

Proceedings of International Conference on Islamic Education and Science Development (ICONSIDE)

Fakultas Tarbiyah dan Keguruan, Universitas Islam Negeri Mataram, Indonesia
Mataram, 27 May 2023 Available online at <https://proceeding.uinmataram.ac.id/>

SANTREN: THE FORGOTTEN EARLY ISLAMIC EDUCATION INSTITUTION ON BUILDING ISLAMIC CHARACTER

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ABSTRACT

This article tries to present a critique of the lack of attention today's society towards *Santren* or in other languages it can also be called *Surau* as the earliest place to educate muslim children in religious matters. *Santren* as a non-formal institution centered on the Qur'an teacher (*guru ngaji*) who is most commonly called an *ustadz* in the transfer of knowledge to the muslim generation. Reciting the Qur'an is not only in the sense of learning to read the Qur'an but also teaching children other Islamic subject. Not infrequently *Santren* then becomes the second sacred place after the mosque to hold life cycle rites and death rites in society. The difference lies in the amount of geographic reached between the mosque and the *Santren*, as we can also see how many residents turn the *Santren* into a place of worship. *Santren* usually cover a small part of the community whose houses are close together and make that place a common space that can be used at any time when the local community has a celebration. Based on the theoretical basis of the ideal model of Islamic education, and concentrated public sphere, this research was conducted by exploring historical data, criticizing phenomena and reality, with a new ethnographic approach in the form of self-reflection and Being Truer. The results of the author's findings revealed that the decline of the *Santren* as the initial basis for Islamic education was due to, among other things, the lack of attention from parents to hand over their children to recite the Qur'an at magrib time and prefer to get teacher with private learning, as well as the lack of dedicated teachers to revive the *Santren*, and thirdly, the increasing of individualism in society which can no longer be dammed, especially with the easy access to Islamic knowledge through the media which is considered equivalent to learning the Qur'an at *Santren*.

Keywords: *Santren*; Mosque; Islamic Movement: Qur'an teacher; Islamic education.

INTRODUCTION

Santren in Sasak language terminology is different from the popular Islamic boarding school designation today. In this paper what is meant as *Santren* is the designation for prayer rooms, *surau*, *langgar*, and not infrequently even the terrace or part of the room in the home of the qur'an teacher is used as a place for the process of learning the qur'an, and it is also called a *Santren*. In his book, Azyumardi Azra mention that *Santren* or *surau* are

said to have experienced a transition and modernization as traditional Islamic education (2017: 7). It is undeniable that *Santren* in the past had a vital role in shaping the Muslim generation before fading away with the emergence of modernity, especially the medium of television entertainment. Life in the village used to be well-established with religiosity, one of which was marked by the existence of the *Santren* as a place for spiritual guidance for children every night. In several traditions of society in the archipelago, the function of the *Santren* and other designations is the same as a place to learn to read the Qur'an and then develop *ubudiyah* (Anam, 2017: 4). Every time before sunset, the children are ready to go to the Islamic boarding school to study the Qur'an. In one hamlet in our village, Lengkok Lendang, Tembeng Putik Village, there used to be several Islamic boarding schools which were the choices for studying the Qur'an. It doesn't have to be a *Santren* that is close to home, it could be a bit tenuous but where a child can feel comfortable studying. This sometimes raises questions between parents or teachers of the Qur'an, why do they pass through a place to study the Qur'an that is closer to their home.

When the writer was child, one of the *Santren* was quite active and had many activities, not only learning to read the Qur'an, but also studying Fiqh, Tajwid, and studying Aqidah Akhlak. The *Santren*, namely Nurul Jannah *Santren*, got its name from the donor even though the land is shared land. At *Santren* Nurul Jannah, when I was a child, the writer learned from knowing the *hijaiyah* letters to learning about fiqh law, moral aqeedah, and the history of Islamic culture. There can be up to 35 children studying for one *Santren* with a 6 x 5 meter building. The teacher of the Qur'an at the *Santren* is a Hajji, namely Haji Syahruddin who also teaches at the madrasa in the village whose house is attached to the wall of the *Santren*. After the teacher of the Qur'an died, the existence of the Islamic boarding school as a place to educate children to recite the Qur'an began to fade, the absence of regeneration for teachers was also the cause of the decline in the enthusiasm of the children who were handed over to the Islamic boarding school. Since the writer at MTs level, began to be involved in teaching younger children as well as being the Prayer Leader. This continued until the writer was at the Madrasah Aliyah level and did not happen to live at the Islamic boarding school so that at night he could teach children the Qur'an at the *Santren*.

