

THE ROLE OF *AL-MIFTAH LIL ULUM* METHOD IN ENHANCING SANTRI'S CONTEXTUAL *KITAB KUNING* LITERACY COMPETENCE

Mochamad Syaifudin¹, Ahmad Musadad^{2*}, Alfa Zaidanil Fauzi³,
Umi Indasyah Zahro⁴, Shofiyun Nahidloh⁵, Tri Pujiati⁶

¹Institut Agama Islam Al-Khoziny Sidoarjo; Indonesia

²³⁴⁵⁶Universitas Trunojoyo Madura; Indonesia

Correspondence Email; musadad@trunojo.ac.id

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Abstract

This study aims to evaluate the influence of a contextual approach on improving santri's kitab kuning literacy and to formulate an adaptive model at Al-Hikam Islamic Boarding School Burneh Bangkalan. This research used a qualitative research with classroom action research (CAR). The data of this study is the improvement of literacy of Kitab Kuning for Santri at Al-Hikam Islamic Boarding School Burneh Bangkalan. The data of this study got from observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation of learning practices with beginner santri of Madrasah Diniyah Takmiliah (MDT) at Al-Hikam. This research used Miles and Huberman's interactive mode to analysis data. The findings indicate that the adoption of the innovative "Al-Miftah Lil Ulum" method successfully addressed the ineffectiveness of the traditional *sorogan* method, significantly improving *santri's* morphological and syntactic analysis skills in a short period. The learning materials, structured in the form of *nadzam*, colored tables, and structured exercises, proved capable of bridging *santri's* cognitive gap towards classical texts. The implementation of this method had a significant impact on *santri's* ability to read and comprehend *Fathul Qarib* within a relatively short timeframe. This research found that challenges exist in the learning process, such as heterogeneity of abilities and the need to adjust the study duration to two years; these were addressed through class separation and strengthening meaning comprehension practices. The results of this study imply that the integration of contextual methods can bridge the gap between classical Islamic intellectual heritage and contemporary educational challenges, affirming the crucial role of innovation for *pesantren's* relevance in responding to 21st-century learning needs.

Keywords

Contextual, kitab kuning, method, *pesantren*, santri literacy.



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INTRODUCTION

Pesantren Al-Hikam in Bangkalan stands as one Islamic educational institution striving to address these challenges through the development of a contextual-based kitab kuning reading method. Based on observations and interviews with several santri, indicated that the use of Al-Miftah Lil Ulum method has a problem with the use of the Javanese language, which was considered difficult for santri from diverse linguistic backgrounds. The main advantage, considered most important by almost all santri, is that learning becomes enjoyable through the application of the al-Miftah method. The objective of this approach is not only for santri to be able to technically read the texts, but also for them to comprehend the values contained within the kitab and actualize them in daily life. Thus, this method emphasizes not only cognitive-linguistic aspects but also affective and practical ones, aligning with constructivist theory and participatory education frameworks (Marchlewska et al., 2019). Academically, this research also highlights the aspect of religious literacy as part of santri's functional literacy. Kitab kuning literacy enables santri not only to copy or memorize texts but also to understand, critically analyze, and contextualize them within social realities. Within this framework, the development of a kitab kuning reading method becomes part of an effort to enhance critical and transformative literacy competencies in pesantren education (Rakhmat, 2021). Such literacy is crucial to equip santri to respond to contemporary challenges reflectively and constructively.

To solve the problem, this innovation was undertaken in response to the weak foundational competencies of new santri in reading kitab petuk, comprehending Arabic texts written in pegon script, and recognizing Arabic grammatical structures. By adopting the "Al-Miftah Lil Ulum" method, originally developed by Pondok Pesantren Sidogiri, the *asatidz* (teachers) at Al-Hikam sought to implement a more structured, gradual, and santri-experience-based approach. In response to the ineffectiveness of the pure sorogan method in addressing the basic needs of beginner santri, in 2023 Pondok Pesantren Al-Hikam Tunjung Burneh Bangkalan strategically began adopting the Al-Miftah Lil Ulum learning method. In its initial implementation phase (2023), this program remained experimental, involving 28 carefully selected santri (13 male and 15 female) who were deemed to possess high cognitive readiness and motivation to follow this new learning model (Interview with Ust. Shohibul Khoir, Head of Madrasah Takmiliyah Al Hikam (MDT), July 11, 2025). Beyond merely facilitating the transition from Arabic illiteracy to the ability to read unvocalized kitab, this method also opens new pedagogical spaces that are more contextual and progressive. It

