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Reconstructing Learning Culture in Contemporary Islamic Boarding Schools: Classical Text Literacy Practices among Early-Generation Students

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Abstract

This study aims to examine how learning culture is reconstructed through classical Islamic text literacy practices among early-generation students in modern Islamic boarding schools. It employs a qualitative case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon within its natural context. Data were collected through observations, in-depth interviews with teachers and students, and documentation, and were analyzed using data condensation, data display, and verification techniques. The findings reveal that the reconstruction of learning culture is achieved through the integration of traditional methods such as *bandongan* and *sorogan* with interactive and contextual learning approaches, supported by adaptive teacher roles and the use of learning media. These practices significantly improve students' literacy skills, participation, and confidence in engaging with classical texts. The study implies that combining traditional Islamic scholarship with modern pedagogical strategies can enhance the relevance and effectiveness of *pesantren* education.

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Introduction

The transformation of learning culture in Islamic boarding schools has become increasingly important in responding to the evolving demands of contemporary education. Education today requires not only the transmission of knowledge but also the development of critical thinking, adaptability, and contextual understanding. This study is important because it addresses how traditional learning systems can remain relevant in modern society. The point lies in the need to integrate classical Islamic scholarship with modern pedagogical approaches. The reason is that students in the current era are exposed to rapid technological and social changes that influence their learning behavior. Evidence from various educational settings shows that traditional methods alone are often insufficient to engage learners effectively. Therefore, there is a growing need to reconstruct learning cultures that are more responsive and adaptive. In conclusion, this research is essential to ensure that Islamic boarding school education continues to contribute meaningfully to both intellectual and character development in a changing global context.

Despite its importance, many Islamic boarding schools face general problems related to the effectiveness of their learning culture, particularly in teaching classical Islamic texts. Students often struggle to engage with kitab kuning due to its linguistic complexity and traditional teaching approaches that are predominantly teacher-centered. This problem is significant because it affects students' motivation, comprehension, and overall learning outcomes. In many cases, students become passive learners, relying heavily on teachers without developing independent learning skills. Additionally, the lack of innovation in teaching methods contributes to a gap between traditional educational practices and modern learning needs (Ataman, 2024; Munawwaroh, 2024; Suhermanto, 2024). This situation is further complicated by the diverse backgrounds of students, especially those who are new to pesantren environments. As a result, there is a pressing need to address these issues through a systematic reconstruction of learning culture. Without such efforts, the relevance and effectiveness of classical Islamic education may continue to decline.

Field observations reveal a number of phenomena that highlight the urgency of this issue. In many classrooms, students are seen struggling to read and understand unvowelled Arabic texts, often relying on memorization rather than comprehension. Teachers frequently use traditional methods such as lectures and one-way explanations, which limit student participation. However, there are also emerging practices where teachers begin to incorporate interactive methods, such as group discussions and contextual explanations. These variations indicate that while some efforts toward change have been initiated, they are not yet systematic or widespread. Interviews with students further reveal that many of them feel overwhelmed by the complexity of kitab kuning, yet they remain motivated when provided with supportive learning environments (Mustafa & Maulana, 2024; Rahmadan & Shudiq, 2024). This phenomenon suggests that the challenge is not merely the difficulty of the material, but also the way it is taught. Therefore, understanding these real conditions is crucial in designing effective strategies for learning culture reconstruction.

Previous studies have explored various aspects of learning in Islamic boarding schools, particularly focusing on traditional teaching methods and student learning outcomes (Hasanah et al., 2024; Jamil & Sanusi, 2024; Sain et al., 2024). Many researchers have emphasized the importance of preserving classical learning traditions, such as bandongan and sorogan, as essential components of Islamic education. These studies highlight the strengths of traditional methods in maintaining discipline and continuity of knowledge transmission. However, they often overlook the challenges faced by early-generation students who lack prior exposure to such learning systems (Sailin & Masbahuddin, 2024; Saleha & Sholihah, 2024; Salsabila & Ayuba, 2024). In addition, some studies have examined the integration of modern educational approaches, including the use of technology and student-centered learning strategies. While these studies provide valuable insights, they tend to treat traditional and modern methods as separate entities rather than integrating them into a cohesive framework. This limitation indicates a gap in the literature regarding how learning culture can be reconstructed holistically to address contemporary educational needs.