The difference between the situation of the Islamic boarding schools in the 90s until the year under 2010 and today is quite clear, one of which is the enthusiasm of the children to come to recite the Qur'an. They sometimes feel forced because they are afraid of being scolded by their parents if they don't go, so when they get to the *Santren* they don't focus and play more. Today's children's distractions are also strong enough to cause children to go through the evening prayer only as a routine to fulfill their parents' wishes. In the past, when we didn't have much television, what became entertainment after reciting the Qur'an was playing under the moonlight or listening to stories from our parents while sitting in a group. The bond that is built from *Santren* is also quite strong, especially when in our village, for example, every month of Ramadan a competition between *Santren* is held at the mosque. This is an event to show the quality of the education of children in a *Santren*. In fact, not infrequently it also becomes an arena of competition between *Santren* to show existence. In this case, historically, Islamic boarding schools can be referred to as developers of Islamic society in the context of traditionality (Furqan, 2019: 9).

The situation that is happening today covers Islamic boarding schools, namely that it is only filled with children who are learning the Qur'an, while teenagers are MTs age. and MA who are already fluent sometimes no longer come to *Santren* just to listen to children who are younger than them. This has happened for so many years that one Qur'an teacher will not focus on teaching so many children at one *Santren* every night. The limited understanding of the Qur'an teacher, who only focuses on lessons so that he can read the Qur'an, also causes the fading of the *Santren* as the earliest center of Islamic education for children in the village (Syamsudini, 2017:12). This paper tries to explore how the *Santren* are fading as a vital institution to build the religious intellectuality of children in the village, then what are the strategies to revitalize the *Santren* in the context of community development in today's Muslim society, and finally how are efforts to transform established Islamic education in formal institutions as well. can be applied in *Santren*.

METHOD

This research was conducted using a qualitative approach by applying a New ethnography from Paula Saukko (2003), namely self-reflexivity is used to reflect the reality that the author encounters as part of the community members, or in other terms it can also be referred to as insiders. The next concept is an effort to reveal the truthfulness (being truer) of the object of study, in this case the religious condition of the community represented through *Santren* which no longer finds its function as a vital institution in building the religious spirit of children in the village.

The theoretical basis for studying this reality refers to Madjid Irsan Al Kilani's thoughts about the concept of the Islamic Ummah Awakening Model (2019), namely how Islamic education must synergize in all educational institutions including the most vital family, as well as the environment. The next concept is the Public Sphere from Jurgen Habermas (2010). Even though it is a non-formal institution whose existence is based on community volunteerism, the *Santren* can also play a more vital role as a religious institution, especially to support the mission of the community.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

***Santren* in the Early Context of Sasak Islam**

Much of the literature on the spread of Islam in the Sasak community states that the term *Santren* is also called kerbung (Murdianto, 2021). Kerbung refers to the situation of people gathering in a circle and one of them is a teacher. Regarding the place, kerbung is an area that was built to be used as a gathering place, without walls, a seat cover in the form of a centipede (ketaring) made of coconut leaves, the roof is made of reeds or woven coconut leaves. It was in that place that the Sasak people gathered to learn about Islam as a legitimate religion. Kerbung or *Santren* is used as a place of worship as is the case with a surau, which is not only used as a place for prayer, but also a place to rest, a place to study, and even a place to hold legal debates, to wedding processions.

Both kerbung and *Santren* are shared spaces that are recognized by the community as sacred places, so they need to be revived with religious and social activities. The hamlet of Lengkok Lendang which is the object of this paper consists of 9 *Santren* as places to study the Qur'an, each of which also represents a particular religious organization. Kerbung in his

research by Murdianto (2020) mentions that it was the forerunner of the Islamic boarding school that is known today. Of course not all kerbung then transform into Islamic boarding schools, because not all of them can be institutionalized with government regulations. However, *Santren* is indeed a place devoted to learning to read the Qur'an. The kerbung terminology in Murdianto's research is more suitable for the term majlis taklim which is popular today, because there the emphasis is on religious understanding by learning through lectures from the central figure. While the emphasis on Islamic boarding schools in this paper is learning to read the Qur'an which is also interspersed with discussions on fiqh law at the last moment after learning to recite the Qur'an.