is crucial for teaching methods and strategies to align with current emphasized goals, particularly where implementation still shows shortcomings (Bada & Jita, 2022). Furthermore, a shift from traditional to modern learning methods can significantly inspire santri (Ali et al., 2019). In essence, the integration of the Al-Miftah Lil Ulum method represents an innovative response to the pedagogical stagnation that has long hindered the achievement of classical literacy in pesantren environments. This method has successfully reformed rigid learning patterns into a dynamic, transformative system oriented towards measurable competency attainment.

The uniqueness of this method lies in its curriculum, almost entirely summarized from the Kitab Jurumiyah, a classical masterpiece in nahwu, and enriched with profound additional explanations from Alfiyah Ibn Malik and Nadzm Al-'Imrity. Thus, Al-Miftah Lil Ulum not only simplifies the material but also remains deeply rooted in authentic Islamic scholarly tradition. This kitab consists of four main volumes, each carefully designed to equip santri with essential foundational competencies, holistically preparing them before progressing to the practical stage of reading and comprehending unvocalized classical Arabic texts, such as Fathul Qarib (Sidogiri, n.d.). Moreover, the advantage of the al-Miftah method lies in the density of the nahwu sharaf material (Aziza et.al, 2021). So, the implementation of this method is considered effective in improving the literacy skills of santri at Pesantren Al-Hikam in Bangkalan. This is evident in the santri's improved literacy skills related to reading Kitab Kuning using the Al-Miftah Lil Ulum method. However, the obstacles were encountered during the learning process.

There are not many studies specifically discussing contextual approaches in kitab kuning instruction within traditional pesantren. Previous research has largely focused on conventional learning models without linking them to contemporary pedagogical approaches or religious literacy. For instance, the influence of the sorogan method on santri's kitab kuning reading ability in pondok pesantren was investigated by (Mukhlisotin, 2019; Suteja, et.al, 2021). Research by Masrof (2020) employed the CBSA (Cara Belajar Siswa Aktif - Active Student Learning Method) in classical kitab learning. Rohmani (2022) study indicated the necessity of appropriate strategies in kitab kuning learning, such as selecting suitable teaching methods, *bahtsul masail* (deliberation on religious issues), and online discussions involving *santri*, alumni, *santri* guardians, and sympathizers, granting permission to use laptops and mobile phones, providing adequate facilities, fostering a pleasant environment, having vigilant *musyrif* (mentors), and building *santri* interest and motivation. The traditional *sorogan* approach to kitab kuning learning was specifically studied by

Jailani et.al (2022). Research by (Sidika et.al, 2025) further emphasized a comparison of *kitab kuning* teaching methods, while Nurhayati & Anam (2025) applied the Al-Miftah Lil Ulum method to enhance *Kitab Kuning* comprehension. Other studies explored the application of Pesantren Learning Curriculum Management to improve santri's understanding of kitab kuning (Fuqoh & Aziz, 2025) and the use of the musyawarah (discussion) method to increase interest in reading kitab kuning (Ghufron & Khoiriyah, 2025). Based on the previous studies, it can be seen that the method used in learning Kitab Kuning was a conventional method, like CBSA, Sorogan, Bahtsul Masail, etc. This study tries to fill the gap in research by presenting an empirical analysis of the contextual-based kitab reading method developed at Pesantren Al-Hikam. In this research, we tried to give a new paradigm in learning Kitab Kuning on modern Islamic education, particularly concerning the integration of tradition and innovation in classical text learning.

METHOD

This research used *Classroom Action Research* (CAR) methodology, conducted collaboratively between the researchers and the educators at Pondok Pesantren Al-Hikam, Bangkalan. Classroom action research is a study that illustrates the cause and effect of an intervention, simultaneously detailing what occurs when the intervention is applied, and explicating the entire process from the initial application to its subsequent impact, aiming to identify problems and plan actions to resolve them (Arikunto et.al. 2015; Meesuk et al. 2020). This research was conducted at Al-Hikam Boarding School in Burneh, Bangkalan.