Furthermore, existing research often focuses on either the effectiveness of teaching methods or students' learning outcomes, without examining the broader cultural context of learning. The concept of learning culture reconstruction, which involves changes in values, habits, and interaction patterns, has received limited attention. This gap is significant because learning culture plays a crucial role in shaping students' attitudes, motivation, and engagement. Without addressing cultural aspects, improvements in teaching methods alone may not lead to sustainable change. Additionally, few studies specifically investigate early-generation students, who represent a unique group with distinct challenges and needs. Their experiences provide valuable insights into how learning culture

can be adapted to support diverse learners (Wang et al., 2024; Yadav, 2024). Therefore, this research seeks to fill these gaps by focusing on the reconstruction of learning culture through classical text literacy practices, with particular attention to early-generation students in modern Islamic boarding schools.

The novelty of this study lies in its integrative approach to learning culture reconstruction, combining traditional literacy practices with modern pedagogical strategies. Unlike previous studies that examine these elements separately, this research emphasizes their interaction and mutual reinforcement. The study also introduces a specific focus on early-generation students, highlighting their role as key participants in the transformation process. This perspective is important because it acknowledges the diversity of learners and the need for adaptive educational practices. Additionally, the research explores the use of contextual and reflective learning approaches in teaching classical texts, which has not been extensively studied in previous literature. By addressing both cultural and pedagogical dimensions, this study contributes to the development of a more comprehensive framework for Islamic education. The findings are expected to provide practical insights for educators and policymakers in enhancing the quality and relevance of learning in Islamic boarding schools.

Based on the identified gaps and phenomena, this study formulates its research problem as an inquiry into how learning culture reconstruction is implemented through classical text literacy practices among early-generation students. The underlying argument of this research is that effective reconstruction requires a balanced integration of tradition and innovation, supported by adaptive teaching strategies and a supportive learning environment. It is hypothesized that when learning culture is reconstructed in this manner, students' literacy skills, motivation, and participation will improve significantly. Furthermore, the study argues that teachers play a crucial role in facilitating this process, acting as mediators between traditional knowledge and modern learning needs. The contribution of this research lies in providing empirical evidence and a conceptual framework for understanding learning culture reconstruction in Islamic boarding schools. Ultimately, the study aims to offer practical recommendations for enhancing educational practices and ensuring their sustainability in a rapidly changing world.

Method

This study employs a qualitative research design using a case study approach to explore the reconstruction of learning culture through classical Islamic text literacy practices among early-generation students (Phillips et al., 2024). The qualitative approach is chosen because it allows for an in-depth understanding of social phenomena, particularly those related to values, interactions, and learning processes within a natural setting. The case study design is considered appropriate as it enables the researcher to investigate the phenomenon holistically within its real-life context, focusing on specific groups of students and teachers in a modern Islamic boarding school environment. This design also facilitates the exploration of complex dynamics that cannot be captured through quantitative methods, such as students' experiences, perceptions, and responses to reconstructed learning practices. Therefore, the selection of a qualitative case study is based on its ability to provide rich, descriptive, and contextualized data relevant to the research objectives.

The research is conducted in a modern Islamic boarding school setting that represents a transitional educational environment combining traditional and contemporary learning systems. The selection of this location is based on its relevance to the research focus, particularly the presence of early-generation students who are newly introduced to classical Islamic text learning.

Additionally, the institution has implemented various strategies aimed at reconstructing its learning culture, making it a suitable site for examining the phenomenon under study. The diversity of students' backgrounds and the integration of both traditional and modern teaching approaches further strengthen the rationale for choosing this location. By selecting a site that reflects the characteristics of contemporary pesantren, the research is expected to generate findings that are both meaningful and transferable to similar educational contexts.

