaneously, while in formal-pathway

subjects such as tafsir and language lessons, santri produce thematic summaries and short essays, supplemented by discussion and presentation as oral-literacy exercises.

3.2.2 Co-curricular Reinforcement and Daily Habituation

Beyond classroom instruction, literacy is reinforced through a wall magazine, a “Literacy Corner,” a book-review forum, a periodic bulletin (Gema Queen), and a “Creative Writing Class” mentored by alumni published in mass media. Project-based literacy mentoring extends this further:

“Literacy project mentoring aims to ensure that santri do not only learn through theory, but also through real experience that requires them to think and work together in completing larger literacy assignments.” (Interview, Vice-Principal for Student Affairs, SMA Queen Al-Falah, 17 May 2025)

A technology literacy seminar introduced santri and teachers to digital tools, including e-book applications and collaboration platforms. These activities are complemented by institutionalized daily routines outside the formal schedule: a 15–30 minute morning kitab recitation (tadarus) followed by a written summary, and an evening “recite-and-write” halaqah session after Isya prayer. Santri reported that these routines expanded vocabulary and built writing confidence, with some written reflections subsequently used for Friday sermons or shared on the pesantren’s social media.

3.2.3 Mentoring and Supporting Infrastructure

Teachers, musyrif (dormitory supervisors), and senior santri function as literacy facilitators beyond formal teaching duties; observation documented personalized guidance in open reading-room sessions and a dedicated advanced literacy class for senior santri preparing for writing competitions or university admission. Infrastructure reinforces this ecosystem: a digital library and dormitory-level reading collections were observed in active use, supplemented by informational boards displaying literacy-related quotations throughout the grounds. Library staff confirmed the library functions as an active literacy hub hosting seminars, book discussions, and writing workshops rather than merely a lending facility.

3.3 Curriculum Evaluation for Literacy Strengthening

3.3.1 Internal and Co-curricular Evaluation

Evaluation begins at the classroom level:

“Curriculum evaluation is conducted internally through routine monthly meetings. Teachers and mentors report on learning achievement and santri’s literacy development... This evaluation covers cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects of santri’s response to literacy activities.” (Interview, Head of Diniyah Madrasah, 4 August 2024)

A second informant specified the criteria:

“The aspects assessed include santri’s understanding of the teaching material, their involvement in learning activities, and their mastery of kitab kuning... We also evaluate the achievement of memorization targets, attendance, and active participation in class discussion.” (Interview, Head of Pondok, 13 December 2024)

Observation confirmed teachers actively correct literacy journals using informal rubrics covering content accuracy, structure, vocabulary, and originality, accompanied by formative written feedback. A dedicated co-curricular team separately evaluates out-of-classroom literacy activity; documentary review of semester reports showed that when participation in book-review forums declined, the team adjusted its approach, for example by inviting different guest speakers, demonstrating that evaluation findings are used formatively rather than only retrospectively.

3.3.2 Academic, Institutional, and Participatory Evaluation

Literacy assessment is integrated into formal academic evaluation in Arabic, Indonesian, and kitab kuning subjects, with literacy scores recorded in santri’s progress reports and considered in graduation decisions for the final boarding year, confirming literacy as an integral rather than supplementary evaluative component. At the institutional level, pesantren leadership periodically reviews

curriculum effectiveness through an internal Mukhtamar Kurikulum (Curriculum Congress) convening senior teachers, alumni, and pesantren figures; documentary review identified concrete recommendations arising from this forum, including strengthened teacher training in digital literacy and expanded reading resources. Distinctively, evaluation also incorporates santri's own perspectives through a Majelis Musyawarah Santri (Student Consultative Council) and suggestion boxes placed in the library and other public spaces, creating a participatory evaluative climate that, according to interview data, encourages more active and sustained engagement in literacy programming.

Curriculum design integrates literacy values into curricular structure, treats literacy as institutional culture rather than an incidental skill, remains flexible to santri's varied competence levels, and involves multiple stakeholders. Implementation operationalizes this design through literacy-based classroom pedagogy, co-curricular reinforcement, daily habituation, distributed mentoring, and supportive infrastructure. Evaluation is conducted comprehensively through internal teacher assessment, specialized co-curricular review, integrated academic testing, leadership-level review, and participatory feedback from santri themselves.