The data of this study is the improvement of literacy of Kitab Kuning for Santri at Al-Hikam Islamic Boarding School, Burneh, Bangkalan. The research subjects were ustad who taught Kitab Kuning and santri who studied Kitab Kuning at the Al-Hikam Islamic boarding school, Bangkalan. The subjects of this research were beginner-level santri from Madrasah Diniyah Takmiliyah (MDT) who, in the initial stage, were found to have significant limitations in comprehending kitab kuning texts. This particular selection of subjects was based on the compelling results of pre-observation, which clearly indicated their weak abilities in reading pegon script, understanding complex Arabic sentence structures, and recognizing the deeper meaning of kitab written in Arabic Javanese script without vocal marks (harakat).

Table 1 below will explain the characteristics of research participants:

Table 1. Research Participants

No	Category	Number / Percentage	Description
1	Total participants	292 <i>santri</i> Male: 132 <i>santri</i> Female: 160 <i>santri</i>	All <i>santri</i> at Al Hikam
2	Number of respondents	83 <i>santri</i>	Approximately 28.4% of total participants
3	Percentage of respondents	28,4%	Representative sample for the questionnaire
4	Gender of respondents	Male: 39 <i>santri</i> (47%) Female: 44 <i>santri</i> (53%)	Fairly balanced distribution
5	Educational level of respondents	Junior High School : 72 <i>santri</i> (87%) Senior High School : 11 <i>santri</i> (13%)	Majority at Junior High level
6	Average age of respondents	Junior High School: 13–15 years old Senior High School: 16–17 years old	Consistent with educational levels

The primary instruments utilized in this study were comprehensive learning observation sheets, a questionnaire, semi-structured interview guidelines designed to elicit detailed responses, and weekly documentation recordings of the teaching process to capture its evolution. Observation was conducted on the 1st of May until the 4th of July 2025. Observations were systematically conducted on the implementation of teaching and learning activities, thoroughly recording the dynamic interactions between teachers and *santri*, the specific strategies employed by teachers in adapting the "Al-Miftah Lil Ulum" method, and *santri*'s direct responses to the material presented. Furthermore, in-depth interviews were conducted with three selected individuals who possessed the necessary expertise and competence to provide insightful answers to the research problems posed.

The research was systematically executed in several cycles of activities, which involved continuous observation, in-depth interviews, and meticulous documentation of ongoing learning practices. In each cycle, method evaluations and improvements were conducted based on field findings, resulting in continuous enhancement of *santri* literacy competence. This research was oriented not only towards the final outcomes but also towards the gradual and participatory process

of improving the quality of kitab learning. Thus, this method is considered capable of becoming an adaptive learning model that effectively combines the strengths of pesantren tradition with contemporary pedagogical principles based on the santri's life context.

Data analysis techniques employed Miles and Huberman's interactive model, which encompasses stages of data reduction, data display, and gradual conclusion drawing. Data validity was ensured through source and method triangulation, as well as repeated discussions with MDT Al-Hikam teachers to ascertain that the collected data truly reflected the field conditions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Initial findings of this study reveal that kitab kuning learning system at Pondok Pesantren Al-Hikam Tunjung Burneh Bangkalan historically relied solely on the sorogan method. This traditional pesantren approach emphasizes individual learning between santri and teachers in reading and comprehending unvocalized classical Arabic texts. Although this method possesses significant pedagogical value in fostering emotional and spiritual closeness between teachers and students, its effectiveness is absolutely dependent on the santri's cognitive and linguistic readiness.

