

STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING READING AND COMPREHENSION SKILLS OF KITAB KUNING USING THE AL-MIFTAH METHOD AT AL MUJAHIDIN ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOL, BANYUMAS

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Abstract

This community service program aimed to enhance the skills of reading and understanding kitab kuning (classical Islamic texts) among students of Pondok Pesantren Al Mujahidin Banyumas through the implementation of the Al-Miftah Lil-'Ulum Method. The program was conducted from October to December 2025 and involved 50 students using a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach, which positioned students and pesantren caretakers as active participants throughout all stages of the program. The mentoring process was carried out systematically through cycles of problem identification, action planning, implementation, observation, and reflection, with an intensive training session serving as the culmination of the activities. The mentoring strategy emphasized practical and applicative mastery of nahwu and sharaf rules through material presentations, group reading exercises, text analysis practices, and interactive dialogue. The results indicate a significant improvement in students' competencies, as reflected by an increase in the average score from 58.4 in the pre-test to 81.6 in the post-test. In addition to cognitive improvements, the program also had positive affective impacts, including increased learning motivation, self-confidence, and active participation. Therefore, the Al-Miftah Lil-'Ulum Method is proven to be effective and feasible as a model for developing kitab kuning reading and comprehension skills in Islamic boarding schools.

Keywords: Kitab Kuning; Al-Miftah Lil-'Ulum Method; Islamic Boarding School

A. INTRODUCTION

Pesantren are Islamic educational institutions that have demonstrated strong resilience and sustainability in responding to various dynamics and challenges of the times. Their existence has not only endured but has also made a tangible contribution to the development of the national education system. In several aspects, the pesantren education system has even been adopted by formal educational institutions, particularly through the implementation of boarding systems and the establishment of close, organic educational relationships between educators and learners. The boarding system is regarded as one of the key indicators of a superior school, as it facilitates a comprehensive educational process encompassing academic development, character building, and social skills formation.

Through boarding life, students not only acquire knowledge but also undergo a process of internalizing values and character traits such as discipline, togetherness, tolerance, mutual respect, and strong social cohesion. This educational pattern fosters a conducive, participatory, and sustainable learning environment without neglecting academic competitiveness. These characteristics position pesantren as a relevant educational model for shaping human resources who are knowledgeable, morally grounded, and competitive.

Historically, pesantren and Islamic educational institutions have produced many scholars and leaders who have played significant roles in the development of Islamic knowledge and socio-religious life. Prominent scholars such as Imam Al-Shafi'i, Imam Al-Ghazali, and Imam Al-Juwayni emerged from classical Islamic educational traditions. In Indonesia, national figures such as KH. Hasyim Asy'ari, KH. Ahmad Dahlan, KH. Abdurrahman Wahid, and Nurcholish Madjid were also products of Islamic educational institutions. This fact confirms that Islamic educational institutions, particularly pesantren, have made strategic contributions to the formation of character, intellectual capacity, and leadership within the nation.

One of the main distinguishing features of pesantren is the study of kitab kuning (classical Islamic texts). Pesantren and kitab kuning are akin to two sides of the same coin and cannot be separated in the context of Islamic education in Indonesia. Since their inception, pesantren have been inseparable from kitab kuning, which are scholarly works produced by classical Muslim scholars whose intellectual authority is widely acknowledged (Bahrudin & Moh. Rifa'i, 2021). According to Dhofier (1994), the teaching of classical Islamic texts, particularly those written by scholars of the Shafi'i school, constitutes the core formal instruction in pesantren, which explains why the majority of Indonesian Muslims adhere to the Shafi'i school of jurisprudence. Nevertheless, in practice, pesantren also introduce other schools of law, such as Hanafi, Maliki, and Hanbali.

Kitab kuning are understood as Arabic-language religious texts encompassing various Islamic disciplines and functioning as primary guides and references in Islamic studies (Abudin Nata in Muhammad Syu'aib, 2025). These texts play a crucial role in conserving and transmitting Islamic values, particularly within pesantren education. Since the mid-nineteenth century, the study of kitab kuning has become a permanent and mass-based component of pesantren curricula, especially following the return of Nusantara scholars from Mecca (Abdurahman, 1994). Thus, the learning of kitab kuning serves as a fundamental foundation for preserving the Islamic scholarly tradition within pesantren.