4. Discussion.

4.1 Curriculum Design as the Foundation of Literacy Strengthening

The finding that curriculum design begins from an explicit, literacy-relevant vision and mission corresponds with curriculum theory's long-standing emphasis on goal clarity as the starting point of planning (Taba, 1962; Oliva, 2009; Doll, 1996). Hamalik's (2008) conception of curriculum management as a deliberate, goal-directed organization of learning experiences is visible in how leadership treats vision and mission as "spiritual and ideological drivers," echoing Posner's (2004) argument that curriculum coherence depends on aligning every component with an overarching purpose, a coherence requirement Mujib and Mudzakkir (2006) similarly identify as central to the Islamic conception of curriculum (*manhaj*). This blending of technical planning with Islamic educational philosophy resonates with the *ta'lim-tarbiyah-ta'dib* framework articulated by Al-Ghazali and Ibn Khaldun (as elaborated by Kurniawan & Mahrus, 2011) and by al-Attas (1980), in which *tarbiyah* denotes holistic development, *ta'lim* denotes knowledge transmission, and *ta'dib* denotes character cultivation (Ihsanuddin, 2022). Queen Al-Falah operationalizes this framework in a literacy-specific direction rarely documented in prior literature: rather than treating these as abstract categories, the institution translates them into tiered literacy classes, mandatory local-content memorization, and literacy journals that directly target reading and writing competence, extending recent work on the practical implementation of *tarbiyah-ta'lim-ta'dib* (Jaya, 2020; Ramadana & Ali, 2022), which has tended to focus on moral rather than literacy outcomes.

The systematic needs-mapping process aligns with Posner's (2004) emphasis on needs assessment as a prerequisite for curriculum relevance and supports Munawara and Mughiroh's (2024) finding that pesantren literacy programs are more effective when tailored to santri's actual competence levels. This diverges, however, from studies describing literacy programming as a relatively uniform intervention (Daulay et al., 2024); the tiered grouping identified here is more differentiated than typically reported, suggesting that as pesantren scale upward, as Queen Al-Falah has from 35 to over four thousand santri, designers are pressed toward greater pedagogical differentiation than smaller, more homogeneous settings require. The integration of classical, national, and local curricular strands around a shared literacy objective also speaks to debates about curriculum integration in modern pesantren: Kurniawan (2023) argues integration is essential for reconciling religious authority with national standardization, while Suyadi and Widodo (2023) caution it risks diluting classical instruction if poorly managed. By mandating retention of literacy-bearing local content regardless of national curriculum changes, Queen Al-Falah preserves classical literacy as a non-negotiable core while accommodating national requirements, offering an empirical resolution to this debate.

4.2 Curriculum Implementation as a Multi Layered Literacy Ecosystem

The implementation findings, spanning classroom pedagogy, co-curricular reinforcement, daily habituation, mentoring, and infrastructure, support the view that pesantren literacy development functions as an ecosystem of mutually reinforcing practices rather than a single method. This is consistent with Hidayah and Asy'ari's (2022) demonstration that *sorogan* remains pedagogically effective, and Halimi, Ulya, and Rahmatillah's (2022) argument that *bandongan* continues to play a vital literacy-transmission

role even as pesantren modernize. The present study extends this literature by showing these classical methods are deliberately combined with co-curricular mechanisms, wall magazines, bulletins, and creative-writing extracurriculars, rarely examined in the same analytical frame, suggesting contemporary pesantren literacy strengthening increasingly resembles a deliberately constructed multi-channel ecosystem.

The informal habituation found here, morning tadarus-and-summary routines and evening “recite-and-write” sessions, resonates with Daulay et al.’s (2024) observation that innovative kitab kuning pedagogy frequently emerges from teacher-initiated practice rather than top-down mandate. The co-curricular journalism activities documented likewise parallel Hidayati and Miftahurrohman’s (2023) finding that structured pesantren press programs, such as Pers Mahrusy at Pondok Pesantren Lirboyo, systematically cultivate digital literacy, suggesting pesantren press activities constitute a transferable mechanism across institutions. This finding also complicates Mujahidin and Anwar’s (2024) characterization of pesantren digitalization as primarily technology-driven; it instead aligns with Suresman et al.’s (2025) systematic literature network analysis of pesantren learning models, which similarly finds that classical methods such as sorogan persist alongside rather than being supplanted by digital innovation, since the most consistently observed literacy practices here remain low-technology and socially embedded even as the institution invests in digital infrastructure, indicating digital and non-digital strategies coexist rather than the former displacing the latter, a nuance not always captured where digitalization is framed as a linear trajectory (Oktaviani & Setiawati, 2025).