This part will discuss the research findings about the role of Al-Miftah Lil Ulum in improving the literacy competence of contextual Kitab Kuning from santri at the Al-Hikam Islamic Boarding School, Bangkalan. Based on research findings, it can be seen that the learning design on the following table:

Table 3. Learning Design in Improving the literacy competence of contextual Kitab Kuning of students at Al-Hikam Islamic Boarding School, Bangkalan

No	Cycle	Focus of Learning	Learning Strategy	Evaluation
1	Cycle 1	Introduction to basic <i>kitab kuning</i> structure and <i>Pegon</i> script.	Interactive lectures, practice reading with <i>harakat</i> , classical dictionary experience.	Basic reading test and initial comprehension.
2	Cycle 2	Application of contextual method in understanding simple texts.	Small group discussions, reflective Q&A, use of contextual media.	Text content comprehension test and contextual relevance.
3	Cycle 3	In-depth text meaning exploration and practical application exercises in daily life context.	Classical <i>kitab</i> case studies, contextual interpretation exercises, <i>santri</i> presentations.	Comprehensive evaluation: interpretive ability and its application.

Based on Table 3 above, it can be seen that there are three cycles that were used in this research. It can be seen in the following description. In cycle 1, the focus of learning is on the introduction to basic kitab kuning structure and Pegon script. In this part, Ustadz, who teaches at Al-Hikam Boarding School at Bangkalan, gives learning strategies by practicing reading with harakat and classical dictionary experience. In giving learning activities, ustadz gives strategies through interactive learning and asks the santri to practice reading with harakat and classical dictionary experience. It means that santri in cycle one can read Kitab Kuning with harakat and open a classical dictionary in cycle 1. The evaluation of cycle 1 is about the basic reading test and initial comprehension. Based on the evaluation on cycle 1, it can be seen that from the totally of santri at about 83 santri who joined the cycle one as participants of research, there are 35 santri who passed cycle 1, while 48 santri did not pass cycle 1.

In cycle 2, the focus of learning is on the application of the contextual method in understanding simple texts. In this part, Ustadz, who teaches at Al-Hikam Boarding School at Bangkalan, gives learning strategies by using small group discussions, reflective Q&A, use of contextual media. In giving learning activities, ustadz gives strategies through small group discussions, reflective Q&A, use of contextual media. The evaluation of cycle 2 is about the Text content comprehension test and contextual relevance. Based on the evaluation on cycle 2, it can be seen that from the totally of santri at about 83 santri who joined the cycle two as participants of research, there are 60 santri who passed cycle 2, while 23 santri did not pass the cycle 2.

In cycle 3, the focus of learning is about In-depth text meaning exploration and practical application exercises in a daily life context.. In this part, Ustadz, who teaches at Al-Hikam Boarding School at Bangkalan, gives learning strategies by using Classical kitab case studies, contextual interpretation exercises, and santri presentations.. In giving learning activities, ustadz gives strategies by Classical kitab case studies, contextual interpretation exercises, and santri presentations. The evaluation of cycle 3 is about the Comprehensive evaluation: interpretive ability and its application. Based on the evaluation on cycle 3, it can be seen that from the totally of santri at about 83 santri who joined the cycle three as participants of research, there are 70 santri who passed cycle 3, while 13 santri did not pass the cycle 3.

To measure the effectiveness and impact of this method's implementation, a study was conducted involving 292 santri. From this population, the researchers drew a sample of 83 respondents, representing 28.4% of the total participants, to provide feedback through a

comprehensive questionnaire. The data collected from this questionnaire offers an empirical and factual overview of the extent to which the Al-Miftah method has been accepted, internalized, and has positively contributed to the development of *santri* competence. The following analysis will thoroughly elaborate on the method's impact on *santri*'s ability at Pondok Pesantren Al Hikam in comprehending *nahwu*, *sharaf*, and reading *kitab kuning*, based on the questionnaire data provided by these 83 respondents.

From the data presented in the table above, it can be explained that the demographic distribution of respondents is quite balanced and representative. Of the total 83 respondents, 53% were female *santri* (44 individuals) and 47% were male *santri* (39 individuals), a sufficient comparison to ensure gender representation in the research findings. The majority of respondents, 87% (72 *santri*), were from the Junior High School (SMP) educational level with an average age range of 13-15 years, while only 13% (11 *santri*) were from the Senior High School (SMA/SMK) level with an average age of 16-17 years. This data indicates that the Al-Miftah method can be effectively applied and is relevant for *santri* in early adolescence. Overall, out of 292 *santri* participating in the program, 67 *santri* (22.95%) successfully passed Stage 1, with 29 male *santri* and 38 female *santri*. Interestingly, among the 83 respondents, 35 *santri* (42.2%) had passed Stage 1, indicating that the respondent sample is sufficiently proportional and representative of various learning stages within this method (Data obtained from the Secretary of Madrasah Al Hikam, Ust. Taufiqurrahman Idris, July 11, 2025).