Data collection in this study is carried out through multiple techniques to ensure comprehensive and triangulated findings. The primary methods include observation, interviews, and documentation. Observations are conducted to capture real-time classroom interactions, teaching practices, and student participation in learning activities. In-depth interviews are carried out with teachers and students to explore their perspectives, experiences, and responses to the reconstructed learning culture (Phillips et al., 2024). Documentation, such as lesson plans, learning materials, and institutional records, is also analyzed to support and validate the findings obtained from observations and interviews. The use of multiple data collection techniques enhances the credibility of the research by providing diverse sources of information and enabling cross-verification of data.

The data analysis process follows an interactive model consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. Data condensation involves selecting, focusing, and simplifying raw data obtained from the field, allowing the researcher to identify relevant patterns and themes. Data display is carried out by organizing the condensed data into structured forms, such as matrices and narrative descriptions, to facilitate interpretation. The final stage involves drawing conclusions and verifying findings through continuous comparison and reflection (Ilhami et al., 2024; Nurfajriani et al., 2024). To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, several validation techniques are employed, including triangulation of data sources and methods, prolonged engagement in the field, and member checking with participants. These strategies are essential to enhance the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the research findings, ensuring that the results accurately represent the studied phenomenon.

Findings

Concept of Learning Culture Reconstruction in Modern Boarding Schools

The reconstruction of learning culture in modern Islamic boarding schools was observed as a multidimensional transformation involving values, habits, and patterns of interaction among students. Based on classroom observations, the learning process no longer relied solely on teacher-centered instruction, but gradually shifted toward a more participatory environment. Students were encouraged to engage actively during lessons, ask questions, and express their understanding. This shift indicates a deliberate effort to reconstruct a learning culture that is more responsive to contemporary educational demands while maintaining traditional Islamic values.

From the interviews conducted with several teachers, it was revealed that the reconstruction process was intentionally designed to bridge traditional and modern learning approaches. One teacher stated that the goal was not to eliminate classical traditions but to adapt them in ways that are relevant for early-generation students. The integration of classical Islamic texts as the core learning material reflects a commitment to preserving intellectual heritage while transforming the way it is delivered and understood.

Further observations highlighted that learning activities incorporated reflective and contextual elements. Students were guided to connect the content of classical texts with their daily experiences, making the learning process more meaningful. This approach helped students not only understand

the textual content but also internalize its values. The reconstructed learning culture thus emphasizes both cognitive engagement and character development.

Characteristics of Early-Generation Students in the Learning Process

Observations indicated that early-generation students come from diverse educational backgrounds, which significantly influences their readiness to engage with classical Islamic texts. Many students were found to have limited prior exposure to Arabic language structures, particularly in reading unvowelled texts. During initial lessons, students often showed hesitation and lack of confidence when asked to read aloud, indicating the challenges they face in adapting to pesantren-based learning traditions.

Interviews with students revealed that they perceived kitab kuning as a difficult subject due to its linguistic complexity. Several students mentioned that they struggled to understand sentence structures and grammatical rules, especially in the early stages of learning. However, they also expressed a willingness to learn, particularly when the teaching methods were supportive and gradually structured. This suggests that motivation exists but needs to be facilitated through appropriate pedagogical strategies.

Table 1. Characteristics of Early-Generation Students in Learning Classical Islamic Texts

Aspect	Observation Findings	Interview Findings
Educational Background	Diverse and mostly non-pesantren background	Students feel unfamiliar with kitab kuning
Arabic Language Skills	Limited ability in reading unvowelled texts	Difficulty understanding grammar (nahwu-sharaf)
Learning Readiness	Low confidence during initial reading activities	Students feel nervous and afraid of making mistakes
Learning Motivation	Gradually increasing with guided instruction	Students show willingness when supported by teachers
Participation Level	Passive in early stages, more active over time	Students prefer interactive and guided learning methods

The table above illustrates the main characteristics of early-generation students based on both observation and interview data. It shows that students initially experience significant challenges, particularly in terms of language skills and confidence. However, the data also indicate a positive trend in motivation and participation when appropriate teaching strategies are applied. This finding suggests that the success of learning culture reconstruction is closely related to the ability of educators to adapt instructional methods to students' initial conditions.