The mentoring role of teachers, musyrif, and senior santri aligns with transformational leadership theory’s emphasis on individualized attention and intellectual stimulation as mechanisms of follower development (Bass & Avolio, 1990; Vermeulen, Kreijns, & Evers, 2022; Khan, 2023), and echoes the Islamic pedagogical principle that teachers function as a *qudwah* (living exemplar) whose personal conduct models the competence being taught (Baba, Salleh, & Zayed, 2021), resonating with accounts of kyai leadership shaping santri attitudes beyond classroom instruction (Setiawan & Prasetya, 2023) and arguments that pesantren innovation depends on leaders balancing tradition with contemporary responsiveness (Wahid, 2024). Importantly, this dynamic is distributed rather than concentrated in formal leadership: senior santri mentor junior peers, a peer-mediated mechanism that has received less attention in transformational leadership literature, traditionally focused on principal-teacher dyads rather than horizontal, near-peer relationships (Kılınç, Polatcan, Savaş, & Er, 2022).

4.3 Curriculum Evaluation as a Multi-Actor, Participatory System

The evaluation architecture, spanning teacher-level assessment, specialized co-curricular teams, integrated academic testing, leadership review, and participatory feedback, is more comprehensive than typically documented in pesantren curriculum literature. This resonates with the CIPP (Context, Input, Process, Product) model’s logic that evaluation should occur continuously across stages rather than only summatively (Stufflebeam, 2003; Dizon, 2022). Although not explicitly designed using CIPP terminology, the structure maps onto its logic: context evaluation in needs-mapping (Section 3.1.2), input evaluation in design deliberations (Section 3.1.4), process evaluation in routine teacher review (Section 3.3.1), and product evaluation in literacy scores feeding formal outcomes (Section 3.3.2). This suggests CIPP’s evaluative logic can manifest organically within faith-based governance without formal adoption of its vocabulary, extending Dizon’s (2022) historical account of CIPP by showing its functional presence in a setting not typically associated with Western evaluation models.

The participatory dimension, the *Majlis Musyawarah Santri* and suggestion-box mechanisms, supports Odera et al.’s (2021) argument that participatory evaluation enhances legitimacy by incorporating beneficiary perspectives rather than relying solely on top-down judgment, and corroborates broader evidence that participatory curriculum approaches strengthen ownership and relevance across educational levels, from santri councils to higher-education sustainability curricula (Makrakis & Kostoulas-Makrakis, 2023). Just as researchers establish credibility through member checking (Ahmed, 2024; Riazi et al., 2023), Queen Al-Falah’s evaluation system establishes institutional credibility by “checking” curriculum effectiveness directly with santri, a structural analogy not previously drawn in pesantren management literature. The formative use of findings, exemplified by adjusting book-review

forum programming in response to declining participation, distinguishes this case from settings where evaluation is primarily administrative (Fatmawati, 2023) or mobilized to address perceived degradation rather than to refine existing strengths (Choiriyah, Khuriyah, & Hakiman, 2023; Jamil, Alfian, Ulfah, & Youssef, 2025). This supports the claim that evaluation's value lies less in instrument sophistication than in institutional willingness to act on findings (Odera et al., 2021), positioning Queen Al-Falah as comparatively mature. As Bustomi, Saiban, Rozikin, Suadi, and Armiah (2025) argue regarding pesantren media literacy and management openness, institutions cultivating openness and participatory feedback tend to sustain greater stakeholder trust, a dynamic plausibly reinforced here.

4.4 Theoretical and Practical Contribution

These findings support a central proposition: literacy strengthening in pesantren is most effectively achieved not through any single curricular element but through deliberate alignment of design, implementation, and evaluation around an explicit literacy objective embedded within religious identity. This confirms and extends Hamalik's (2008) design-implementation-evaluation cycle by showing, through close observation, how it operates for literacy strengthening within a large, multi-track Islamic boarding school, a context substantially different from the secular settings for which classical curriculum theory was developed. Three minor propositions support this claim: (1) literacy-oriented design requires embedding literacy as an explicit value within vision, mission, and mandatory local content rather than assuming it as an automatic by-product of religious instruction; (2) literacy-oriented implementation requires a multi-channel ecosystem combining classical pedagogy, co-curricular reinforcement, habituation, and distributed mentoring rather than classroom instruction alone; and (3) literacy-oriented evaluation requires multiple complementary actors and participatory feedback operating across a full CIPP-like cycle rather than a single summative point.

Table 3.