The analysis of the questionnaire data indicates that the Al-Miftah method significantly contributes to improving the ability to read unvocalized *kitab kuning*. As many as 46.99% of *santri* stated they were "very helped," and 27.71% stated they were "moderately helped," resulting in a total of 74.7% of respondents experiencing tangible benefits in this crucial aspect. Only a small proportion of *santri*, namely 7.23% who felt "less helped" and 1.2% who felt "not helped," demonstrates that this method successfully overcomes common difficulties often faced by *santri* in interpreting unvocalized Arabic texts. This is a strong indicator that the Al-Miftah approach can bridge the gap between *nahwu-sharaf* theory and its application in reading classical literature, enabling *santri* to access previously difficult-to-understand scholarly works. This is

Furthermore, the effectiveness of the Al-Miftah method is also reflected in the *santri*'s perception of the ease of understanding and systematic explanation of the material. The questionnaire shows that 30.12% of respondents "strongly agree" and 39.76% "agree" that the

explanations in this method are easy to understand and presented systematically. With an additional 28.92% who "moderately agree," almost all respondents (approximately 98.8%) felt at ease in receiving the material. Only 1.2% "less agree," confirming that this method is highly accepted and easily digestible, even by beginners who have no prior foundation in *nahwu-sharaf* rules. This underscores the pedagogical excellence of Al-Miftah in simplifying the complexities of *nahwu-sharaf* knowledge without diminishing its essence.

In terms of learning motivation, the Al-Miftah method proved capable of increasing *santri*'s interest in *kitab kuning* learning. Data show that 31.33% of respondents felt "very interested" and 33.73% "interested," while 18.07% were "moderately interested." This means that over 83% of *santri* experienced an increase in interest. Only 14.46% were "less interested" and 2.41% were "not interested," which is a relatively small number. These results indicate that Al-Miftah not only focuses on improving cognitive understanding and practical skills but also successfully arouses and maintains *santri*'s enthusiasm for learning, a crucial factor for the continuity of the educational process in pesantren.

Regarding the application of *nahwu* and *sharaf* rules during the practice of reading Arabic texts, the questionnaire results show a convincing level of competence. As many as 24.1% of *santri* stated they were "very capable," and 48.19% stated they were "capable," with 20.48% being "moderately capable." The percentage of *santri* who felt "less capable" was only 7.23%. This data strongly reinforces the evidence that the Al-Miftah method successfully promotes the applicable internalization of rules, ensuring that *santri* do not just memorize formulas but can also use them to analyze and interpret sentence structures in unvocalized Arabic texts independently. This is a key indicator of the method's success in bridging the gap between theory and practice.

Discussion

The Role of the Al-Miftah Lil Ulum Method in Improving the Literacy Competence of Contextual Kitab Kuning of Santri at Al-Hikam Islamic Boarding School, Bangkalan

Based on observation and interview, it is found that an urgent need for innovation in *kitab kuning* teaching methodologies that preserve traditional values while simultaneously remaining relevant to contemporary learning contexts. Some progressive pesantren have attempted to integrate a contextual approach (Contextual Teaching and Learning/CTL) into *kitab* instruction, assuming that meaning will be more easily grasped when directly connected to *santri*'s life experiences (Cichocka, 2016; Khalika, 2018). 21st-century learning necessitates collaborative and innovative

instruction, alongside the provision of feedback to students throughout the learning process (Alfisuma et al., 2023; Mayuni et al., 2020; Amaliah et al., 2023; Pujiati & Arjulayana, 2024; Wahyuni et al., 2021; Zhao et al., 2021).