Further classroom observations showed that teachers implemented step-by-step instructional approaches to accommodate these characteristics. Lessons began with basic introductions to nahwu and sharaf before progressing to simple text reading exercises. This gradual scaffolding allowed students to build foundational knowledge and confidence over time. As a result, students became more comfortable participating in learning activities.

Implementation of Classical Text Literacy Practices

The implementation of classical text literacy practices was observed through a combination of traditional and modern teaching methods. Teachers employed bandongan and sorogan methods as primary instructional strategies, allowing students to listen, follow, and practice reading texts independently. In addition, small group discussions were introduced to encourage collaborative

learning and deeper comprehension. These varied approaches created a more dynamic and engaging learning environment.

Interviews with teachers indicated that the integration of multiple methods was essential in addressing students' diverse learning needs. One teacher explained that relying solely on traditional methods would not be effective for early-generation students. Therefore, additional supports such as translated texts, gloss notes, and guided explanations were provided to enhance understanding. This reflects a flexible approach in implementing literacy practices.

Observational data also revealed the use of supporting media, including digital tools, to facilitate learning. Some classes incorporated visual aids and online resources to explain complex grammatical concepts. Students appeared more engaged when technology was used, suggesting that digital integration can support traditional literacy practices. Overall, the implementation strategy reflects a balanced combination of preservation and innovation.

The Role of Teachers in Building Learning Culture

Teachers were observed to play a central role in shaping and sustaining the reconstructed learning culture. Rather than acting solely as knowledge transmitters, they functioned as facilitators who guided students through the learning process. During classroom interactions, teachers encouraged active participation by asking questions, inviting opinions, and providing constructive feedback. This approach fostered a more interactive and student-centered learning environment.

Interviews with teachers highlighted their awareness of the challenges faced by early-generation students. They emphasized the importance of patience, adaptability, and emotional support in teaching. One teacher noted that building students' confidence was just as important as teaching content. This indicates that the teacher's role extends beyond academic instruction to include motivational and psychological support.

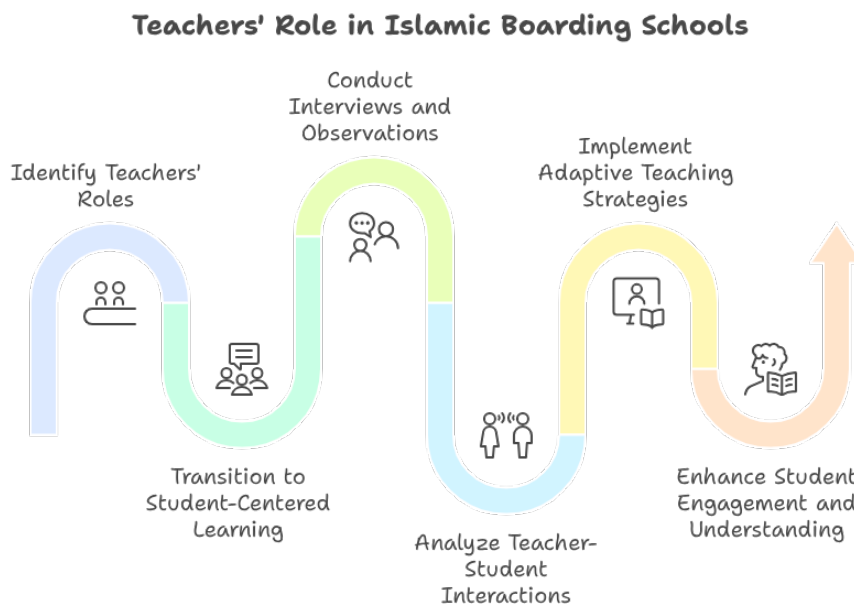


Figure 1. The Process of Teachers' Roles in Reconstructing Learning Culture in Islamic Boarding Schools