However, preliminary observations at Pondok Pesantren Al Mujahidin Banyumas reveal challenges related to students' skills in reading and understanding kitab kuning. Many students have not yet achieved sufficient mastery of nahwu (Arabic syntax) and sharaf (Arabic morphology), which are essential prerequisites for comprehending classical Islamic texts. These limitations negatively affect students' ability to read kitab kuning independently and to accurately understand the linguistic structures and meanings of the texts.

Reading skills constitute one of the core language competencies and serve as a benchmark for language proficiency (Muhsyanur, 2019:7). Reading involves the recognition of letters and grammatical structures as well as the ability to obtain

and comprehend information, ideas, messages, and discourse conveyed by the author (Muhsyanur, 2019:16). In the context of Arabic language learning, reading skills require not only the ability to pronounce texts fluently but also the capacity to translate and accurately grasp the author's intended meaning (Ach. Sholehuddin, 2019:54). Therefore, mastery of reading kitab kuning is a fundamental competence in preparing students to become future Islamic scholars and researchers.

Based on these issues, a planned, systematic, and contextual mentoring approach is required to enhance students' competencies in reading and understanding kitab kuning. One strategy considered relevant is the implementation of the Al-Miftah Lil-'Ulum method. According to Al Mahmudi (2018), the Al-Miftah Lil-'Ulum method is a concise synthesis of Al-Jurumiyah, Al-'Imrithi, and Alfiah, without introducing new terminologies in the study of nahwu, while maintaining the originality of classical terminology. The materials focus on nahwu and sharaf rules that are directly applicable to reading kitab kuning, without excessive theoretical elaboration.

The content of the Al-Miftah Lil-'Ulum method is presented in clear, concise, and easily understood Indonesian language, complemented by formulas, tables, and schematic representations, and is creatively integrated with melodies familiar to students (Ubaidillah & Rifa, 2019). Selecting an appropriate learning method is a strategic factor in achieving successful learning outcomes (Fuad, 2012; Iskandarwassid & Sunandar, 2011; Adzkiyatul, 2021), as methods aligned with learners' characteristics facilitate optimal achievement of instructional objectives.

In line with the policies of the Directorate of Islamic Higher Education (Diktis), Community Service programs are directed toward strengthening the role of higher education institutions in mentoring and empowering religious educational institutions. Pesantren, as strategic partners of universities, occupy a vital position in reinforcing Islamic literacy based on classical texts (turath). Therefore, the involvement of lecturers and academics in mentoring kitab kuning learning represents a concrete implementation of the Tri Dharma of Higher Education that is relevant, applicable, and responsive to the real needs of pesantren communities.

Previous studies indicate that kitab kuning learning in pesantren generally employs traditional methods such as bandongan, sorogan, memorization, and discussion (Adib, 2021; Hanani, 2017; Thoriquusu'ud, 2012; Murtafiah, 2021). Muqoyyidin (2014) emphasizes that pesantren have successfully established a strong scholarly tradition based on kitab kuning; however, contemporary challenges demand innovative learning strategies that remain rooted in classical traditions while being responsive to students' needs.

Based on this review, the Community Service program entitled "Mentoring Strategies for Reading and Understanding Kitab Kuning through the Al-Miftah Lil-

‘Ulum Method at Pondok Pesantren Al Mujahidin Banyumas” is designed as an effort to develop and disseminate effective practices in kitab kuning instruction. The novelty of this program lies in its focus on applicative mentoring strategies tailored to the empirical conditions of the students and oriented toward program sustainability. Accordingly, this initiative is expected not only to enhance students’ individual competencies but also to strengthen the kitab kuning learning system at the partner pesantren in a sustainable manner.

B. METHODOLOGY

This community service program was conducted using the Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach, which positions the lecturers and partner institutions as active participants throughout all stages of the activity. This approach was selected because it aligns with the characteristics of community service conducted by lecturers at Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTKI), emphasizing the integration of Islamic scholarship, the real needs of the pesantren community, and the sustainable strengthening of partner capacity. The implementation of the PAR approach in this program was carried out through three main stages.

First, the Planning and Needs Analysis Stage. This stage began with initial coordination and communication with Pondok Pesantren Al Mujahidin as the community service partner. A needs assessment was then conducted to map the initial conditions of the santri’s abilities in reading and understanding kitab kuning, particularly regarding their mastery of basic nahwu and sharaf. The results of the needs analysis served as the basis for designing the mentoring program, determining learning materials, scheduling activities, and forming santri study groups.