The implementation of the Al-Miftah Lil Ulum method is designed to be gradual and systematic, reflecting a structured pedagogical approach to kitab kuning instruction. When compared to traditional methods they might have experienced, santri's perception of the ease of the Al-Miftah method is highly positive. One of the main problems in kitab kuning learning is also attributed to the use of conventional teaching methods such as *bandongan*, *sorogan*, and memorization (Ifendi, 2021; Umro'atin, 2017). However, its effectiveness has become questionable, particularly for santri with inadequate basic educational backgrounds. *Sorogan* often lacks a systematic pedagogical approach and provides insufficient room for material contextualization, thereby making kitab kuning feel alien and difficult for the new generation of santri to comprehend (Kamba, 2018). This aligns with findings by Miller & Josephs (2009), which indicate that overly textual learning approaches can hinder comprehension for students from diverse cultural backgrounds (Miller & Josephs, 2009). It also has the same as this research, as many as 44.58% of santri rated this method as "much easier to understand," and 34.94% stated it was "easier." Only 20.48% rated it as "the same," and no respondents stated it was "more difficult." This fact demonstrates that Al-Miftah has a clear competitive advantage in material delivery, making it more efficient, structured, and easy to understand, especially for beginners who are just starting their journey in learning classical Arabic.

In general, concerning the aspect of overall kitab reading ability development, the questionnaire data also shows encouraging progress. As many as 24.1% of respondents felt "very developed," and 40.96% "developed," with 24.1% "moderately developed." Although there were still 10.84% who felt their development was less significant, the majority of respondents consistently reported a clear and measurable improvement in ability after following this method. This improvement is not limited to grammatical aspects but extends to the comprehensive ability to read and understand the overall context of the kitab. Finally, the strongest indicator of the method's success is the recommendation from the santri themselves: 54.22% "highly recommend" this method be continuously implemented in *pesantren*, 27.71% "recommend," and 15.66% "moderately recommend." Only 2.41% "less recommend." These figures are a strong indicator that the Al-Miftah method is very well received by the santri and deserves to be continuously developed as a leading

method in kitab kuning instruction in pesantren environments, proving its relevance and effectiveness in shaping a generation of competent ulama (Islamic scholars).

Numerous challenges in kitab kuning learning have become increasingly complex amidst socio-cultural changes and the evolving learning patterns of millennial santri, who are now more accustomed to visual and contextual learning (Noorhaidi Hasan, Suhadi, Najib Kailani et al., 2019). Problematics related to kitab kuning instruction frequently include common difficulties in reading and writing Arabic texts, as well as a prevalent lack of santri motivation towards kitab kuning studies (Khoirul Anam, 2025; Mubarok, 2022; Wulandari, 2014). Beyond these pedagogical issues, there is also a problematic absence of a standardized curriculum and syllabus serving as mandatory references for kitab kuning instruction, which further complicates structured learning (Amir, 2020).

Based on these interview results, it can be concluded that the core activities in each learning session begin with a series of rituals that cultivate a spiritual and collective atmosphere: communal prayers, *tawassul* (seeking intercession through revered individuals), and the recitation of *nadzam* (poetic summaries of rules) aimed at reinforcing memorization and basic comprehension. Subsequently, *santri* are guided to read and memorize the designated material, followed by detailed explanations from the educators to clarify complex concepts. A crucial aspect of this method is the extensive problem-solving exercises integrated within each unit of material, with the questions themselves provided within the *Al-Miftah kitab*, ensuring alignment with the curriculum. Each session concludes with an interactive question-and-answer segment, providing an opportunity for *santri* to clarify doubts and strengthen their understanding. A significant innovation occurs in Volume 3, where *santri* are introduced to *Tasrif Al-Miftah*, a specialized module for in-depth study of verb conjugation and derivation. The culmination of this preparation is when *santri* advance to Volume 4, where they begin the practical application of reading *Kitab Fathul Qarib* directly, applying all learned rules within the context of classical *fiqh* texts. This aligns with research by Ahmadi & Badri (2023), who found innovation in *kitab kuning* learning strategies through (1) curriculum structure development and (2) selection of learning strategies.