Santren in the context of Sasak is a place that serves as a center for non-formal learning, especially at night. Before there was electricity, kerosene lamps were used as lighting. The children's enthusiasm for reciting the Qur'an was very high because it was the only way to get religious education there. At the People's School (before becoming an SD or elementary school) only general sciences were taught, especially reading, arithmetic, and learning Indonesian. While in the *Santren* they teach religious knowledge, reading the Qur'an, reading Arabic Malay script, as well as procedures for worship. So it's no wonder that there are older people from the 40s-50s generation who can't read Latin letters, but can read the Qur'an or Malay Arabic writing. Before the establishment of the Latin writing of Indonesian as the national language, the Sasak people were also well established with Malay Arabic script but the content was in Sasak. These classical Malay Arabic books were written in Sasak language, making it easier for the students to recite the Qur'an on topics that are adapted to the real conditions of society. *Santren* as an intellectual management institution was of course strong enough to become a stronghold in society. Because it was also a base for gathering the period when colonialism (Dutch, Japanese) also succeeded in occupying Lombok. For example, Islamic boarding schools in Kelayu, Pancor, and Selaparang, Kediri, which gave birth to many Sasak scholars of the recent era.

Efforts to build a spirit of religious intellect through *Santren* are of course accompanied by a community movement that is so strongly instilled with Islamic values that are applied in everyday life (Halim, et al., 2005). However, the problems that arise later when the *Santren* seem to be an institution that lives reluctantly or unwillingly, are caused by several factors, namely the lack of interest of parents to give their children to recite the Qur'an at the *Santren* because it is thought that they will play there more if the ustaz or the teacher of the Qur'an does not pay attention. This assumption is of course also based on several Islamic boarding schools which are neglected, even without a Qur'an teacher who is also the prayer leader. *Santren* Nurul Jannah, which used to be where the writer recited the Qur'an, also had a similar experience. After the death of the father, more precisely the author's older brother, no one became a teacher at the *Santren*. His son or cousin of the writer was still a student at that time, so he was rarely able to fill in at the *Santren*. Finally after occupying MTs. grade 9, the writer became a tutor for younger children. Likewise with the author's older brothers who became companions for the children below him.

This is not only experienced by the Nurul Jannah Islamic boarding school where the author is a companion, but also other Islamic boarding schools in Lengkok Lendang hamlet with a total of 9 *Santren*. *Santren* Aliyul Wathan for example, besides the absence of parents who really focus on taking care of it at *Santren*, because they are already busy with their

daily work in the riverside sand quarry. The children around the Aliyul Wathan *Santren* also spend their time after school every day working in the sand mine. When evening returns to their respective homes, they rarely have the opportunity to go up to the *Santren* to study the Qur'an, or just join the Qur'an.

Santren in the context of the Sasak community is different from pe*Santren* in the context of the Javanese community, Surau in the Minang community, or in other terms, namely Langgar (Asiah, et al., 2022). Islamic boarding schools apply the concept of majlis taklim in their learning, surau is also a place to study religious knowledge and even becomes a place for debate when there is a problem, while the *Santren* as explained above is a place devoted to learning to read the Qur'an. The Qur'an teacher at a *Santren* can be a central figure in many ways, including as a leader of remembrance, reading the talqin of the deceased when someone dies, giving lectures and being a khatib in the mosque. There is a shift in function between *Santren* before and today. One of them is due to the people's easier access to information, entertainment, and technological developments that have an impact on lifestyle (Yusutria & Febriana, 2018). The discussion in the next chapter tries to present the identification of the causes of the decline of *Santren* as a vital institution for building the spirit of Islamic education.