Figure 1 illustrates the dynamic process of teachers' roles in reconstructing learning culture within Islamic boarding schools. The process begins with identifying teachers' roles as facilitators, motivators, and mentors, followed by conducting interviews and observations to understand classroom realities. It then transitions into a shift toward student-centered learning, where teachers encourage active participation and engagement. The next stage involves analyzing teacher–student interactions to identify effective strategies and areas for improvement. Based on this analysis, teachers implement adaptive teaching strategies that integrate traditional methods with modern approaches. Ultimately, this process leads to enhanced student engagement and deeper understanding of learning materials, particularly classical Islamic texts. The figure highlights that the reconstruction of learning culture is not a linear process but a continuous and reflective cycle, emphasizing the importance of adaptability and responsiveness in teaching practices.

Further observations showed that teachers adapted their communication styles to suit students' levels of understanding. They used simple language, repeated explanations, and provided examples relevant to students' daily lives. This helped bridge the gap between complex classical texts and students' comprehension levels. As a result, students became more engaged and responsive during lessons.

Challenges and Impacts in Learning Culture Reconstruction

Observations identified several challenges in the reconstruction of learning culture, particularly related to students' limited foundational skills and time constraints. Many students required additional time to grasp basic concepts, which sometimes slowed down the overall learning process. Additionally, maintaining students' focus in a digital era was noted as a significant challenge, as students were often distracted by external influences.

Interviews with teachers revealed that low initial interest in classical texts was another major challenge. Teachers reported that students often perceived kitab kuning as difficult and less relevant to their daily lives. To address this issue, teachers implemented motivational strategies and contextual teaching methods to make the material more relatable. This indicates a proactive effort to overcome learning barriers.

Despite these challenges, the impact of learning culture reconstruction was observed to be largely positive. Students gradually showed improvement in reading skills, comprehension, and confidence. They became more active in class and demonstrated a greater willingness to engage with learning materials. Interviews with students also reflected increased interest and appreciation for classical texts. These findings suggest that the reconstruction efforts have contributed significantly to enhancing students' literacy and overall learning experience.

Discussion

The findings indicate that the reconstruction of learning culture in modern Islamic boarding schools represents a significant shift from traditional teacher-centered approaches toward more participatory and student-centered practices. This transformation aligns with contemporary educational theories that emphasize active learning, critical thinking, and contextual understanding (König et al., 2024; McGrath, 2024; Ro, 2024). The integration of classical Islamic texts as the foundation of learning demonstrates that tradition is not abandoned but rather reinterpreted to meet current educational needs. Through observation, it is evident that students are no longer passive recipients of knowledge, but active participants who engage in dialogue and reflection. This shift contributes to a more dynamic and meaningful learning environment, where knowledge is

constructed collaboratively (Hamid et al., 2024). The emphasis on connecting textual content with real-life experiences also enhances students' ability to internalize values embedded in the texts. Therefore, the reconstruction process can be understood as a strategic effort to balance the preservation of Islamic intellectual heritage with the demands of modern pedagogy and learner characteristics.

Furthermore, the characteristics of early-generation students play a crucial role in shaping the implementation of learning culture reconstruction. The findings reveal that students' diverse backgrounds and limited prior exposure to Arabic significantly affect their readiness to engage with classical texts. This condition is consistent with the concept of learner diversity, which requires differentiated instructional approaches (Qorib, 2024). Interviews indicate that students initially perceive kitab kuning as complex and intimidating, particularly due to the absence of vowel markings and the complexity of grammatical structures. However, their willingness to learn suggests that challenges are not rooted in lack of motivation but rather in insufficient support and guidance. Observational data confirm that when teachers provide structured and gradual instruction, students begin to develop confidence and competence. This highlights the importance of scaffolding in learning, where students are guided step by step until they achieve independence. Consequently, understanding student characteristics becomes essential in designing effective learning strategies within reconstructed cultural frameworks.