In addition to the core *nahwu* and *sharaf* curriculum, this learning method also integrates the mastery of the *pegon* script, a modified Arabic script used for writing Javanese or other regional languages, which is highly relevant in the context of traditional pesantren in Indonesia. *Pegon* instruction is conducted once a week, with the main objective of enabling *santri* to write and read in the *pegon* script—a vital skill for accessing classical regional language literature, much of which is

written in this format. As a significant public validation of the method's success and *santri's* competence, a spectacular public demonstration is held annually during the *Haflah Pesantren*.

The implementation of the Al-Miftah Lil Ulum method is designed to be gradual and systematic, reflecting a structured pedagogical approach to *kitab kuning* instruction. This learning process is conducted in specialized classes with highly qualified educators: they are either alumni of Pondok Pesantren Sidogiri or dedicated teaching staff (*guru tugas*) who have a profound understanding of the Al-Miftah method's philosophy and techniques, and are certified through rigorous training programs. This ensures consistent and high-quality instruction across all levels.

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The Strengths and Limitations of the Al-Miftah Lil Ulum Method and Its Integration with Traditional Methods in Pesantren

Santri at Al-Hikam Islamic Boarding School in Bangkalan have difficulty in understanding *Kitab Kuning*, which is very important to understand the Islamic studies (Dalimunthe, 2020). The numerous challenges in *kitab kuning* learning have become increasingly complex in socio-cultural changes and the evolving learning patterns of millennial *santri*, who are now more accustomed to visual and contextual learning (Hasan et al., 2019). Problematics related to *kitab kuning* instruction frequently include common difficulties in reading and writing Arabic texts, as well as a prevalent lack of *santri* motivation towards *kitab kuning* studies (Anam, 2025; Mubarok, 2022; Wulandari, 2014).

According to Ustaz Mas'ud, Head of Curriculum at Madrasah Al Hikam, the Al-Miftah Lil Ulum method stands out with various comparative advantages when compared to more traditional approaches to *nahwu-sharaf* learning. This method is specifically designed to be an optimal solution for beginners who have no prior foundation or experience in Arabic *nahwu* (syntax) and *sharaf* (morphology). Among its main strengths are its highly systematic and gradual material structure, which allows *santri* to build understanding from a strong foundation towards more complex concepts. Additionally, Al-Miftah is equipped with appealing visuals and uses Indonesian as the medium of instruction, thereby simplifying the information assimilation process for *santri* who are not yet fluent in Arabic. Another advantage lies in the wealth of exercises and practical examples provided, which promote the applicable mastery of rules, as well as material that is easy to memorize thanks to presentation techniques supported by poetry or *nadzam*. However, Ustaz Mas'ud also acknowledges certain material limitations within this method, such as the absence of in-depth discussions on the '*amal* (grammatical function) of *masdar* (verbal nouns), *isim fa'il* (active participles), and *isim maf'ul* (passive participles)—aspects crucial for understanding sentence structure at an advanced level. This limitation, he states, is natural and acceptable, considering that the Al-Miftah method was created from the outset specifically for *santri* at the beginner stage.

Beyond its focus on foundational instruction, Ustaz Mas'ud also highlights that the Al-Miftah method is still limited to the ability to read *harakat* (vocalized classical Arabic texts), meaning *santri* can grammatically read unvocalized Arabic texts correctly, but not necessarily achieve a deep understanding of the meaning (*murad*) or essence of the text. In contrast, the traditional *sorogan* method, long a hallmark of pesantren education, emphasizes the practice of deriving meaning from *kitab petuk* (classical texts annotated interlinearly with *pegon* script), elaborating on the *murad* (intent and content of the text), and discussing *nahwu-sharaf* in depth, often conducted in a *musyawarah* (scholarly discussion) format.

Due to the distinct characteristics of these two methods, Pondok Pesantren Al Hikam strategically maintains and integrates the classical method as a natural continuation of Al-Miftah learning. After *santri* successfully complete all stages of the Al-Miftah method and master foundational *nahwu-sharaf*, they are transferred to *madrasah diniyah takmiliyah* (advanced religious education). At this level, *santri* will begin to delve into advanced *kitab* in various Islamic disciplines, such as *fikih* (jurisprudence), *akhlaq* (ethics), *hadith*, *tafsir* (Qur'anic exegesis), and others, through the *sorogan* method, which has proven effective in profoundly transferring knowledge (Interview with

Ust. Mas'ud Head of Curriculum Al Hikam, July 11, 2025).