The Fading Function of *Santren*

One of the reasons why the *Santren* are considered to have faded in function is when they are no longer used as centers for learning to read the Qur'an in society. This also has an impact on children who are increasingly slow to read the Qur'an. Likewise, older people who cannot walk far to the mosque cannot pray in congregation. *Santren* usually only function at night from dusk to evening, sometimes some are operationalized to recite the dawn recitation. When the writer was small, the *Santren* were not only filled with children who were learning to read the Qur'an, but also teenagers, both boys and girls who were proficient at reciting the Qur'an, also participated in the celebration. However, it is different from now, the *Santren* are only filled with young children who are just learning to recognize hijaiyah letters, and there are some who have started to be able to read even though they are still spelling. Teenagers who are already fluent in reciting the Qur'an should also take part in guiding children who are still learning to spell. Of course, this will also help teachers of the Qur'an who cannot possibly teach many children each night alone. The synergy between the Qur'an teacher and the youth who are already fluent will make it easier to guide the children so that they can read the Qur'an more quickly.

Problems related to the waning function of the *Santren* today can also be caused by people who are so busy that it seems they do not have the opportunity to fill in the *Santren* either for congregational prayers or reciting the Qur'an (Anwar & Maman, 2022). Regarding congregational prayers, it is usually more focused on the mosque to always be there at all times, even if only a few people. Meanwhile, in the *Santren* for noon and ashar, there is usually no congregation. Congregational prayers are held at night from sunset to evening, and also at dawn. This is of course not to minimize the function of the *Santren*, but because it is related to the time the children learn the Qur'an, which is also adjusted.

In several areas in Lombok, especially in urban areas, children learn the usual recitation of the Qur'an after Ashar until just before sunset. Because it was feared that when it was night in the city, the children did not dare to leave the house. In contrast to the previous village, the evenings could be livelier as a relaxing time to mingle with the family after a day of working in the fields, fields, and doing construction labor. Children after reciting the Qur'an will be allowed to play around the house or even around the village as long as they don't leave the village. *Santren* can also be a place to hold tahlilan events for families who have died, or also community meetings in small numbers.

The question is why Islamic boarding schools are not maximizing their functions today, starting from the attitude of society which is starting to appear individualistic in relation to mastery of economic bases that are starting to become established and are able to buy modern products so that their children rarely leave the house, access to all things related to entertainment to learning facilities can be accessed from home (Basyit, 2017). There are even parents who pay private tutors to come to their homes to teach their children. This causes children to interact less with their surroundings, which can also cause boredom when everything is done at home.

Santren also began to fade its role when the children were so distracted by technological advances that it lulled them. Today's children in grades 4-6 elementary school still have difficulty spelling the letters of the Qur'an and when reading the sheets of the Qur'an they have to be very close to their eyes. They are not so focused on seeing when the Qur'an is placed on the prayer rug. Compared to when the writer used to be, in grade 3 elementary school you had to be fluent in reading the Qur'an because you would be embarrassed if you couldn't spell, while the others were already fluent. Social media has had quite a big impact on the way children learn to read the Qur'an today. Distractions from social media are so strong that today's children are psychologically quite weak when reading, partly because they are already quite settled with the audio-visual medium.

Even though on social media they can take lessons from the good things that are used as content, one of which is learning recitations, melodious murottals, but it's quite rare for them to make it a spectacle that also serves as a guide. They are more preoccupied with the booming social media Tik-Tok. Even when reciting the Qur'an, village children today also carry cell phones as entertainment after reciting the Qur'an or when it is not their turn to teach the Qur'an.

Today's *Santren*, which are usually attached to the Maghrib recitation, have also begun to be replaced by the shifting of recitation hours to the time after Ashar in institutions that are semi-formal but have legal entities, namely TPA/TPQ (Al Qur'an Education Park). The term TPA is considered more modern than *Santren* (Nonci, 2022). Today's children are more familiar when asked where TPA/TPQ is the place to recite the Qur'an than *Santren*. Even though the forms of learning activities are almost the same, starting to learn to recognize hijaiyah letters, spelling using the book *Iqra'* from volumes 1 to 6. In TPA/TPQ, there is usually not only 1 teacher, there are even TPA/TPQ whose teachers are not only men but also teenage girls. In terms of actual location, it is also the same, TPA also utilizes a *Mushalla* in an area to be used as a place of learning, or more popularly it is also held in a mosque.