Second, the Mentoring Implementation Stage. This stage constituted the implementation of the community service activities in the form of mentoring for reading and understanding kitab kuning using the Al-Miftah Lil-Ulum Method. The activities were carried out in a structured and gradual manner, including the delivery of materials, practice in reading kitab kuning texts, reinforcement of linguistic rules, discussions on textual interpretation, and practical analysis of Arabic sentence structures. The mentoring process was conducted participatively by involving santri and pesantren administrators as active partners, thereby creating a contextual and applicative learning process.

Third, the Evaluation, Reflection, and Follow-Up Stage. This stage aimed to assess the effectiveness of the mentoring activities and to identify the outcomes of the community service program. Evaluation was conducted through observations

of improvements in santri competencies, joint reflection between the service team and partners, and review of activity documentation. The evaluation results were used as the basis for preparing the community service report as well as formulating recommendations for follow-up actions and program sustainability within the pesantren environment.

The data collection technique employed in this community service program was documentation, including activity records, photographs, attendance lists, and santri exercise results during the mentoring process. The collected data were analyzed using qualitative data analysis techniques through the stages of data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing, ensuring that the results of the community service program were presented systematically and accountably.

Matrix of Community Service Methods

Component	Description
Stage Planning	1: Coordination with the pesantren partner and needs analysis regarding santri abilities in reading and understanding <i>kitab kuning</i> .
Method	Participatory Action Research (PAR).
Partner Role	Providing initial data and input regarding mentoring needs.
Outputs	Program design and mentoring schedule.
Stage Implementation	2: Mentoring of reading and comprehension skills of <i>kitab kuning</i> using the Al-Miftah Lil-Ulum Method in a gradual and structured manner.
Method	PAR and direct instructional practice.
Partner Role	Santri actively participate in mentoring activities; pesantren administrators support implementation.
Outputs	Improved santri skills in reading and understanding <i>kitab kuning</i> .
Stage Evaluation	3: Evaluation of mentoring outcomes and joint reflection between the service team and partners.
Method	Participatory qualitative evaluation.
Partner Role	Involved in reflection and assessment of program outcomes.
Outputs	Community service report and follow-up recommendations.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Community Service Program in the form of Training on Strategies for Developing Skills in Reading and Understanding Kitab Kuning using the Al Miftah Lil-Ulum Method was conducted at Al Mujahidin Islamic Boarding School,

Banyumas, from October to December 2025. This activity involved 50 santri as participants and applied a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach, which positioned both the santri and the pesantren caretakers as active subjects throughout all stages of the program. This approach was selected to ensure that the mentoring program was not merely a transfer of knowledge, but was also oriented toward empowerment and the real needs of the pesantren.

The implementation of the community service program was carried out in stages, beginning with the identification of initial problems related to the low level of skills in reading and understanding kitab kuning, followed by action planning, mentoring implementation, observation, and reflection. This sequence of stages enabled the service team to continuously adjust mentoring strategies in accordance with the development of the santri's abilities. The peak of the program was marked by the implementation of an intensive training session on 11 December 2025, which served as a moment to evaluate the santri's learning achievements after completing the entire series of mentoring activities.

During the intensive training stage, the santri directly practiced their skills in reading and understanding kitab kuning based on the principles of nahwu and sharaf that had been learned through the Al Miftah Lil-'Ulum Method. Reading practices were conducted both individually and in groups, with direct guidance from the service team. The results of these practices not only strengthened the santri's skills but were also used as a basis for evaluating the effectiveness of the mentoring and formulating recommendations for future program development.

The activity documentation shows that the mentoring and training processes took place in a concrete, participatory, and interactive manner. Activities such as material presentations, group reading exercises, text analysis practices, and dialogues between the instructors and santri illustrate an active and collaborative learning atmosphere. This condition demonstrates that the PAR approach was able to create a learning space that optimally encouraged santri involvement in understanding the nahwu and sharaf structures of kitab kuning.



Picture1. Group-based practice of reading kitab kuning as part of the practical mentoring activities.



Picture 2. Presentation of the Al Miftah Lil-'Ulum Method by the community service team to the santri of Al Mujahidin Islamic Boarding School, Banyumas.



Picture 3. Santri practicing reading and text analysis with direct mentoring.



Picture 3. The training atmosphere and interactive dialogue between the instructor and santri in understanding nahwu and sharaf structures.