In terms of implementation, the combination of traditional and modern literacy practices emerges as a key factor in the success of learning culture reconstruction. The use of methods such as bandongan and sorogan reflects the preservation of classical pesantren traditions, while the incorporation of group discussions and digital media introduces elements of modern pedagogy. This hybrid approach allows students to benefit from both structured guidance and interactive engagement. The findings suggest that relying solely on traditional methods may not be sufficient for early-generation students, who require additional support to comprehend complex texts. The use of translated materials, gloss notes, and digital tools enhances accessibility and facilitates deeper understanding. Moreover, the integration of technology responds to the learning preferences of contemporary students, who are more familiar with digital environments (Jajoo & Deshmukh, 2024; Khomsiah, 2024; Latifah & Nurhikmah, 2024; Tzimas & Demetriadis, 2024). Therefore, the implementation of literacy practices in this context is not static but adaptive, reflecting a continuous effort to align educational methods with students' needs and technological developments.

The role of teachers is also identified as a central element in the reconstruction of learning culture. Teachers are not only responsible for delivering content but also for creating an environment that encourages active participation and critical thinking. The findings show that teachers adopt multiple roles, including facilitators, motivators, and mentors. This multidimensional role is essential in addressing the challenges faced by early-generation students, particularly in building confidence and sustaining motivation. Interviews reveal that teachers consciously adapt their teaching styles to match students' levels of understanding, using simple language and relevant examples. This approach is consistent with student-centered learning principles, which emphasize the importance of meeting learners where they are. Additionally, the emotional support provided by teachers contributes to a positive learning atmosphere, where students feel safe to express themselves and make mistakes. As a result, the effectiveness of learning culture reconstruction is closely linked to teachers' ability to adapt, innovate, and respond to students' needs.

Despite the positive developments, several challenges remain in the process of reconstructing learning culture (Dhaas, 2024; Halisoh & Sain, 2024). The findings highlight issues such as limited foundational skills, time constraints, and low initial interest in classical texts. These challenges reflect the complexity of integrating traditional learning materials into modern educational contexts. The influence of digital culture also presents a paradox, as it can both support and hinder learning. While technology can enhance engagement, it can also distract students and reduce their focus. Teachers must therefore navigate these challenges by designing strategies that maximize the benefits of technology while minimizing its negative impacts. The use of contextual teaching methods and motivational approaches is shown to be effective in increasing students' interest and engagement. However, continuous innovation is required to sustain these improvements. This suggests that learning culture reconstruction is not a one-time process but an ongoing effort that requires adaptation, evaluation, and refinement.

Overall, the impact of learning culture reconstruction is evident in the improvement of students' literacy skills, confidence, and participation. Students gradually demonstrate the ability to read and understand classical texts, as well as to engage in discussions and critical analysis. This development indicates that the reconstruction process has successfully addressed initial learning barriers and created a more supportive learning environment. The increased interest and appreciation for classical texts among students also suggest a shift in attitudes, which is an important outcome of cultural transformation. Furthermore, the integration of traditional and modern approaches contributes to the sustainability of Islamic educational practices in a rapidly changing world. These findings imply that the reconstruction of learning culture is not only beneficial for academic achievement but also for character development and the preservation of intellectual traditions (Al-Hamzi et al., 2024; Islam & Asad, 2024; Saleha & Sholihah, 2024). Therefore, it can be concluded that a well-designed and adaptive learning culture reconstruction has significant potential to enhance the quality of education in Islamic boarding schools.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the most significant finding lies in the successful reconstruction of learning culture through the integration of classical Islamic text literacy and adaptive pedagogical practices, which provides an important lesson that tradition and modernity can coexist in a mutually reinforcing way. The research highlights that early-generation students, despite their initial limitations, are capable of developing literacy skills, critical thinking, and active participation when supported by structured, contextual, and student-centered learning environments. The strength of this study is its contribution to the academic field by offering a comprehensive framework that connects learning culture, literacy practices, and student characteristics within Islamic boarding school education, thus bridging the gap between traditional pesantren scholarship and contemporary educational demands. However, this study is limited by its focus on a specific case and a relatively small number of participants, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Therefore, future research is recommended to involve broader contexts, comparative studies across institutions, and the integration of quantitative approaches to further validate and expand the findings.

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