After the 2018 Lombok earthquake, several *Santren* also collapsed, or experienced cracks in the walls, but not many paid attention to rebuilding or simply renovating. Many

Santren were neglected because the old buildings did not have enough funds to renovate because the community was also more focused on building mosques. Even though reviving *Santren* with worship activities is also the same as in mosques which can be initiated jointly by *Santren* coaches (Basri, 2020:27). Many *Santren* at sunset are no longer filled because the children have recited the Qur'an in the afternoon. Its function is then used more for public celebration events that do not have a large enough space in their homes. It is also not uncommon for *Santren* in the days leading up to elections to be used as a place to mobilize masses because mosques are not allowed to do so because they cover broad community groups (Kurniawan, 2018). While in *Santren* it is considered a smaller scope so that it is not too visible when mobilized for political purposes. The function of the *Santren* which was originally sacred then became an ordinary place that is considered profane, like a hall or building that is commonly used by the community.

It can also be said that the *Santren* is no longer a legitimate place for religious affairs, especially a space for learning the Qur'an for children. However, the functions of spirituality in the *Santren* are still maintained, especially regarding celebrations carried out in the community, such as tahlilan, joint wirid events, where Aqad nikah, Aqiqah, circumcisions are held, to the place where the funeral prayer is held.

The next discussion that the author tries to present is *Santren* as a concentrated public space read from the point of view of Jurgen Habermas' theoretical concept of a public sphere that is created together for a collective purpose.

Shifting *Santren* as Public Space

Actually, from the beginning of the establishment of the *Santren*, of course, as a public space that is more devoted to worship, especially as a place to learn to read the Qur'an, as described above. However, as society develops, of course, the function of the Islamic boarding school is not only limited to that, it also becomes a public space when the community is deliberating to decide on an issue. In the tradition of the Sasak people, the *Santren* is also a public space whose function is almost the same as the mosque and is positioned in a higher place than the people's homes. This means that the position of the place of worship that is higher than the houses of residents shows that the Sasak people respect the place of worship which is also considered a sacred place. The value of sacredness is raised through social concepts that are carried out together. For example, by orderly providing food when one resident has a celebration, this mechanism is called "dulang banjar". The event was centered in *Santren* by inviting community leaders or residents from other villages to attend.

The concept of public space from Habermas when it is related to the function of the *Santren* is intertwined with the life cycle of the community which makes places that are considered sacred a good place to start something. When the pandemic spread 2 years ago, many places of worship, especially mosques were closed, people who feel that facing a pandemic should get closer to God, not by stopping worship activities. The *Santren*, which was originally only used at night, later became busy and also functioned for worship, including Friday services because it was considered far from the reach of security officers, who usually dispersed crowded gatherings under the pretext of preventing the spread of Covid-19.

Santren as a public space in other respects is also associated with the political strategy of individuals who participate as contestants by utilizing the *Santren* members to vote for them, of course with the promises they can present to the community ((Prasetyo, 2012). *Santren* in this case seem to lose their sacredness when used as a transactional place for political affairs which could involve money politics. However, the public space that is concentrated in this *Santren*, namely the community, does not dampen their interest in continuing to make the *Santren* a sacred place in a vertical relationship with God. Even though matters related to the world are also keep it running.

Of course, the function of the *Santren* as a starting point for introducing sharia cannot be denied when formal learning institutions focus more on general knowledge. The initial provision of the obligation to worship at the Islamic boarding school for children may initially be by force, but after they do it repeatedly, then it turns into a habit with a feeling of sanction if it is not carried out. The habit of studying worship is aimed at establishing the Shari'a, even though theologically they do not fully understand the teachings they are practicing. But when they reach puberty (mumayyiz), these children begin to think philosophically about what they are doing as an effort to build closeness to God. Sufistically, of course, the worship that children are accustomed to at the *Santren* is part of spirituality which is built on the side of Sufism as well.

The concept of how Islamic boarding schools are more dominant as non-religious public spaces is undeniable because people interact more in that context. Religious events centered in places of worship have begun to fade and are only attended by people around the places of worship, and not many people from outside the environment are involved. In this case the consequences of modernity faced by society also contributed when the *Santren* also began to fade as an institution that initially played a major role in building community religion (Noor, 2016).

This is also the case with the regeneration process of the Muslim community which should have been more firmly galvanized in Islamic boarding schools, today it is no longer found. Because the function of the *Santren* is more as an arena for gathering to discuss non-religious matters rather than matters that build the religiosity of the community. Efforts to get out of lagging behind like this certainly need new offers to restore the spirit of the *Santren* as an institution that needs to restore its role as the earliest place to galvanize the religious spirit.