Matrix of Research Questions, Key Findings, Propositions, and Theoretical Perspectives			
Research Question	Key Findings	Proposition	Relevant Theoretical Perspective
How is the curriculum designed to strengthen santri literacy?	Literacy embedded in vision/mission; systematic needs mapping; integration of classical, national, and local curricular strands; tiered grouping by literacy level; multi-stakeholder deliberation	Minor Proposition 1: Literacy-oriented curriculum design requires embedding literacy as an explicit institutional value within vision, mission, and mandatory local content, rather than assuming it as an automatic by-product of religious instruction	Curriculum theory (Taba, 1962; Posner, 2004; Hamalik, 2008); ta'lim-tarbiyah-ta'dib framework (Al-Attas, 1980; Kurniawan & Mahrus, 2011)
How is the curriculum implemented to strengthen santri literacy?	Three coexisting educational pathways; classroom literacy pedagogy (bandongan, sorogan, written summaries); co-curricular reinforcement; daily habituation; distributed mentoring; supportive infrastructure	Minor Proposition 2: Literacy-oriented curriculum implementation requires a multi-channel ecosystem combining classical pedagogy, co-curricular reinforcement, habituation, and distributed mentoring, rather than classroom instruction alone	Transformational leadership theory (Bass & Avolio, 1990; Vermeulen, Kreijns, & Evers, 2022); classical pesantren pedagogy (Hidayah & Asy'ari, 2022; Halimi, Ulya, & Rahmatillah, 2022)
How is the curriculum evaluated to determine the effectiveness of literacy	Routine internal teacher-level assessment; specialized co-curricular evaluation team; integrated	Minor Proposition 3: Literacy-oriented curriculum evaluation requires multiple complementary evaluative	CIPP evaluation model (Stufflebeam, 2003; Dizon, 2022); participatory evaluation theory

strengthening?	academic testing; leadership-level Muktamar Kurikulum; participatory evaluation via Majelis Musyawarah Santri	actors and participatory feedback mechanisms operating across a full context-input-process- product cycle, rather than a single summative assessment point	(Odera et al., 2021)
Major Proposition (integrative)	-	Literacy strengthening in pesantren is most effectively achieved through the deliberate alignment of curriculum design, implementation, and evaluation around an explicit literacy objective embedded within the institution's religious and cultural identity, rather than through any single curricular element in isolation	Integrative curriculum management cycle (Hamalik, 2008), extended through literacy-specific application to a large, multi-track Islamic boarding school context

Theoretically, this study contributes a literacy-specific elaboration of both classical Islamic curriculum philosophy and contemporary evaluation theory, demonstrating their joint applicability to a previously underexamined context. Practically, the model identified, tiered literacy grouping, mandatory literacy-bearing local content, distributed peer mentoring, and participatory evaluation, offers a transferable template other large, multi-track pesantren and faith-based institutions internationally can adapt. Given the scale of the global learning poverty crisis (World Bank, UNESCO, UNICEF, FCDO, USAID, & Gates Foundation, 2022), models demonstrating sustained, structurally embedded literacy strengthening within resource-constrained, non-Western religious education systems carry relevance well beyond the pesantren sector itself.

5. Conclusion

This study set out to analyze how curriculum management strengthens santri literacy at Pondok Pesantren Queen Al-Falah Ploso through the integrated cycle of curriculum design, implementation, and evaluation. The findings show that curriculum design embeds literacy as an explicit institutional value through a literacy-relevant vision and mission, systematic needs mapping, integration of classical, national, and local curricular strands, tiered accommodation of santri's varied competence levels, and multi-stakeholder deliberation; implementation operationalizes this design through a multi-layered literacy ecosystem combining classroom pedagogy, co-curricular and extracurricular reinforcement, daily habituation, distributed mentoring by teachers and senior santri, and supportive physical infrastructure; and evaluation is conducted through a comprehensive, multi-actor system spanning routine teacher assessment, specialized co-curricular review, integrated academic testing, leadership-level curriculum congresses, and participatory feedback from santri themselves.

The principal contribution of this study is to demonstrate that literacy strengthening in pesantren is best understood not as the outcome of any single pedagogical method or evaluative instrument, but as the product of deliberate alignment across the full curriculum management cycle, anchored in the institution's religious identity rather than imposed upon it. Theoretically, the study extends classical Islamic curriculum philosophy (ta'lim-tarbiyah-ta'dib) and contemporary evaluation theory (CIPP) by showing their joint, organic operation within a large, multi-track pesantren, a context that has remained underexamined in both literatures. Practically, the model identified, particularly tiered literacy grouping, mandatory literacy-bearing local content, distributed peer mentoring, and participatory evaluation, offers

other pesantren, madrasah, and faith-based institutions a transferable, context-sensitive framework for converting literacy from an assumed by-product of religious instruction into a systematically governed institutional outcome, with relevance extending to the broader global effort to address learning poverty in resource-constrained and religiously distinctive educational settings.

Future research should pursue comparative case studies across pesantren of differing size, sectarian orientation (salaf versus khalaf; Hayati, 2019), and regional context to assess the transferability of the literacy-oriented curriculum management model identified here, and should consider mixed-methods or longitudinal designs capable of tracking santri's literacy trajectories quantitatively over time, complementing the rich contextual understanding offered by this single-case qualitative design with evidence of measurable literacy outcomes at scale.

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