Challenges and Solutions in the Implementation of the Al-Miftah Lil Ulum Method at Pesantren Al Hikam

The implementation of the Al-Miftah Lil Ulum method at Pondok Pesantren Al Hikam, despite offering various advantages, is not without several significant challenges that necessitate adjustments to the learning strategy. The primary challenge identified is the unpreparedness of the majority of new *santri* who possess absolutely no prior knowledge or basic foundation in Arabic *nahwu* (syntax) and *sharaf* (morphology). This phenomenon markedly contrasts with the initial cohort of the method's implementation, where *santri* generally had a sufficiently adequate basic understanding of "instrumental sciences" (*ilmu alat*), referring to Arabic grammar. As a result of this disparity in initial knowledge levels, the target completion time for the Al-Miftah method has been adjusted and extended from the originally planned one year to two years. The curriculum structure has also been adapted: the first year is now entirely focused on mastering the theory of all four Al-Miftah volumes, along with the *tasrif* (verb conjugation and derivation) module, ensuring a strong grammatical foundation. Meanwhile, the second year is exclusively dedicated to the practical reading and comprehension of *Kitab Fathul Qarib* daily, providing intensive opportunities for *santri* to apply the learned rules within the context of actual classical *fiqh* texts.

Beyond the challenge related to initial knowledge levels, the heterogeneity of *santri*'s abilities within a single class also presents a crucial issue. Within one learning group, there are often *santri* with widely varying speeds of comprehension and material mastery, ranging from fast learners to those who require more time. To overcome this pedagogical constraint, the adopted solution is to separate classes based on ability levels, allowing educators to adjust the method of material delivery, depth of explanation, and intensity of exercises according to the cognitive profile of each group of *santri*. This differentiation approach ensures that every *santri* receives optimal learning stimulation and no one is left behind due to the collective pace. Additionally, the limitation of Al-Miftah material, which is designed for beginners and thus does not cover some more advanced and complex *nahwu-sharaf* topics, has also been anticipated. This gap is addressed with a tiered approach: after *santri* are declared to have passed all stages of the Al-Miftah method, they are automatically admitted to the *madrasah diniyah takmiliyah* (advanced religious education) level at the pesantren.

Another identified limitation is that the Al-Miftah method initially did not extend to an in-depth understanding of the *murad* (substantive meaning) or essence of the text, but rather focused

on the accuracy of *i'rab* (changes in word-ending vocalizations) and *tarkib* (syntactic structure). To address this and ensure *santri* can not only read correctly but also understand the content of the *kitab*, a program to strengthen *pegon* practice and direct text meaning-making has been implemented. This activity is conducted routinely once a week, where *santri* are guided to write and read in the *pegon* script (Arabic script for local languages) and train their ability to elucidate the *murad* from the *kitab* being studied.

CONCLUSION

This research concludes that the development of a contextual-based *kitab kuning* reading method at Pesantren Al-Hikam Bangkalan has successfully made a significant contribution to enhancing *santri* literacy competence, particularly in understanding classical Arabic structure and relating it to real-life contexts. The applied contextual approach, by integrating *santri* learning experiences, the active role of teachers, and the adaptation of material to contemporary issues, fosters the emergence of more communicative, reflective, and problem-solving learning strategies. The results of validity tests and feedback from teachers and *santri* indicate that this method is not only academically viable but also practically effective in overcoming the pedagogical stagnation of *kitab kuning* learning, which has often been perceived as rigid and exclusive. This research also opens avenues for further studies, both in the form of developing more standardized learning instruments and integrating this contextual approach into national pesantren curricula. Longitudinal studies are also needed to measure the long-term cognitive and affective impact of this method on *santri*'s development. Comparative studies among different pesantren and the exploration of using digital technology for *kitab kuning*-based learning are also important agendas for the future of pesantren-based Islamic education. Thus, this research not only provides theoretical and practical contributions but also serves as an initial foundation for revitalizing *kitab kuning* learning methods to be more contributory and relevant to the demands of the 21st century.

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