Transformation of Islamic Education in *Santren*

Madjid Irsan Al-Kilani in his book the model for the revival of Muslims states that one side that is quite important to be prepared as a strength for Muslims is by revitalizing Islamic educational institutions not only focusing on the affairs of competition among institutions, but also how to synergize each of these institutions to become something unified for collective goals (Al-Kilani, 2019: 56). Likewise with Islamic boarding schools, today's reality should be a reflection of how to build transformative education in Islamic boarding schools as well as in formal institutions. *Santren* should also have a curriculum that contains clear goals for what students can achieve, not only traditionally it is only a place for small children to recognize hijaiyah letters. Furthermore, Islamic boarding schools can also prepare a generation of Muslims who are ready to enter a higher level of formal education by being taught early lessons that support this. For example, if the

Santren traditionally focus only on reading the Qur'an, then with a structured curriculum they can also teach how to read the yellow book, learn nahwu-sharf, understand the book of interpretation, and other lessons that are relevant to the context of the participants' environmental realities. educate.

In this case also the teachers at *Santren* are no longer only centered on one Qur'an teacher, but can synergize with other teachers who have established mastery in a particular field. Then, of course, the question will arise, how will all this be financed? Most of our society today is trapped in money orientation when asked to do something. The idea is that teachers should be given incentives if they teach at *Santren*, while parents of children reciting the Qur'an are not many who want to pay contributions as expenses. As a bid solution, of course a Muslim government must provide efforts to overcome this, especially in terms of financing. If the financing is handed over to the community, it is certainly considered burdensome in the midst of their life needs.

As exemplified in the government of the Abbasid dynasty, they built the Baitul Hikmah (House of Wisdom) as a place to study and teach knowledge to anyone interested and funded by the government (Irfan, 2016). The context of today's *Santren* can actually be applied, especially by utilizing existing village funds set aside to finance existing *Santren* at the village level. Efforts to promote this, of course, must begin with joint support so that *Santren* really begin their transformation as an educational institution that is vital in preparing generations of Muslims before entering higher education.

This transformation can also begin with students who are truly prepared from their families to come to study, not just hand them over and then when they arrive at the Islamic boarding school they only come to play with their peers. Children who interact more with gadgets, technology, may be less active in learning to recite the Qur'an, and this is also a challenge for parents, teachers, both teachers at school and in Islamic boarding schools to make more massive efforts to be educated with Islamic education. Thus, the revitalization of Islamic education in formal institutions including Islamic boarding schools and schools can also be applied to a smaller context in *Santren* (Ulum, 2012). Of course, with all parties taking a role to start building this movement into a habitus that also needs to be transmitted to all areas where the majority of Muslims are still ignorant of Islamic education.

CONCLUSION

As presented in the discussion section, efforts that can be made to restore the function of the Islamic boarding school as a vital institution in Islamic education are by encouraging the spirituality of the community to be more concerned with religious matters, especially for their children. That is, the people themselves who have a celebration to restore the reality of their religious life start from the nearest educational institution from where they live. Offering a solution to the fading of Islamic education from the *Santren* can be initiated by encouraging the revival of the evening prayer, developing a more structured curriculum for the *Santren*, to synergizing the *Santren* with other formal educational institutions accompanied by efforts to provide space for teachers who are highly dedicated to teaching at *Santren* according to the field they master. Of course, with reference to the Islamic boarding school learning curriculum which is arranged in accordance with the real conditions in society.

Santren as a sacred public space does not necessarily forget the social context of society which also requires spaces to gather both when discussing religious and non-religious matters. The public space of this *Santren* then becomes a sign of a cohesive society by placing the concepts of the world and the hereafter fairly in the life of the religious community. Religious public space embedded in Islamic boarding schools is also something that needs to be maintained so that Islamic boarding schools are not easily distorted by political interests by those who use it for personal gain.

Another solution, although normatively necessary, is to resuscitate people who care about religious values and the collective piety that needs to be built. Society is not only concerned with individual piety, but through the *Santren*, collective piety can be echoed. *Santren* can then become a collective identity of a society in relation to religious activities which are continuously being reproduced and disseminated also to be transmitted to other environments. Finally, by synergizing Islamic boarding schools with other institutions, this is the first step to promote integrated religious activity in all walks of life in Muslim society.

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