In line with the mentoring process, the results of the community service program indicate a significant improvement in the santri's skills in reading *kitab kuning*. The improvement is evident in aspects of reading accuracy (*qirā'ah*), mastery of *nahwu* and *sharaf* rules, and the ability to understand Arabic sentence structures. This change is also reflected in the santri's attitudes, who initially were hesitant and lacked confidence, but gradually became more fluent and confident in reading *kitab kuning* independently in front of mentors and peers.

The improvement in reading skills is supported by quantitative data showing an increase in the santri's average score from 58.4 in the pre-test to 81.6 in the post-test, representing an increase of 23.2 points. These data indicate that the mentoring method applied was effective in strengthening the basic skills of reading *kitab kuning*. Thus, the Al Miftah Lil-'Ulum Method has proven to make a tangible and measurable contribution to improving the santri's competencies.

Furthermore, the improvement in reading skills had a direct impact on the santri's ability to comprehend the content of *kitab kuning*. The santri were not only able to read unvowelled Arabic texts correctly, but also began to understand lexical meanings, sentence structures, as well as the legal content and messages contained in the texts. This was evident from the santri's ability to explain the content of the readings both orally and in writing, which had previously been a major obstacle in *kitab kuning* learning.

These changes are also reflected in the distribution of the santri's competency categories. At the beginning of the program, the majority of santri (64%) were in the low-ability category. However, after the mentoring process, no santri remained in this category. Instead, 82% of the santri reached the good category, while the remainder were in the sufficient category. This shift demonstrates that the

mentoring was comprehensive and capable of accommodating santri with diverse initial ability levels.

The success of improving the santri's abilities cannot be separated from the use of the Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach. Through PAR, santri and pesantren caretakers were actively involved from the problem identification stage to reflection, making the mentoring program more contextual and aligned with the needs of the pesantren. This active involvement also fostered a sense of ownership of the program, which positively affected the santri's motivation and participation.

Through continuous cycles of action, observation, and reflection, the mentoring process could be dynamically adjusted to the development of the santri's abilities. This approach encouraged the creation of a dialogical and collaborative *kitab kuning* learning process, rather than a one-way instructional model. In the context of community service, PAR proved effective not only in improving academic competence but also in empowering the target community.

In addition to academic achievements, this community service program also produced significant non-academic impacts. Increased learning motivation, self-confidence, and active participation among the santri indicate that *kitab kuning* learning can be developed into a more humanistic and empowering process. These affective outcomes serve as important supporting factors for the sustainability of the pesantren's scholarly tradition.

Overall, the results of this community service program demonstrate that the Al Miftah Lil-'Ulum Method is worthy of further development as a model for fostering skills in reading and understanding *kitab kuning* in pesantren. This method can be integrated with traditional pesantren learning systems, such as *sorogan* and *bandongan*, to create a more varied, inclusive, and effective learning approach. The success of this PAR-based community service program also opens opportunities for replication in other pesantren with similar characteristics, in order to strengthen the pesantren's academic culture in a sustainable manner.

D. CONCLUSION

The mentoring program aimed at developing the skills of reading and understanding *kitab kuning* through the implementation of the Al-Miftah Lil-'Ulum Method at Pondok Pesantren Al Mujahidin Banyumas was carried out in a systematic, participatory, and sustainable manner using a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach, which involved students and pesantren caretakers as active subjects from the stages of problem identification to reflection. The mentoring strategy was implemented through learning activities that emphasized practical and applicative mastery of nahwu and sharaf rules, manifested in material

presentations, group reading exercises, text analysis practices, and interactive dialogue, thereby creating a collaborative and contextual learning process. The results of the mentoring program demonstrate a significant improvement in students' competencies, both quantitatively and qualitatively, as indicated by an increase in the average score from 58.4 in the pre-test to 81.6 in the post-test, as well as a shift in the distribution of students' abilities from a predominance of the low-competency category to a majority in the good category. In addition to cognitive improvements in reading accuracy, mastery of nahwu and sharaf, and understanding of the structure and meaning of unvocalized Arabic texts, the mentoring also had positive affective impacts, including increased learning motivation, self-confidence, and active student participation. Therefore, the Al-Miftah Lil-'Ulum Method has proven to be effective and feasible as a model for developing kitab kuning reading and comprehension skills in Islamic boarding schools and has strong potential to be replicated in other pesantren with similar characteristics.

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